

BUILT FOR CHAOS

BUILT FOR CHAOS

Designing a life that fits your ADHD brain

Matt Morrison

Copyright © 2026 by Matt Morrison and Authentic Mess Studios

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that neither the author nor the publisher is engaged in rendering legal, investment, accounting, or other professional services. While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional when appropriate. Neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, personal, or other damages.

Published by Authentic Mess Studios
www.authenticmessstudios.com
www.builtforchaosbook.com

First Edition: 2026
Paperback ISBN: 979-8-9962275-3-2
Ebook ISBN: 979-8-9962275-1-8
PDF ISBN: 979-8-9962275-2-5

Contents

Preface	8
Introduction: Why Everything Else Has Failed You	9
Chapter 1: The System Is Broken, Not You	11
Chapter 2: The Manual We Never Got	27
Chapter 3: Burn the Productivity Lies	43
Chapter 4: Triage Your Brain: The Three-Pile System	59
Chapter 5: Read Your Own Operating Manual	79
Chapter 6: A Translation Guide for Your Relationships	99
Chapter 7: Thrive, Manage, or Escape: A Survival Guide for Work	117
Chapter 8: The Emergency Restart	135
Chapter 9: You Don't Get Cured, You Get Skilled	147
Chapter 10: Your Human AF Go-Bag	161
References	175
Notes	179

Preface

A Note Before You Dive In

What you're holding (or reading) is the first edition of Built For Chaos – the Ebook and paperback version built to get this into your hands fast. You've waited long enough for something that actually fits your brain.

This isn't the end of the road. We're building something bigger together: a full-color premium workbook edition designed from the ground up for the way ADHD brains actually process, plan, and operate. Better visuals. Deeper tools. Built to sit on your desk and get wrecked with use.

That version is coming through Kickstarter. I want you in the room when it launches.

Sign up at builtforchaosbook.com. You'll get updates, early access, and first dibs when the campaign goes live.

Free Resources

Throughout this book you'll find references to 10-Minute Wins, worksheets, and the Human AF Go-Bag. Download all of them, free, at: builtforchaosbook.com/resources.

Print them. Use them. Wreck them. That's the point.

Introduction

Why Everything Else Has Failed You

Stop Trying to Fix Your Brain. Start Building Systems That Actually Work.

You've tried to run your life on someone else's operating system. The planners, the apps, the color codes. They work until they don't. Then the shame shows up and the wheels come off.

If your brain refuses to think in straight lines, good. Mine too. The system is broken, not you.

You've Been Given the Wrong Tools

Every productivity system that's failed you was designed for neurotypical brains. That planner that frustrated you? Built for someone whose brain works in straight lines. That advice that made you feel worse? Written by someone who's never had to manage attention like a limited resource.

You weren't a bad cook. You were handed a saw and told to make dinner. The tools were wrong from the start.

This guide isn't here to fix you. It's here to give you a manual that finally fits the machine you actually have.

RECEIPTS

BUILT FOR CHAOS

Millions of adults are fighting their brains without knowing why, as ADHD remains systematically underdiagnosed in adults.

Source: CDC, 2024 · Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report · An estimated 15.5 million U.S. adults have ADHD, with approximately half receiving their diagnosis in adulthood rather than childhood. · Attoe & Climie, 2023 · Journal of Attention Disorders · Women are particularly underdiagnosed because their symptoms often present internally and are frequently misattributed to anxiety or depression.

Who I Am

I'm a sales guy who figured some stuff out, not a doctor or mental health professional. I wasn't diagnosed until my early thirties. By then, I'd already spent years thinking I was fundamentally broken, watching money slip through my fingers, and wondering why I could solve everyone else's problems but not my own.

I ended up on a balcony in Dallas, drowning in debt and shame, wondering if I'd ever figure it out. How I got from that balcony to systems that actually work starts in Chapter One.

