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From the Nashville Business Journal:
https://www.bizjournals.com/nashville/news/2023/10/27/adhd-entrepreneur-podcast-nashville-squirrel.html

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SQUIRREL! Recent ADHD diagnosis leads to 50-year-old entrepreneur's next venture



Dave Delaney



By Nikki Ross – Reporter, Nashville Business Journal
Oct 27, 2023

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For fifty years, Dave Delaney – entrepreneur, CEO of Futureforth, author and keynote speaker – has been operating with the wrong software.

But after finally being diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in March, he finally feels like things make sense.

“I felt joy,” Delaney said, explaining that life with undiagnosed ADHD was like running iOS software on an Android device. “But when you know, are diagnosed and treated, you can connect your operating system with the right device and once you know that, then you can run much better.”

Shortly after receiving his diagnosis, Delaney in true entrepreneur fashion created his Nashville-based website and podcast Wise Squirrels in May. It’s aimed at helping those who receive an ADHD diagnosis later in life become educated and know they are not alone.

It’s also been a way for him to process his own diagnosis.

“When I was diagnosed, right away I'm like, 'OK, I need to start sharing what I learned,'” Delaney said.

And yes, the squirrel part of the name did come from Pixar character Doug in animated film "Up," the constantly distracted dog that is most famously known for interrupting his own sentence because of a squirrel.

“I've referenced that constantly,” Delaney said of the character. “I was going to call the site something like squirrels but that’s what I don’t want it to be. I didn’t want it to be seen as making fun of people with ADHD.”

Which is how "wise" was incorporated into the name.

“I’m doing this to help late diagnosed adults with ADHD like me,” he said. “With age comes wisdom. One would hope at least I’ve learned a few things in my 50, now 51 years on earth. So that is where the wise part came in.”

What is ADHD and how was Delaney diagnosed?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder with symptoms like difficulty controlling behavior, trouble paying attention, talking too much, interrupting others and hyperactivity. Treatments for ADHD include therapy and medication.

An estimated 8.7 million adults in the U.S. have ADHD, according to Forbes Health. And 6.8% of adults have symptomatic ADHD. Delaney said ADHD is common in entrepreneurs like himself.

Delaney's wife, Heather, who is a school teacher, has told him for years he had ADHD and should get tested.

In 2016 he did get tested. But his psychologist told him he had anxiety with a hint of depression.

It wasn't until this year, after a fellow entrepreneur who has ADHD told Delaney he probably has it, that he finally went back. It was there he learned that during his 2016 assessment, he was labeled a candidate for ADHD. But no one ever told him.

"I'm also very entrepreneurial which as it turns out ADHD is quite common in entrepreneurs," he said, explaining that having ADHD has led to some incredible opportunities. "Here in Nashville, it's led to networking events that I co-founded, I founded monthly networking events, and two conferences I co-founded and jobs I took and clients I took and speaking engagements and all that stuff."

Now that he's been diagnosed, he's seeing an ADHD coach and psychologist. He's actually been doing a number of things since the pandemic that help his ADHD symptoms, like seeing an online therapist, daily meditation, exercising, journaling and he quit drinking.

These changes were sparked after high stress and anxiety from the pandemic and a tornado severely damaging his home. He decided he needed to take better care of himself.

The response to Wise Squirrels

Delaney currently doesn't make any money from Wise Squirrels. He considers it a weekend hobby at the moment but that doesn't mean he isn't open to sponsors.

He's been podcasting for 18 years now. His goal is to release the Wise Squirrels podcast weekly, but for now it's on a bi-weekly release schedule.

"It's been fantastic," he said of the response to his podcast. "I started getting all these private message and comments on social, especially on Facebook, from friends who were like this is amazing."