

# BDS episode- Caryn Forsgren

**Caryn Forsgren:** Hi. Thanks for having me. My name is Caryn Forsgren and I am a life coach. I specialize in ADHD and executive functioning. I am a business owner and the proud mother of a couple of teenage boys and lots of fur babies.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's great.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Interesting.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** You're in good company here. We all have a lot of fur babies.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That is a super interesting job. First of all, most people have heard of ADHD and ADD, but can you tell us a little bit more about it?

**Caryn Forsgren:** So ADHD is a neurological condition that people are born with. It is not something that we can catch or get later in life. However many of us are not diagnosed until later, which I could explain. But ultimately it's a neurological condition that largely affects the prefrontal cortex of our brain, which is the part that houses our executive functions. And I kind of liken them to an air traffic control tower, right? They're the parts of our brain that regulate all of the things that need to be coordinated. So it's time management and organization, planning and prioritizing, emotional control, inhibition. All of these things tend to be a little bit more delayed in people who have ADHD.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Wow. Thanks for that. That's a really good explanation. It sounds like your job is very interesting and fulfilling, but is that something that you always thought you would do

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah, so it's funny because I always tell folks the first thing is I have ADHD I have known since I was in my early twenties in college, and my mother called me and said, "Hey, I've just been watching Oprah and you have this thing called ADD." I didn't really know what that meant or what to do with that information other than to maybe just say, "Well, that, I guess that explains everything, right?"

So flash forward and my mother's wish came true. I did have a child like

myself, my oldest,

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Sorry, that's a good one.

**Caryn Forsgren:** My oldest son also has ADHD. and so I've gotten to experience it from the vantage point of a parent as well. And so really no, to answer your question, I never would've expected that this is the avenue that I would pursue. But in trying to assist my son getting through online school during Covid, I tried to find every possible means of helping him and stumbled across a coach for him, and, learned through that process that, oh my gosh, I found what I wanna

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's Wow. I'd like to hear a little bit about your background before you got there. so where did you start out in your professional career and how, that evolved over time and contributed to this.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Well, It's funny that you say that because in retrospect everything that I did career-wise was preparing me for coaching.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's amazing.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Right I have a degree in English and communications, and I left college and ended up working in satellite and computer technology. Technical support largely. And I guess as an English major, I was able to communicate easily the difficult things to the lay person who didn't quite understand how the technology working. So, it allowed me to be that gobetween.

So, I did that. Then I became a trainer for technology, ended up getting into sales and then I took some time off from my career to raise a family. I was a stay-at-home mom for about seven years, and decided to go teach at my kids' school when the opportunity came up. I was a technology teacher at a Montessori school for a number years. And so when all of this came together, I hadn't realized it in the process, but this is where I was meant to be.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Yeah. That's amazing

**Caryn Forsgren:** used my technology skills to help me build my website and get my client management system together. My communication skills, obviously through the coaching process itself, but in all of the literature and copy for my materials and my sales experience, of course. So it, and even the experience of

being an ADHD person and a mother of an ADHD child, all of those things kind of fit together in a beautiful way.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's great. But I imagine when you left college, that's not where you thought that you would end up. I would like to talk about that first change too. So you actually ended up, with an English major working in technology. How did that come about?

**Caryn Forsgren:** Actually, my aspirations were to be a reporter and television personality.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** okay. Wow. Alright.

**Caryn Forsgren:** I had an internship at CNN while I was in college and at some point I was offered a job. I relocated to Atlanta to have this job and Ted Turner sold CNN and they had a hiring freeze.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Oh, no!

**Caryn Forsgren:** So, I found myself in a new city with no job. I went to a temp agency and they had some opportunities that I could choose from. One was for a satellite television company and I figured, well, it'd be good to have on my resume something about television.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Definitely.

**Caryn Forsgren:** So I went and temped there and, I just kind of fell into the role of technical support. The company was Satellite Downlink Systems. Rather than everybody going to Vegas for a company meeting now, it became a thing where people would have interactive distance learning, and everybody could stay in their location and attend meetings virtually or via satellite.

So, as you can imagine, people trying to use a VCR or a TV in 150 different locations, people are panicking. They can't log on.

That's the kind of stuff that I helped with, and realized, you know, I did actually have an aptitude for technology that translated into another job with working with computers in similar support situations.

So, that segued into training. You realize when people need a lot of help, there's a reason why they need help.

And so I pretty much settled into training. That was my preferred.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That was your jam for a while.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah, exactly.

**Lindsey Laytner:** You probably had to deal with a lot of different types of personalities too, and maybe certain challenges or what have you, and maybe that also kind of like prepped you without you even knowing.

**Caryn Forsgren:** You're absolutely right. Yeah. So corporate training involved me working with adults, right? My peers. And then like I said, I took some time off and then I went to work at a school that was K-8. And I also got to be the librarian, which was fantastic.

So it was a great opportunity to wear multiple hats, right? I could be this silly librarian reading stories in different voices and the technology teacher where everything is a little more structured.

Now, again, in retrospect, it allowed me to really utilize my skills of my ADHD to not have to be doing one thing all the time where it would feel mundane and I would get bored and my brain wouldn't be able to focus. So I was able to shift, and it allowed me to be even more productive and better at what I did, you know? So it prepared me in so many ways.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** So, yeah, tell us a little more about that. How Working on different things might be a complimentary experience for somebody that has ADHD.

