

## Additional advice to technical college students...

### If I can do it, anyone can

By Chris Myrah

I have two mental health conditions that affect me daily. First, I have severe ADHD. I take Ritalin four times a day for it and also use behavior strategies for things like studying. But it is hard when I take a test or listen to a lecture. I call it being "shiny."

I can be following along, listening, tuned in, and then I am like a little kid who spotted something shiny. All of a sudden, my brain goes, "Ooh, what's that?" and I am totally off onto a tangent. It takes a lot of discipline for me to focus.

One strategy I use came from one of my son's friends—when I am reading a chapter in a textbook, I put a small piece of candy every two pages. I read myself from treat to treat and reward myself if I stayed focused. It sounds silly, but it works.

The second condition I have is Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), for which I also take medication, use behavior strategies, attend therapy, and basically just do the best I can with the rest. My worst compulsions (the behaviors) are that I HAVE to wash my hands 25 times per day, no more, no less.

I also have to brush my teeth and floss every time I eat so much as an M&M. I have literally (LITERALLY) flossed away more than one tooth. I do have to check and double-check things, but I do NOT have to do so multiple times. One or two double-checks is enough for me. b vvvvvvvvvvvvvvvvvfdevvv (Sorry about the typos...kitten—I always leave them in when Chip walks across the keyboard—I don't know why.) I can't have food touch other food, I eat the same thing every day for months at a time, and a few other small things.

My obsessions (the thoughts) are constant self-put-downs. I never think I am good enough, smart enough, brave enough, etc. Every test and assignment I am convinced I will fail, even though my GPA history tells a different story. I also think everybody can't stand me, because I am not good enough, interesting enough, etc. The thoughts almost never stop.

One thing I do that is my way of saying to myself that OCD will not WIN or gain complete control of me is that I NEVER wear matching socks. I just choose socks randomly without looking in the drawer, and whatever two I pull out are what I wear, regardless of how they look with what I am wearing. For example, today I am wearing a black t-shirt under a dark green cardigan. On one foot I have a hot-pink sock covered in rainbows, and on the other I have a multi-colored striped sock. I purposely by weird and colorful socks, then wear whatever comes out, no matter the situation. Even when I go to conferences, interviews, anything—my socks don't match.

Put ADHD and OCD TOGETHER and some days I can be a walking nightmare. I have the disorganization that comes with ADHD, but I also have extreme organization because of OCD. I ask question in class nonstop, I change subjects in the middle of conversations, and can't do anything without a list to keep me on track.

But regardless, I have a 4.0 GPA, I am in multiple organizations, I volunteer in the community (at Rosemount High School, I judge speech and debate, I volunteer in the NICU at St. Paul Children's Hospital, and was a Girl Scout Troop leader), I raised two amazing kids, have stayed sober for 25 years, I am always on time or early, I am honest, kind, caring, and empathetic. I see everybody for who they are on the inside—the outside (sexuality, disability, religion, etc.) is just a shell. My shell isn't perfect. Who am I to judge someone else's?

I just do some things that others consider weird and annoying, and I do many things differently than other people do. And, in case you didn't notice, I tend to be extremely verbose.

I will say the one thing that DOES irritate me is when people make flippant comments like, "Oh, I have to have a clean house. I'm so OCD." Real, REAL, OCD? It's a bit of a nightmare to live with.

Anyway, the gist of what I am saying is that if I can do it, anyone can do it. And if you need to, ask for help. It's available and others care, others understand, and you would be surprised to learn how NOT alone you really are.