

CASE STUDY: BILL

As a chef in a restaurant, Bill had to focus on different elements of the meal he had to produce. He had to decide what time he should start cooking each dish to match up with others from that table. The orders would come very close together, and Bill became very focused. But within a short period there would be a lull in the orders – this was hard for Bill as a dyslexic because he found it difficult to maintain concentration unless he stayed in his hyper-focused state (remembering that most dyslexics are one extreme or other – really, really concentrating or not concentrating at all). He had to be alert to hear instructions that were only given once, and from a number of sources. Sometimes they could come after there had been a lull in his cooking activity, so he was forever having to go from a hyper-focused state to having nothing to do, which meant he lost his concentration.

Someone shouted an new instruction, but it took a lot of energy for him to get hyper-focused again, so he struggled to re-engage. When he came out of the hyper-focused state, he then became aware that he was tired or cold or hungry – all the other inputs that he had been blocking out arrived at that time. He had to push these away to get focused again because it was too exhausting to move in and out of hyper-focus too much.

His solution was to stay hyper-focused throughout the shift by creating other things to do in order to stay alert and focused. In other words juggling lots of things at the same time was better for him than short bursts of activity. The head chef had been giving him simpler and simpler things to do, which meant he was getting his work done quickly and then twiddling his thumbs. But rather than being 'kept back' and not given too much responsibility, he was actually far more comfortable being given MORE responsibility.

keep quiet unless
you've got an order - I'm
in the zone!



Writing

When I was in school I remember finding it harder to learn to hold the pencil correctly than the children around me, and was always being told to not push so hard. As a child I would regularly indent a page of handwriting into many layers of paper in my efforts to try and coordinate the pencil better because it felt as though it was going to go off course all the time.

When I had to do handwriting exercises, which seemed to happen forever because I was always being asked to repeat written work until the teacher could read what I'd written, the sensation when trying to control the pencil became so intense that I felt all the muscles in my neck tense up, right up through my back into the top of my head. At this point I would find that the strength would go from my right arm, and I would find it very hard to continue to hold the pencil so tightly. Without holding tightly, my handwriting became very erratic and would sometimes span three lines rather than one. This made handwriting tasks incredibly tiring, frustrating and humiliating.

I was often angry with myself, and sometimes with others if they showed little understanding of what I was experiencing. If only I had had the means as a child, and the understanding, to explain to them. Incidentally, my handwriting now is very similar to my writing when I was about 6 yrs old - I still press too hard!

When I am encouraging children who are being asked to produce hand-written work, I encourage them to loosen their grip on the pencil. Sometimes it's good to have a ruler to stop the handwriting going too far down into another line. The presence of the ruler being controlled by the other hand seems to encourage spatial awareness and control of both hands, maybe because if the other hand has something to do, then the body is somewhat more balanced, working on two things at once with both hands. Perhaps if children weren't forced to choose a writing hand they might find a better balance of brain activity (between left and right hemispheres) and consequently have more controlled and fluent writing if given a choice of which hand to use.

Mate! you look
shattered! how far
have you run?!

no running...
...just writing!



FURTHER INFORMATION...

I hope that this book has given you an introduction to my world! It is of course very difficult for me to put it into words and then condense these into a short book – I would much rather speak to you face-to-face. I am available for seminars, workshops, conferences and training sessions, so please do email me:

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Thank you.