**Caryn Forsgren:** That means that I need to give you a little bit of background about ADHD. I think that we all tend to have the public's view of ADHD as being a little boy who can't sit still in his seat and lacks some inhibition maybe blurts things out or is a little more aggressive, right? While those things aren't necessarily untrue, it is a very narrow view of what ADHD is. If you have ADHD you never outgrow it.

It is something that you have your whole life, and that changes in a number of ways depending on the expectations and requirements that come at different stages of life. Kids who may be able to pull it together in elementary school to perform at a decent level. When they reach middle school and those

expectations and responsibilities increase, they find themselves unable, with those executive functions that we talked about, to meet those expectations.

So it takes some time to, be able to build themselves up again. And what do you know, as soon as they're getting good at managing those expectations, here comes high school with even more, right? So these kind of transitions happen in school, then launching into adulthood, going to college, becoming a parent.

All of these kind of things are places where we find that people struggle with their ADHD. So in the job in particular, what we know about our ADHD brains is they're wired for interest. The neurotypical brain tends to be able to activate on importance. So if I have a list of to-dos, and here's the most important things I can just go do those, right? But if you have ADHD it's difficult to motivate yourself to exert the energy to go do the things that don't feel like we're interested in them. And if we're translating that to work, how can we help an ADHD brain be more engaged? We wanna keep them interested. We wanna inject novelty. We want it to be something that feels competitive or has a level of interest that's gonna help drive the behavior. So, noticing those things about ourselves if we're looking for work, it's helpful to find things that are gonna allow us to have some more variety, some more agency, less micromanagement. Maybe if I can get to point J in my own route, I'm gonna be a better employee than if somebody is trying to make sure that I go A, B, C, D, E, F, G in order to get there, so having that understanding of ourselves and the way that our brains work can really make a, big difference in how well we can perform.

Yeah, that's a really good explanation and brings a lot of insight. One of the things I'd like to know-- you've already touched upon what inspired this transition, but once you made that decision, how did you go about it? Because that's not an easy choice to make. Well, you've gone through several transitions, but we're talking about the one into your current job.

Yeah. So, Well, COVID gave me the opportunity, right? We were all home on quarantine and as a teacher at the Montessori school, there was no school. So COVID afforded me the opportunity because school was closed for a while and we were beginning to see how it was difficult to manage the ADHD symptoms any longer. So I found, the coach for my son and she attended a coach training school that's specifically for ADHD coaches. And so that's what I did. It's called the ADD Coach Academy. And so it's ADCA and if I do say so, they are the preeminent coach school for ADHD and executive function.

I attended 350 hours of training, not counting my mentor coaching and practicums that I did with other coaches. And so, I'm very highly trained in how to coach, which, I don't know if I need to clarify, but this is life coaching, right?

So I'm a life coach with ADHD as a specialty. And so this school has definitely, helped me become an expert in the field of ADHD, which sadly there aren't very many who are.

One of the things that we know is that many medical doctors receive 15 minutes or fewer of education in ADHD and then operate as experts to include psychologists.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Wow. That's crazy. I didn't know that.

**Heidi Bolduc:** So are they more so trained on the symptoms of diagnosing then rather than understanding how it works in real life?

**Caryn Forsgren:** Largely I would say that's true. Yeah. So the ramifications of the ADHD symptoms and how to treat the ramifications of not being able to perform and receiving the negative feedback and feeling depressed and anxious because we can't meet our own expectations or others. Those are the things that they can help with.

But it's like and this is what I noticed when trying to help my own son, it's like there's a gap, right? Like we can get medication and then we can get therapy for how we're ineffective, but where's the training to help us actually do better rather than having to only manage it on the backside, right?

Coaching aims to be that place in the middle where we can gain the skills to go with the pills, so to speak.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's catchy, I like it.

**Lindsey Laytner:** I like that.

**Caryn Forsgren:** So if we're thinking about ADHD medication, largely what the medication does for us is if we have all this cognitive hyperactivity that leads to our distractibility, you know, something's loud over there, so I can't not pay attention to that or, you know, the other things that are taking our attention from where we want it to be. The medication allows us to choose what we're gonna focus on so that we're not quite as distractible, but it doesn't tell us what

to do with that focus or how to use that focus. So coaching aims to help people be able to recognize what's getting in their way and to understand how to use that more appropriately. Like I said, we're not gonna fix ADHD. It's always gonna be with us.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** It's to manage it, right?.

**Caryn Forsgren:** How can we work with it instead of against it?

**Lindsey Laytner:** It's just like a more, proactive approach. I would assume you've probably worked with people that maybe are less functioning with ADHD and then really high functioning people with ADHD and...

**Caryn Forsgren:** Well, and it ebbs and flows like we were saying, too. You know, sometimes people can do great and get all the way through a doctoral degree and then end up becoming a parent and saying, I can't manage everything, I'm over my head.

The interesting thing about coaching is that, and particularly with ADHD Dr. Hallowell, who's one of our best advocates and teachers of ADHD in the community. He says, "If you've met one person with ADHD, you've met one person with ADHD."

It appears in so many different ways. I have a statistic right here under my computer. Over 18,730 combinations of ADHD symptoms exist.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Wow.