What I can offer you is this: one person's ADHD experience, plus research-backed strategies that actually work. A resource and validation for your journey.

The Human AF Method: A Framework Built for Your Brain

Most productivity advice comes from people whose brains work in straight lines. When you try to force web-thinking into linear systems, everything breaks down. Then everyone acts surprised and wonders why you're struggling. As if all you needed was to put in more effort.

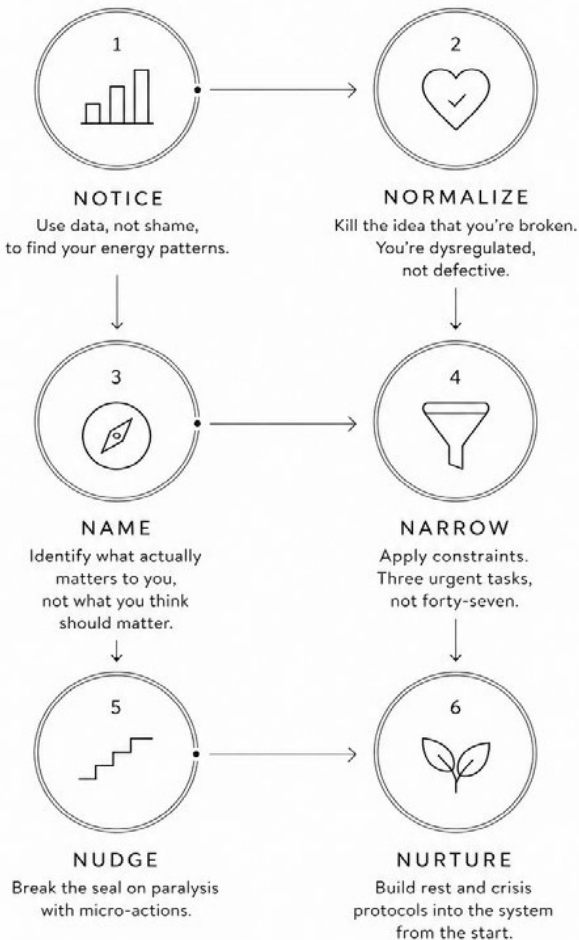
**I got tired of trying to install PC software
on my Mac brain.**

Introduction: Why Everything Else Has Failed You

Every strategy in this book has been tested in the real world by someone whose brain runs on the same beautiful chaos as yours. That's the Human AF Method: a framework for ADHD brains that honors how you actually function instead of demanding you become someone you're not.

The Human AF Method is built on six steps that mirror the cycle your brain goes through when managing anything: daily tasks, relationships, work, crisis:

THE Human AF Method



BUILT FOR CHAOS

These six steps hold everything together. Every tool in this book maps back to one of them.

At the Center: The Three-Pile System™

Here's the tactical heart of everything: when your brain presents forty-seven things that all feel urgent, you triage them into three piles.



HOT PILE

Urgent Tasks

Immediate action required today. Max 3 items.



WARM PILE

Important but not urgent

Important, not urgent. Moves to HOT when deadlines appear.



COLD PILE

Can wait

Ideas and wishes. Brain dump to free up working memory.

That's it. Three piles with clear rules. You'll learn the complete system

Introduction: Why Everything Else Has Failed You
in Chapter Four.

How To Use This Book

This isn't a book you need to read cover-to-cover in order, though you certainly can. It's designed to be a field manual you can jump into wherever you need help right now.

If you're in crisis mode: Go straight to Chapter 8 (Emergency Restart). Get stable first, then come back to the rest.

If you're starting from scratch: Read Chapters 1 through 5 in order to understand your brain's wiring, and build your Three-Pile System in Chapter 4.

If you need relationship scripts: Jump to Chapter 6 (A Translation Guide for Your Relationships).

If work is the main struggle: Go to Chapter 7 (Thrive, Manage, or Escape: A Survival Guide for Work).

