



Beverly H. Rohman



" ADHD and Attitude"

Super swimmer Michael Phelps, winner of the unprecedented 8 gold medals in the 2008 Olympics has been called the "greatest Olympian of all time." Do you see a connection between Michael Phelps and Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Mozart, Jet Blue CEO David Neeleman, psychiatrist Dr. Ned Hallowell, and actor Will Smith? These famous people all have been diagnosed with a learning difference **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**....otherwise known as **ADHD**. Typically characterized as a condition of the brain that results in excessive activity (hyperactivity), impulsivity, and difficulties with focusing attention, ADHD often makes it difficult for children to control their behavior in school and social settings. For adults there are similar challenges at work, at home and with relationships. It is one of the most common chronic conditions of childhood and affects between 4 and 12 percent of all school-age children. And we now know that these conditions carry on into adulthood.

Successful athletes, business men, actors, brilliant scientists, musicians and even doctors can be diagnosed with ADHD. There are no boundaries that it does not cross. The difference between achieving success, as demonstrated by the impressive group mentioned, or stumbling through life with school struggles, social challenges and failures has much more to do with attitude, positive actions and opportunities than with hyperactivity, impulsivity, and difficulty focusing. Sure..... having ADHD can be a challenge, a HUGE challenge at times, but when you understand how to work with it, you will find that it's a tremendous gift. You will also discover fantastic untapped potential.

Now that he's won his eight gold medals, Michael Phelps has been applauded for his success, his discipline and focusing on his goals. As a child, however, Debbie Phelps, Michael's mother, said he "never sat still, never closed his mouth, was always asking questions, always jumping from one thing to another." She thought he was just a very active little boy, until teachers complained of his inability to focus in the classroom. At age nine, Michael was diagnosed with ADHD. It was then that Debbie Phelps found

another outlet for her son's energy ---- the pool. There he could stay for hours and satisfy his boundless energy, never off course or distracted. So, when the teachers started to comment that Michael couldn't focus on anything, Debbie Phelps responded, "Well yes he can! He can focus on the pool... He was able to focus on what he loved."

The same was true for Thomas Edison – sent home in the 8th grade and told he was uneducable. Like Debbie Phelps, his mother knew that his very active and curious mind was definitely capable of learning and taught him at home. We all know what her positive attitude did for her son.....and the rest of the world.

Parents and educators have the power to make a difference in each child's life, and the start of the school year provides the opportunity for new beginnings and new ways of dealing with old challenges. A small adjustment to your routine or a change to the old patterns and attitudes can have a tremendous impact on positive family dynamics or classroom behaviors. It is when teachers and parents feel helpless and hopeless about their child's learning abilities that serious failures and difficulties result.

By setting up some structures and helping to organize the life of your child with ADHD you optimize the potential for a successful start to a new school year and set the course for their life. The feeling of success --- however small --- provides the foundation for a more positive attitude about school, learning and the possibilities that can come with having ADHD. Help your child to see that ADHD is less about deficits and disabilities, but more about Attention and Attitude that is Determined, Healthy and Definitely creative. With that optimistic attitude your family can always be filled with **HOPE** --- **H**elp to **O**ptimize the **P**otential for **E**xcellence. And, when there is more HOPE, who knows....you could help to turn on a light or even encourage another gold medal winner.

For more information about learning differences and ADD, contact The Learning Connections, at 3 Goldsborough Street, Easton, MD 21601, 410-763-7097, or write to beverly@thelearningconnections.net

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