**Lindsey Laytner:** That's wild.

**Caryn Forsgren:** And so what that means is to not assume that any two people are gonna present in my coaching practice the same way. So therefore, coaching can't be prescriptive. I can't have a plan in place. Here's what I'm gonna teach you because it may or may not apply to what it is that you're experiencing. So it has to be customized to the individual. And my job is to help people understand how their ADHD is showing up, and then largely to help them build some separation between their sense of self and the symptoms. Oftentimes we tend to think that we are our ADHD and it becomes an issue of negative selftalk. We are anticipating negative results and if that's what we're looking for, we're gonna get more of it.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** If I can help you recognize that your ADHD is happening to you, that we can build some awareness around it, recognize that maybe we can anticipate some of these things happening and have some systems and structures in place to either mitigate or avoid it altogether. Then, we can start seeing ADHD separately from our sense of self, right? Give ourselves a little bit of grace, and if we can get in that sweet spot, that's where we're able to make change. Sounds like this is truly your calling and you're definitely helping a lot of people. What were some challenges during this transition for you?

**Caryn Forsgren:** Like I was saying earlier about that ADHD brain being wired for interest? Mine is definitely wired for coaching. So I didn't really feel like I had to work too hard to pay attention to this. I realized pretty quickly that this was the real deal for me. I think if I were to say the hardest part that I

experienced in the process was starting a new business I didn't have any requisite business skills. I'd always been a corporate employee.

There was some fear around, "Can I make a living at this? Is this something that I can really do?" But also just all of the basics-- getting a business name, getting your tax id, setting up a bank account. What do I do about taxes? What do I do about, you know, all the things. And luckily, during this whole process, I found the Small Business Association, which is a free government entity that's provided through community colleges in most counties, and they offer all sorts of training and over COVID it was all virtual, which was even better, right?

Yeah. So I learned everything about, you know, keeping my books, creating a business plan. And boy, all of this challenges my ADHD symptoms. That's the stuff I'm not interested in, right? I wish that I could outsource. Because I was so interested in the other stuff, it allowed me to be able to focus on that stuff. And I credit that with being able to get my business off the ground as quickly as I did. I've got other coach friends who struggled, you know, to some degree with those things.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** So that's interesting.

**Lindsey Laytner:** It's not intuitive.

**Heidi Bolduc:** Oh yeah.



**Lindsey Laytner:** And probably a lot of people that are even listening probably don't even know how to go. They might wanna start their own company or you know, do their own business and they have no idea even where to start.

**Caryn Forsgren:** That's right. So, I highly recommend the Small Business Association. I believe their website is [sba.org](http://sba.org),

In terms of other difficulties just probably getting all the website together client management system, payment processing-- it's an ordeal. But once it's done, it's, pretty much set it and forget it.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's great. Was there anything that surprised you about going through this transition, this job transition?

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah, I mean, I think I surprised me, to be honest.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** I love it.

**Caryn Forsgren:** I'd had a corporate career and it's not like I lack confidence in myself, but I never imagined that I could go be an entrepreneur. And it did all come together like I said. I felt like I kind of manifested this whole thing, but, so, it presented itself in front of me, but I made it happen, you know, and I couldn't be more thrilled.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's amazing. That's...

**Heidi Bolduc:** it's just like really empowering, right? Especially to go and start your own business. 'cause I know my husband during Covid took advantage of, like you said, all of the online trainings, online payment. So he switched careers, but he's in a career where he works for someone else. He purposefully wanted it that way because he knows how hard it is to start a business.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Yeah.

**Caryn Forsgren:** I have to admit the fact that I was in a position where my husband had a job that allowed me to do so. And, you know, not everybody has that and I'm grateful for that opportunity. I probably would say I invested about \$25,000 to start a business. I've made that back many times over.

**Lindsey Laytner:** I feel like you're very passionate about it, and it makes sense. And so I think for a lot of people where you have something that you're very

passionate about, it feels really right. Maybe, yeah, you might have to make that investment. Maybe you're nervous 'cause you're thinking, what if it completely backfires?

Maybe you should take the jump and pivot and maybe it'll blossom into something that's, more amazing than you ever could have thought.

**Caryn Forsgren:** That's right. The unfortunate thing is you don't really know until you try.

**Heidi Bolduc:** Yeah, exactly. And then one of the things I've been wondering, this is just kind of a logistical question, but do you have a wide age range of people that you coach? Is it like adults only? Do you also do teenage age?

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah, so I do work with teens and adults. The thing about coaching is it requires people to be able to identify a goal and work toward that goal. So, you know, there are people who coach children, although that's not what I do. I feel like I wanna be able to help people who feel like they have something they need to fix, right? Because, you know, one of those things, like I said, that we lack with ADHD is a sense of time. We have a time blindness, so we tend to live in the now and the not now. And when that's the case, whatever happens in the future doesn't apply to me. It's not really something that I'm connected to, so I'm only making decisions for the now and that applies when we're talking about students. You know, do you wanna get into a good college? Well, that's so far out on the horizon for them that our ADHD nearsighted lenses don't allow us to keep our focus on that goal. So it's very difficult to be able to stay in pursuit of a goal that's too far off. It's easier to help create the path toward that goal with teenagers and adults. So yeah, I, I would say that adults even are my favorite people to work with because they know what they want. They know how to articulate what their needs are, and they're willing to do the work.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That makes sense. I mean, it's like that for example, you leave school and then you go back, usually you do better because you wanna be there. Right? When you're older or you've been through more, I think you know what's at stake or what you want a little bit more. I think it's just harder to know that when you're young.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Right. And so sometimes we're pursuing our parent's goals for us.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Exactly. That's right.