If you're ready for the long game: Read Chapter 9 (You Don't Get Cured, You Get Skilled) and keep Chapter 10 (Your Human AF Go-Bag) nearby for quick reference.

The 10-Minute Wins

At the end of each chapter, you'll find a 10-Minute Win: a small, actionable exercise designed to give you immediate momentum. You don't need to do every one. Pick what speaks to you. Use the worksheets if they help. Skip them if they don't.

We've Got The Receipts

Throughout this book, you'll see research callouts labeled RECEIPTS. They're not footnotes for academics. They're validation. Studies that confirm what you've probably already experienced. Evidence that the framework is built on real science, not just one person's opinion. You don't have to read them. They're there when you need them.

BUILT FOR CHAOS

The Human AF Go-Bag

Think of the Go-Bag as your emergency field manual. It's the chapter you flip to when everything is falling apart and you need fast answers. Quick-reference visuals, emergency protocols, and system resets all in one place.

When you're in crisis, your brain can't process long explanations. The Go-Bag gives you scannable, actionable tools you can grab in the moment.

Note: This book is not medical advice, therapy replacement, or a diagnostic tool. If you're in crisis, contact local emergency services or a trusted professional immediately. This book complements professional care; it doesn't replace it. Use your judgment, adapt what makes sense, and ditch what doesn't.

A Note on Perspective

There isn't one way to have an ADHD brain. My story is one version. A hyperactive, impulsive, overthinking brain version. For millions of women, it's quieter: inattention, anxiety, the exhausting work of masking symptoms just to function. Their ADHD gets missed, dismissed, or misdiagnosed for years.

I can't tell that story because I didn't live it. What I can do is build tools that work for the brain, not the gender. These systems address the core challenges we share: executive function, overwhelm, paralysis, time blindness.

No matter what your experience has been, I hope you find something here that makes you feel seen and better equipped for what's ahead.

Your story starts in Chapter 1. Mine starts in Dallas.

Chapter One

The System Is Broken, Not You

In This Chapter:

Human AF Method: Normalize

- The three months that almost ended everything (and what saved me)
- Why every productivity system has failed you (and why that's not your fault)
- Permission to stop apologizing for how your brain works

Reading Time: 15–20 Minutes

I'm writing this at 3:47 a.m. because my brain decided tonight was the perfect time to organize every thought I've ever had about why traditional productivity advice is complete garbage for people like us. Tomorrow I'll probably be exhausted and spend half the morning staring at my ceiling, thinking about why I made that comment in third grade that made me look like an idiot.

Both are normal. Both are okay.

A year ago, I was standing on a balcony in Dallas wondering if I'd ever figure any of this out.

The Balcony

One morning on my apartment balcony, I caught myself wondering if disappearing would finally quiet the noise.

I stood there for hours. Hours.

BUILT FOR CHAOS

Shame stacked on failure stacked on "you're broken and can't be fixed."
It felt too heavy to carry.

**Need support right now?
Call or text 988 (US) • Text HOME to 741741
Help is available 24/7**

The Diagnosis That Explained Nothing

Three months earlier, I thought I was on my way to figuring it out. I'd just been diagnosed with ADHD in my early thirties. The therapist handed me the diagnosis like a prescription for chronic illness, something to "manage" and eventually "overcome." Nobody explained what it actually looked like in daily life. Nobody connected the dots between why I could redesign an entire website overnight but couldn't remember to water the plant sitting next to my desk.

Nobody told me I could have the most incredible day and watch it all unravel an hour later. Nobody told me what to do when everything turned dark and loud and started falling apart. What to do when I was overwhelmed. What to do when sadness grabbed hold and worry made me doubt every next step.

I thought I was sick. I waited to figure out how to be "normal."

I tried every planner, every system, every piece of advice that promised to fix my broken brain. Each one worked for about two weeks before the overwhelm crashed in and I decided I was the problem.