**Caryn Forsgren:** So a lot of people don't realize until they're adults that they have ADHD and quite frankly, we find that women in particular-- we can fly under the radar with our ADHD. Because the way that we tend to present is what we call inattentive. So, it's not as easy to notice the hyperactivity aspect for us. Ours is all cognitive, right? It's hidden. We tend to not be people that maybe can't stay organized or have difficulty with time, but we have difficulty maintaining our attention or preventing ourselves from going down rabbit holes in pursuit of particular interests, right? And, so, like I was saying earlier at various stages of life, we find that our ADHD causes more problems. And we know that estrogen plays a big role in that with women. So, we're finding a lot of menopausal women are learning of their ADHD at that time in life.

Imagine the regret and the shame at a late life diagnosis.

**Lindsey Laytner:** So the estrogen diminishing exacerbates the symptoms of ADHD. Yeah. Wow. Interesting. Wow. More things to look forward to for people. We need to study women more. I mean, this would be like a call in general.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Well, it's interesting you say that, Lindsey, because most of the study around ADHD has been of males and young males, so we really don't have a great body of information around women in ADHD. But fortunately, we're moving toward that.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's good to hear.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Yeah, I think that's really great because I know growing up, like there was always a stigma I would feel around kids that had ADHD or ADD, and it was always, like you said, that picture of a young boy that can't sit still in his seat, is talking in the middle of the class, and you know, all that. But there's so many different types of people that have different levels or presentations or whatever, and then kind of live their life not knowing what's completely, I guess wrong and maybe having a lot of shame...

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah. And so that shame and negative self-talk is a huge part of what coaching is about. I base my practice in positive psychology because we do wanna work on helping people shift out of that place. When you're in that negative space, you can't gain any traction. You know, if all you're thinking is, I suck, I'm always gonna suck, I can't make anything happen. That's prophecy.

You're gonna make that true. So if we can help shift your thinking to some more positive things. Not toxic positivity, I'm just saying we need to have some more balance of the way that we're viewing things. And so when I say I base my practice in that, the first thing I do with my clients is offer them what we call a VIA character strength assessment. It's free online if you'd like to take it. VIA is the name of it. This measures 24 strengths that we all have and helps us identify what rises to the top for us. So, what does rise to the top are things that are kind of essential to who we are. They're things like humor, kindness, appreciation of beauty and excellence, judgment.

**Lindsey Laytner:** heard of the Gallup strengths? It seems like it's different.

**Caryn Forsgren:** It is different than Gallup. I think if I were to compare the two the VIA talks about what the actual strengths are, and then the Gallup is showing how you're using the strength. And I think the Gallup can be more workplace-related, too. The VIA is more all encompassing. But what's interesting about if we're using these strengths that are essential to who we are, they're actually energizing us. And if you think about our ADHD brains, we're having to expend a whole lot more energy to make the same progress as the neurotypical person beside us. So, if we can use these strengths in a way that we can help energize ourselves when we're low to overcome some obstacles, then wow, that's a really interesting way to handle it. So have you guys heard of neuroplasticity?

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Yeah, a little bit. I'd like to hear more about it though.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Neuroplasticity is kind of the inverse of that old adage where we say you can't teach an old dog new tricks. That is scientifically untrue. Our brains are capable of change and drastic change any time of our lives.

So, when we're talking about neuroplasticity with ADHD, if those neurons that we have tend to always be firing in a negative perspective, and we're getting entrenched in that kind of, "Oh, here we go again. I can't do it right." Then, that's the only way that our brains are accustomed to thinking. What if we can add some new pathways for our neurons to fire that are positive? We're changing the way that maybe that neuron that's accustomed to firing in that entrenched way will suddenly take a left turn because now we've paved some new road, right?

So we're helping to change the way that our brains are wired to think about things and balance that negative with some positive. Once we're in a positive

place, that's where we see opportunities for growth and change. And that's where we can start to actually find successes that we can build upon. So that's a big part of how ADHD coaching works. I wanna help folks be able to recognize their negative self-talk and recognize that there might be another answer. Maybe you don't suck at it.

Maybe the truth is that you're lacking the skills to be able to demonstrate your capacity.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Gotcha.

**Caryn Forsgren:** That part of our brain that is affected by ADHD is just how we manage. The other part of our brain is how we process. So it really does not connect with our intelligence. And in fact, ADHDers are usually very intelligent. Our problem is, it's like a barrier between being able to receive the information and output the information, but not process it. Dr. Russ Barkley says that it's not about knowing what to do, it's about doing what we know when we're talking about ADHD. And that's huge. That proves that it's not a behavioral problem.

**Lindsey Laytner:** It's a pathway.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Exactly. So if we can help be able to do the things we know, we're gonna be able to have more agency.

**Lindsey Laytner:** You're building so much confidence in people, too, along the way because they probably come to you and need it desperately and realize it's been in me this whole time and I can just do things a little differently from someone else, but it doesn't mean that I'm gonna do it incorrectly.

**Caryn Forsgren:** It's a great sense of validation for somebody to actually understand where you've been and the experience that you've had and that it's not self-induced. So many of us think, "What's wrong with me?"

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** I would imagine one of the big draws of your job is getting to help people in that way and seeing that progress. That sounds pretty great.

**Caryn Forsgren:** You're absolutely right. It's amazing that I can make a difference every day. I'd like to make a larger global difference but I realize that that's not as easy. And so making that incremental change is still valuable.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Which of your skills do you think come in most handy for your job?

**Caryn Forsgren:** I would say the most important skill to have as a coach is good listening skills. It's important to be able to hear where your client is coming from without making any assumptions or passing any judgment. And then, you know, it's my job too, to help my clients hear what they've said to me in a new way. It always helps to have somebody be able to reflect what we say back so that we can hear it again. And it helps us reframe what we're hearing. So there's a lot of that. Well, and I'll tell you the truth, I feel like one of the biggest assets I have is that I have the ADHD experience.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Of course.

**Caryn Forsgren:** I'm literally relating to my clients. And, so, sometimes I'm the first person who's actually understood. Which is heartbreaking in, in one respect, of course. But I'm happy that I can, be that for someone, you know?

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** So were there any skills that you wish you already had before your current job?

**Lindsey Laytner:** Or skills that you had to learn while on the job?

**Caryn Forsgren:** You know, not so much about skills per se. I, feel like my coaching skills are always improving. I got an excellent education and so just with more experience, I become a better coach, right? I think that some of the things that I'm not accustomed to.

Sometimes, there are clients that we don't fit together, right? Having to manage some of those difficult conversations having to sometimes have difficult conversations with parents or spouses.

Those things are difficult, and I'm gaining the experience. I don't know that I could have known to have that experience in advance.

Not everything about this job is positive and happy.

Some clients take some advance movement and then they lapse back a little bit, right? It's two steps forward, one step back sometimes. And so it can be very draining in the coach's chair to be living this with clients. And then the next

client comes and you're in their space with them. So, it is important to give yourself self-care, which again is probably the most on the job training that I've had, is to recognize that.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Because that's what I was gonna say from what you're saying, yeah. It's like you have to empathize with your clients and feel it, but you also have to have a level of protecting yourself. Is that something you're learning? How do you manage that? That must be difficult.

**Caryn Forsgren:** It's becoming easier, right? Part of it is in how I manage my time, how frequently I see clients, and the time that I give myself in between so that I can, you know, decompress or whatever. And I also use some of the techniques that I offer my clients about being mindful and meditative and, you know, just, just trying to, to apply self care.

**Heidi Bolduc:** What does ADHD coaching look like in terms of, you know, is it always clients like scheduling, a call or a session with you or is some of it, "Hey, here's a schedule I made up for you. Now go ahead and implement this."

**Caryn Forsgren:** So, the interesting thing about ADHDers is it doesn't matter which of those 18,752 diagnoses that you have, we all hate being told what to do.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Absolutely insane.

**Caryn Forsgren:** It's a really kind of interesting line that coaches have to skate with ADHDers. I don't want my clients to feel like I'm just offering them another task that's gonna add to their sense of overwhelm.

And, so, I do not have any prescriptive I don't know, assign homework or tell people what they need to do. Our coaching sessions are a conversation that hopefully will arrive at some new awareness that includes an action that the client is willing to take. I wonder if I tried a digital calendar, if that might help. Right? And so then they're gonna go and try that on and walk around it and then see how it feels. What I can do is offer accountability, and I say that I offer accountability to the level of their requests.

Again, I'm not gonna check in and say, "Hey, have you done that thing?" That could be problematic. "So, how could I support you?" And they'll tell me, "Maybe you could send me a text on Wednesday in case I haven't remembered



to do it." So, when they're getting that text from me, it's really what they asked for, right? It's not an intrusive thing.

It can be a really really difficult thing, but ultimately when we arrive at an action, I will ask the client, "Are you committed to do that? And what does that commitment look like?"

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** So what is your typical workday like?

**Caryn Forsgren:** I have about five or six clients a day. I work four days a week. And sessions are 50 minutes long. We schedule them on a regular basis. So, every Monday at nine o'clock, for example, is your appointment because ADHD, right? It's easier to have something with regularity. And, so, we'll do that.

I ask for a minimum of three months. But many of my clients continue on month to month you know, for sometimes couple of years now. But, we have a conversation that's kind of similar to talk therapy. The difference being that we are not interested in the past. We're trying to understand where we're headed and to carve out a pathway that's gonna be the shortest route from here to there.

People ask me a lot, the difference between therapy and coaching, and the easiest way for me to describe it is that therapy is a lot like archeology: we're digging to understand the basis of why things are. And coaching is more like architecture: we're figuring out how to build something that's gonna help support us in the future. So, both of those things are valuable and oftentimes my clients do both at the same time.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's a really good illustration of that. I like that.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Maybe I can tell you my story a little bit around that.

So, when I had my son, I noticed in preschool that at times it seemed like he was being a little ostracized, and I didn't quite understand why. And I didn't think too much about it.

But, we got to kindergarten and I started getting a note home every day from the teacher. Like, "During circle time your son lied down when everybody else was sitting crisscross, and he was being distracting. But when I asked him questions, he did know the answer." "It was time to give the kids instructions on what they were gonna do for their math lesson. And your son kept playing with the dice on



the table while I was trying to explain the lesson." And these kind of things that made me as a mother just seethe as these things could be different if the teacher wasn't looking and she literally would say things like, "He was being very disrespectful while I was giving instructions and played with the dice."