Debt piled up. I stopped answering calls. The worst part? Everyone around me seemed to have it figured out. They remembered things. They followed through. They didn't watch money slip through their fingers.

Chapter One: The System Is Broken, Not You

I loved helping people solve problems at work, but I couldn't solve my own.



RECEIPTS

BUILT FOR CHAOS

Traditional productivity methods fail ADHD people due to mismatched executive function demands.

Source: American Psychological Association, 2022 · Psychological Bulletin · Standard planners and time-blocking systems require sustained working memory and impulse control—the exact functions most impaired in ADHD. · CHADD, 2021 · National Resource Center on ADHD · Tools built for neurotypical brains systematically disadvantage ADHD users, creating a cycle of failure and shame that compounds over time.

That's how I ended up on that balcony. Drowning in debt, cut off from everyone I cared about, crushed under anxiety and depression I couldn't name or understand. My ADHD brain, which is normally just chaotic, had turned into a full tornado of overwhelm.

Every. Single. Day.

One Phone Call

Then my phone rang. One of my closest long-distance friends, calling at the worst moment of my life. She had no idea what I was going through, but she didn't need to.

Steph's the kind of person who has that infectious emotional pull. When she's happy or excited about something, you become happy or excited too. Even on that night. I sat down and felt, just for a few moments, that I was home again.

I don't remember most of what we talked about. The only thing I really remember is the feeling that if I just went back home, everything would be okay. I'd get it figured out. I'd see someone. I'd start learning how to talk it through.

So I woke up, sold what I could, packed the rest, hitched a trailer, and drove home to Pennsylvania where my people were.

Therapy Without the Magic Fix

Back in PA, I found a therapist who understood ADHD tangled with anxiety and depression. For the first time, someone explained how the three dance together and create perfect storms.

Even the best therapy isn't magic. Some days getting out of bed felt impossible. Other days I'd hyperfocus on self-help until it overwhelmed me. I kept searching for The One Perfect System.

I never found it, because it doesn't exist. What I found instead was a sales book.



RECEIPTS

BUILT FOR CHAOS

Internalized stigma and negative thought patterns are common in ADHD, but they are learned behaviors that can be unlearned.

Source: Mueller et al., 2012 · Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders · Stigma surrounding ADHD—such as being told to "just try harder"—is strongly associated with increased shame, social withdrawal, and reduced self-esteem.

A Sales Book Changed How I Learn

The breakthrough moment came from the most unexpected place: Jeffrey Gitomer's *The Little Red Book of Selling*. This wasn't meant to be ADHD advice, but it accidentally revolutionized how I learned.

The book took complex sales concepts and broke them into bite-sized, manageable pieces. Nothing felt overwhelming. Everything was simple without being simplistic. Most importantly, learning became fun again. That's what I'd been missing: fun. Joy. The basic human right to enjoy the process of becoming better at life.

As I read, something clicked. I didn't need to be glued back together, because I was never shattered in the first place. I just needed information delivered in a way that worked with my operating system.

Chapter One: The System Is Broken, Not You

I started asking different questions. If I'd lived my whole life with a disorder, why did I have uncontrollable laughter with good friends? Why did movies capture my soul? Why could I help my customers solve complex problems while my own life felt messy? Wouldn't a truly broken person have a completely broken life?

Five words changed everything:

My brain isn't the problem.

The answer was obvious once I stopped trying to force it. Your ADHD brain works fine. Productivity systems malfunction when they meet your wiring.

Good Days and Brain Soup Days

Let me tell you what success looks like for me now, because you might not expect it.

A good ADHD day means waking up tired but getting to work anyway. A good day means being overwhelmed by everything going on around me and still moving. Forward, sideways, doesn't matter. Movement counts. Any movement.

I'm not writing from some mountaintop of ADHD enlightenment. I'm in the trenches with you, figuring it out one day at a time. Some days I'm the squirrel successfully gathering nuts for winter, one at a time. Other days I'm the squirrel who got distracted by a shiny leaf and forgot what nuts were for.