I realize now that we tend to put a behavior problem on ADHD issues, when in fact the kid is lacking the skills to manage, right?

If somebody struggles with learning how to read, are people gonna say, "You're gonna miss recess because you're not reading like you're supposed to, like the other children are. You're being a bad boy because you're not reading at the same level as everyone else." No, we would approach them with compassion.

Right? We would say, "Oh, I wonder what's getting in the way. Let's see if I can help you." I'd sit down and pay attention. But this is what our ADHD kids are experiencing. So, as a mother, I had a lot of negative feelings about the faculty and people at the school because I felt like they were blaming my child for something that he didn't have the ability to do.

So, we went to a psychologist and had him diagnosed officially, and he told us of a Montessori school. And he said, "I think that Montessori is gonna be the perfect thing for your kid because it's gonna provide structure, but not the same kind of rigid structure that you're gonna find in a regular classroom where it's teacher teaching the kids who all have to sit in a desk." You know, he doesn't have the capacity to sit still at this age. So I sent him to the Montessori school that I ultimately worked at, and it was great. They give them assignments and the kids lie down on the floor and do their work. They take their shoes off. Everybody works at their own pace. The teacher will call a few kids and have small group lessons.

Within a matter of weeks, he went from being somebody who said, "I hate myself. I'm not good at anything and nobody likes me," to, "I'm an artist. I'm really good at school and I have lots of friends."

It was a huge change. So I thought, great. We are doing what we need to do. And he doesn't need to be medicated, which I was fighting wholeheartedly because I had a cousin who was significantly younger than me who was medicated as a teenager and was just zombified by medication. Terrified me. Well, and let me just say, as an aside, we've come a long way in the way that we prescribe medication now. That's not as applicable anymore.

But the point of what I wanna tell you is I avoided giving my son medication because I thought, I don't wanna give my kid amphetamines. He did pretty well in, Montessori school. First, second, and third grade you have the same teacher. And then you move into fourth and fifth and it's a new teacher. And some different, like we're saying before, some different expectations, different requirements that he had to adjust to, and he was falling short.

So, we decided to give him medication. And chewing my fingernails, I sent him to school in fourth grade one day with medication, brought him home, sat him down at the table and said, "Okay, how do you feel?" And he said to me, "I feel free."

As a parent – talk about guilt and shame.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Yeah.

**Caryn Forsgren:** As a parent, I felt so terrible. Why was I avoiding this for my kid when this is what it could provide for him?

And so, yeah, it really does make a difference to be able to have that sort of agency. I think that there's a lot of negative understanding around medication for ADHD.

And while I'm not somebody that can diagnose or prescribe, what I can say is ADHD medication is one of the most commonly prescribed medications. We have more data on how it works with various people's systems. We have so many different iterations of the medications and even some things that aren't stimulants that can provide some assistance. It's worth taking a look again, if we kind of have some of those old-fashioned thoughts around what the medication's gonna do. So many people find that it is life changing.

However, when doctors prescribe the medication and kind of pat you on the head and say, now go have a good life-- it doesn't mean that that is gonna be the magic pill.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** I think that's the case for most things, right? For a lot of neurological conditions and mental health issues.

**Caryn Forsgren:** So, I'm curious, would you guys be interested in a five-minute sample coaching session?

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Sure. Why not? Yeah.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Sure!

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah. Okay. So who's gonna be the potential client?

**Lindsey Laytner:** I can volunteer for tribute.

**Caryn Forsgren:** May the odds be ever in be your favor.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Yes, please.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Okay. So what three things do you want more or less of right now in your life?

**Lindsey Laytner:** Hmm. I want, more time.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Okay.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Maybe less projects.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Okay.

**Lindsey Laytner:** I don't know, more adventure, maybe. I feel like I'm in a stagnant place I know that's very, very different things.

**Caryn Forsgren:** I understand. So, which of those three would you say sparkles the most for you right now?

**Lindsey Laytner:** The third one. More adventure.

**Caryn Forsgren:** More adventure.. Tell me a little bit more about that.

**Lindsey Laytner:** I feel like because, well, just in the stage of life that I'm in right now, like I have a pretty demanding job and I'm also with child and all of those things that kind of come together and I just feel like I just don't have any, time to do anything that's really enjoyable or anything that makes me feel alive.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Oh, wow.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Everything's very like just kind of, yeah, I mean, it's like the mundane every day and then just trying to also get through the day.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Right.

**Lindsey Laytner:** There's no time for something that would be like special, which I would typically try to do

if, you know, I wasn't in the certain situation that I'm in, that's temporary, but, you know.

**Caryn Forsgren:** I get it

**Lindsey Laytner:** Something is missing for me.

**Caryn Forsgren:** So you said that you would like to feel alive. Have you felt that before?

**Lindsey Laytner:** Yes, I, I think so.

**Caryn Forsgren:** What did that feel like?

**Lindsey Laytner:** Wonderful. Like I could tackle anything that came my way ... boundless amounts of energy, you know? Yeah, like invincible.

**Caryn Forsgren:** So let's imagine that I could help you feel that. what would that look like today?

**Lindsey Laytner:** Oh God. Can we give birth now? No, I'm just kidding. Too Too early.

**Caryn Forsgren:** So, let me rephrase it. Maybe if you could imagine that you have that right now, how would it change how you're feeling?

**Lindsey Laytner:** I think I would feel excited

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah.

Yeah

**Lindsey Laytner:** To be up and doing things today.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah.

So basically as a coach, I help my clients anchor their desire and be able to move toward it. So what we would do as a coach and client is we'd have a meaningful conversation to help you find the way to get yourself toward that sense of wanting to feel alive.

Does that sound like something you'd like to do?

**Lindsey Laytner:** Oh yeah.

**Caryn Forsgren:** That's what coaching is.

**Lindsey Laytner:** I love it.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** And then you talk more about that and figure out together what would help.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Maybe like day by day.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah, this is basically the intro.

Like, I could help you figure out what it is that you really want. 'cause let's be honest, a lot of times our ADHDers aren't even really sure what they want. They just know what they don't want. Right? I don't wanna be where I am right now and sometimes it's hard to articulate what the inverse of that is. But I loved how you said, I just wanna feel alive. That's, that is huge. If we can really anchor that for you and identify what feeling alive looks like and figure out what your gap is between here and there, we can help you get on that path to making that happen.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's really cool.

**Caryn Forsgren:** And so it's interesting, you know, when we're talking about ADHD I'm not just saying, I'm gonna help you be able to use a planner effectively. Or that you're, you know, I'm gonna help you be on time to your appointments. That is part of what we're talking about.

But ultimately, our ADHD oftentimes stands between us and these bigger things that we want. How we wanna show up in this world, who we wanna be. Those are the kind of things that I wanna help you be able to attain.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Yeah.

**Caryn Forsgren:** And some of that other stuff may be the low hanging fruit to help with agendas and things like that. But ultimately, we wanna help you be able to define your goal and to really be able to attach to it so that you can pursue it better.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Yeah. It's like taking back some of the control when you feel like you're, you know, maybe stuck.

**Caryn Forsgren:** That's right.

Sometimes, you know, we start to lose hope, right? Yeah, is this all it really is ?

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Thank you for that-- that was definitely interesting.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Thank you.

**Heidi Bolduc:** I know. 'cause it seems like, it kind of seems so much more purpose driven than therapy feels a lot of the times.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Yeah.

**Caryn Forsgren:** I would say that probably the overarching question that coaching asks is, "Who do you wanna be?"

**Lindsey Laytner:** Hmm.

**Caryn Forsgren:** For example, I tell people February tends to be one of my busiest months because everybody has gone through the New Year's resolution cycle.

After three or four weeks, I'm gonna lose weight and that doesn't happen that they say, okay, I'm gonna need some help.

What I tell people though is if people are saying that their objective is to lose weight-- that's a real shortsighted goal. So it's easy when you fall off the horse to not get back on.

But we have to connect it to the larger question. If you wanna lose weight, why do you wanna lose weight?

Well, because I wanna be healthier.

Well, why do you wanna be healthier? Because I wanna be around for my family.

Well, why do you wanna be around for your family? Right?

We gotta get down to the core of what's driving your desire.

So if you wanna use a planner, why do you want to use a planner?

Right? Because I need to do better at work. Why do you need to do better at work? It's the same kind of thing. We need to get ourselves to the nugget of what's really driving you. That's where we can find the motivation that we tend to lack as ADHDers in just completing tasks.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Yes.

**Caryn Forsgren:** So kind of fun, huh?

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Definitely, yeah.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Yeah, it's so cool.

**Heidi Bolduc:** Yeah, it is.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** So, what kind of advice would you give to someone who's interested into getting into this kind of work? Either coaching or a, I realize ADD coaching is a specialty, so it's a little bit different, but for both, I would say.

**Caryn Forsgren:** I think some good soul searching is helpful. You know, who, are you, what is it you really want? Just kind of like we're just saying here, like

what is it that really drives you? And whatever that is, if you can figure out how you can apply your skills, and perhaps you identify them using that Via that we talked about. But how you can apply your strengths and skills in such a way that you are in alignment with who you are? If you're able to do that, then you can do anything, truthfully. Trust yourself, you'll be surprised.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** What are some good personality traits or other characteristics that make somebody good for your job? I know you touched upon some of them already, but are there any others, that you can think of?

**Caryn Forsgren:** Coaches need to be good listeners and empathetic, nonjudgmental, quick thinkers, and enthusiastic. Coaching might not be the right job for introverts or people who lack confidence. And coaches really can't have an agenda or be tied to an outcome.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Oh, that's really interesting. What do you mean by that exactly?

**Caryn Forsgren:** Like I said, everybody's coming with their own needs. My job as a coach is to meet the client where they are. If I am trying to tell them what they need to do that's not helping them be able to further their capacity to handle new situations. So, I need to help the client arrive at their own solution because ultimately my job as a coach is to teach my client how to coach themselves. My job's to work myself out of a job, right? If I'm tied to an outcome, then I'm not allowing the client to have the growth that they need.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Yeah, that totally makes sense.

**Caryn Forsgren:** I feel like it's really important to be somebody who is outgoing and a communicator. Having some confidence because there are gonna be ups and downs at times, and not letting that sway you. And, you know, just, some resilience.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Yeah.

**Caryn Forsgren:** But, I think there are lots of different kinds of people who can be coaches. The question is, why do you wanna be a coach?

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** What's the motivation behind it to help you figure it out.