Both Squirrels are valid.

A good day is catching myself when anxiety starts whispering lies about the future, or when depression tries to convince me I'll never be truly happy, or when my ADHD insists I'll never succeed because I can't focus the "right" way. On really good days, I tell all that noise to shut the @%? up and let me live my life. (Feel free to insert whatever word works best for you.)

Then there are the brain soup days. Days when everything feels overwhelming and I avoid the easy tasks as hard as the hard ones. Days when I stay on the couch and forget the episode I just watched twice.

Those days used to fill me with shame. Now I understand they're part of my brain's natural rhythm. Rest isn't failure. Overwhelm isn't weakness. Sometimes your entire nervous system needs to power down and reboot.

The win isn't "finish everything." The win is stop the shame spiral and reset.

The Lies Your Brain Tells You

The lies my brain used to tell me:

Chapter One: The System Is Broken, Not You

“Everyone else has it figured out”

“If you just tried harder...”

“Normal people don’t struggle like this”

“You’ll never be successful”

“You’re too much for people”

“You’re fundamentally broken”

We're not here to overcome ADHD. You're not failing their systems. Their systems are failing you.

The productivity industrial complex makes insane money selling solutions to neurotypical people, then acts surprised when neurodivergent folks can't make them work. It's like being forced to throw a baseball left-handed when you're naturally right-handed, then getting blamed for your "poor coordination."

You've probably been told you need more discipline. Better habits. Stronger willpower. More motivation.

What you really need are tools designed for how your brain actually works, not how productivity gurus think it should.

This isn't a before-and-after success story. It's an "in the thick of it" success story. We're all in the weeds together, figuring it out one day at a time. Progress is progress, no matter what shape it takes. Some days

BUILT FOR CHAOS

you'll conquer the world. Other days you'll successfully shower and eat. Both victories matter.

We've spent years trying to repair something that was never broken. We've apologized for being human. We've twisted ourselves into shapes that don't fit our bones.

That ends now.

What's next...

Let's get practical. If you understand how your engine really works, you can stop flooding it and start driving it on purpose. Next up, the manual you never got.

10-Minute Win

Document Your Starting Point

Set a timer for 10 minutes.
Answer these prompts without editing
yourself.

The earliest memory I have of feeling "different"
or struggling with something others found
easy:

Three patterns I've noticed in my life that I
always explained as personal failings:

Pattern 1:

Pattern 2:

Pattern 3:

STOP: WIN BANKED



BUILT FOR CHAOS

BUILT FOR CHAOS

WORKSHEET 1.1

MY ADHD STORY SO FAR

PURPOSE

Document your personal patterns and experiences before entering the Human AF Method. This becomes your baseline for measuring progress.

INSTRUCTIONS

Write freely. Don't censor yourself or worry about "correctness." This is for you.

01 **EARLY PATTERNS**

The earliest memory I have of feeling "different" or struggling with something others found easy:

02 **RECURRING THEMES**

Three patterns I've noticed in my life that I've always explained as personal failings:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

03 **STRENGTHS INVENTORY**

Complete this for three strengths

Strength 1 - Something I can do effortlessly that others find hard:

How has this strength been dismissed or mislabeled?

BUILT FOR CHAOS

Chapter One: The System Is Broken, Not You

WORKSHEET 1.1

Strength 2 – Something I can do effortlessly that others find hard:

How has this strength been dismissed or mislabeled?

Strength 3 – Something I can do effortlessly that others find hard:

How has this strength been dismissed or mislabeled?

04 **WHAT YOU WANT OTHERS TO KNOW**

The thing I most want people to understand about how my brain works:

05 **CURRENT CHALLENGES**

Right now, the biggest challenge my ADHD creates in my life:

If I could change one thing about how I manage daily life, it would be:

You captured your baseline. Keep it close as you work through the method.

BUILT FOR CHAOS

Matt Morrison