**Caryn Forsgren:** It's largely the big question-- why, how do you wanna show up? Who do you wanna be? , What's your rationale for that?

If you can really help yourself identify that, then it really, like I said, it is easier to create your roadmap. If we don't know our GPS coordinates, it's gonna be a really circuitous route to get wherever we're going. But imagine if we know where we're headed, then boy, we can take the straight route to get there. Right? So that's what we're talking about...

**Lindsey Laytner:** So, I was just curious, when you're coaching people, do you ever have individuals where their motivations change or like, it's different one month or every quarter or something like that. And how do you navigate that?

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah, that's a good question. You know, because we are kind of shortsighted with ADHD it's quite often that clients come with a whole different subject than they came last

time, right? Because we tend to be interested in the most pressing thing. Maybe I'm worried that I'm gonna get in trouble at work because I haven't been able to get this particular thing done.

And so I don't really care whether I am getting my car in for service on time. You know, this is more pressing. I've had clients come to me asking, I can't seem to bring myself to take a shower. How can I make that happen? Because I now, I can't leave the house. So, you know, some things take precedence over others. We can come back to things. Ultimately the coaching sessions are like a scientific experiment. We're gonna have a conversation that's hopefully gonna lead to some sort of a hypothesis on the part of the client: I wonder if I tried X if X would happen. And so between the sessions is when the client goes in and performs the experimentation. We know that when we have ADHD and particularly as adults, it's largely emotional dysregulation. So, what that means is if we are doing a lot of cogitation around what's the solution for this problem, well, we're on a different plane than where the problem exists. If our problem is emotional and we're trying to rationalize a solution to an emotional problem, we're probably gonna be passing ships. So, the experimentation part needs to come into the emotional place so that we can make an informed decision on what's working and what isn't. And in order to do that, we have to literally put it on and walk around in it and evaluate our feelings around how that works. Sometimes that is enough for the client to get in it and see how it feels and be like, oh, that's all I needed to know. And so the next session we move on. Or it could be, eh, I realize that's not what I want. And we have to tweak things a

little bit and continue for a few sessions to understand what is gonna work. Yeah, it can vary. And that's okay. As long as we're making small steps forward - that's a successful coaching session.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Totally. Thanks.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Where do you think you're going next? What do you think is next for you?

**Caryn Forsgren:** I expect to keep doing exactly what I'm doing. I'm so fortunate to have found what works for me, is my calling. And I really get a lot out of it, and I feel like I can help my clients.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's great.

**Caryn Forsgren:** If there are anything that would change, I may consider giving, lectures or, you know, starting some system.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Podcasting?

**Heidi Bolduc:** Or a TED

TED talks are always fun.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Yeah, a TED talk would be really great.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah! So, but in the meantime, I'm happy with the way things are.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** That's great.

Last but not least, we like to ask our guests to choose three people... Currently alive or they don't have to be alive now so that they would like to have a beer or the choice of whatever beverage you would prefer having with them.

**Caryn Forsgren:** I, you know, at least two of them would be my parents. They both passed away before I did this.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Oh Oh yeah, that's right.

**Caryn Forsgren:** So, you know, I wish in fact, I think I knew you when they passed.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Right after...

**Caryn Forsgren:** They passed, uh, 21 days apart from each other. It's crazy.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Oh my god.

**Caryn Forsgren:** So, you know, I spent my whole childhood with parents that didn't understand ADHD. And I think that it, even during my training, I'd find myself in tears. Like, oh my gosh, I wish I could tell my mother this. I felt so validated. I wanted to be able to share some of those things. My father, when my mother called me with the Oprah Armchair diagnosis, "You have it. Your, your brother has it, your father has it. You got a car, you get a car."

And so, you know, I get it from my dad. My brother and my dad and I all have the larger presentation. I was the girl that was in the principal's office getting paddled. I wasn't the one that made it under the radar. I, I presented like a little boy, so I had all the problems. I got it from my dad, you know. Well, it's funny because through all of my education, I realized my mother had ADHD, too.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Wow.

**Caryn Forsgren:** But hers was inattentive, right? So I lived in a house of chaos. You know, we were all fire signs, all of us.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Oh my God.

**Caryn Forsgren:** And so it was crazy. But I wish that I could give my parents some insight into me, some insight into themselves.

Yeah, I've thought many times, I, boy, like I read something that said, we're terrible at taking advice. We have to internalize it and reproduce it as our own before we can actually...

My mother used to get so mad at me. She'd invest all this time and energy and, and giving me advice. And then I would say, well, I'll think about it. You know, and I mean, really, we had knock down drag outs because she felt like I was being ungrateful or whatever.

And so it's like, oh, this is my neurology. Why I did this. I wasn't doing something at you. Right.

Having just some of those basic understandings of my behavior I really wish I could have shared with them, but not just that I, I wish I could share the success, too.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** course.

I come, I, uh, completely understand that.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Yeah. So the third person, I have no idea.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** We'll let you with that 'cause that's a pretty powerful one, so no problem. We'll let you go. We won't put you more on the spot.

Thank you so much for joining us, Caryn. This has been a very enlightening conversation, both about life coaching and ADHD, and we really appreciate having you.

**Caryn Forsgren:** Well, I'm so grateful. I had the best time. You guys are so much fun.

**Karoun H. Bagamian:** Great. Thank you.

**Lindsey Laytner:** Yeah, thank you!