



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST
**ADHD As A Gift, with *Faster Than Normal* Author,
Peter Shankman**

Shannon Waller: Do you sometimes feel like your brain works *Faster Than Normal* or you work with someone whose brain is *Faster Than Normal*? Stay tuned for my fascinating interview with Peter Shankman, author of *Faster Than Normal* and an expert on ADHD and how to be successful. Stay tuned.

Hi, Shannon Waller here and welcome to *Team Success*. Today I am very excited to talk with the author of a book that I read in one weekend. It's called *Faster Than Normal* by Peter Shankman and I was completely enamored. This book is filled with so many practical strategies and healthy mindsets about ADHD and about how to be successful and about teamwork. So Peter, welcome to the show and I'm delighted to meet you.

Peter Shankman: Great to be here. Thanks.

Shannon Waller: Good. All right, so let's talk about *Faster Than Normal* and what kind of compelled you to write this book because there's a great backstory that you have?

Peter Shankman: Yeah, I mean I grew up with what was called sit-down-you're-disrupting-the-class disease, and it wasn't until my mid-thirties that I was diagnosed with ADHD and so I was able to sort of put that together and realize that the majority of stuff that I did that both got me in trouble as a kid and was part of my success as an adult was all tied to that. Once I realized that, I realized what I could do to fix that and use that to my advantage and keep growing it and maybe start the conversation about why neurodiverse people are not broken but rather gifted if they understand what they're doing.

Shannon Waller: That's really interesting and I love that we'll jump into this mindset. I also want to just acknowledge how I met you, which is through our mutual friend and podcast partner André Brisson, who has a great podcast called [The Impulsive Thinker](#). There's really so much more of a conversation happening now about ADHD, about entrepreneurs. I'm a big fan of [Tom Hartman's supposition](#) that we are hunters in a farmer's world, and I love how much you are focused on really looking at this as a gift and helping people be successful with this gift because it can be a superpower if managed correctly.

Peter Shankman: Yeah, that's what I've always said. I just think that we're told from the time we're very young that we're broken. So, you have to undo that while setting people up for success as well.

Shannon Waller: How hard is it to undo? Does it depend on the amount of negative programming you've gotten? How do you take a look at that? What do you notice?

Peter Shankman: I think it depends on the person, depends on the premise that... How did they grow up? What did they understand about themselves? Were they constantly fighting it?



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Did they let it work... By the time I was in college, I started the process. I didn't realize at the time but I was starting the process of not caring what other people thought. And that just continued to go over time and it got better and better. But yeah, it was difficult. For me it was hard when you're told that... When you get sent home with a note from school every single day that says you're doing something wrong, when, in your mind, it's the exact right thing, it's a problem.

Shannon Waller: I totally get that. Part of what enamored me about the book was your title, *Faster Than Normal*. So how do you see ADHD? Because I appreciate your perspective and I think it's different than other people I've heard.

Peter Shankman: Yeah, I mean to me ADHD is simply the body's inability to make dopamine, serotonin, and adrenaline that a normal person creates when they need to focus. So for me, I would sit down in math class and I wouldn't focus. I'd be looking around, looking for something to excite me, something to get me going. Eventually I'd wind up telling a joke or make the class laugh, and unknowingly doing that would give me the dopamine that I needed to focus. Of course I'd be in trouble. I'd get sent to the principal's office or whatever, but the irony is that I was actually trying to focus. Upon growing up, I've learned other ways to get that same result whether that is through skydiving or marathoning or triathlon, whatever it is. I've learned ways to do it in a way that works for me.

Shannon Waller: Awesome. I know we're going to very shortly jump into some strategies including partnering with really good people. I know what adrenaline is. Can you make a clear distinction for me between dopamine and serotonin?

Peter Shankman: They are two different chemicals that the brain makes. Together they do certain things. Apart they do certain things. Serotonin is thought of as a love drug on occasion. Dopamine is a focus drug. You put them together, as the dials increase, decrease, you can get everything from sadness to extreme focus to hyperactivity—you name it. It depends on where the levels are. I'm not a doctor and I'm not a scientist, but this is my understanding based on sort of experiments I've done on myself and things I've read.

Shannon Waller: Okay. Can you share some of the strategies that you use to up your levels? Because you're very conscious and conscientious about how you set yourself up for success every day.

Peter Shankman: Yeah, I'll start my day with an exercise. So first thing I do when I wake up is I jump on either my bike or I go for a run or something. I don't have the ability not to do that; if I do that, that's just not a good day. So for me it's pretty much about figuring out what I can do first and foremost. So sometimes if I have an early start to my day, that might be getting up as



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early as 3 a.m. This morning I was up to 4:30 to get a ride in from 5:00 to 6:00 just to get an hour, 20 miles in on my bike to get those chemicals. And my day started at 7:00. So that's one way. Another way for me, I get on a plane. I'll fly 14 hours and I'll write the entire time. I've written all five of my books on airplanes. Sometimes I fly to Asia just to write and I fly right back.

Shannon Waller: Can you tell that story? Because in the book you talk about you had a deadline and you had a very effective strategy for making sure you met the book deadline.

Peter Shankman: Yeah. I had two weeks left on a deadline. I had written nothing so I booked a round trip to Tokyo. I wrote chapters one through five on the flight out, landed, went to lounge, took a shower, had a cup of coffee, got back on the same plane, same seat. Three hours later, wrote chapters six through 10, and it worked. It's not what a lot of people will do, but for me it's exactly what I needed to do.

Shannon Waller: That's so cool. And you knew that so you were not stressed about it. Was your publisher stressed?

Peter Shankman: Publisher didn't know. A little easier there.

Shannon Waller: That's a really good point. Yep. Okay, so you'll jump on a plane to write a book, half of it on the way there, half of it on the way back. I love that. What are some of the other things that you do? Because you have a real commitment to be successful, a commitment to be a great dad, a commitment to live your best life. And you have some rules about what always will happen or that won't happen, and the consequences if you don't. Can you share some of those rules? Because they're essential, but I think people overlook them a lot.

Peter Shankman: It starts out again with exercise. That has to be first and foremost. Secondary is enough sleep to get up as early as 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. I go to sleep around eight or nine o'clock at night. People think it's crazy, but there's really nothing I can do outside... Nothing really good. There's a quote says "Nothing good happens after midnight." Nothing really good happens for me after 8 p.m. I mean, it's very rare that I'll go to dinner or do late night or something like that, or go to a party. I'm much happier going to sleep early knowing that I can get up early. That works for me. And so I'm a big fan of that.

I think that, again, a lot of people focus on the short term. I tend to constantly look at 12 hours in the future. What's going to happen in 12 hours from now, 12 hours from now, 12 hours from now? And how do I have to get there? How do I want to feel in those 12 hours? And so how do I get there to make sure that in 12 hours I'm in the better place? And it sounds crazy, but it does work.



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Shannon Waller: And then you work backwards and make sure you design everything.

Peter Shankman: Yeah, it's the premise of, okay, do I want to have a good day? So tonight I have, "Do I really want to get up to go to the gym? I'm kind of tired. Well, where am I going to be at... It's 4 a.m., so I could sleep in. How am I going to feel a 4 p.m. if I don't go to the gym?" And I work backwards from that. And that gives me usually enough of the answer to know what I need to do.

Shannon Waller: I love how you've got good habits, but you're disciplined to yourself, if that makes sense.

Peter Shankman: I have a choice. I mean, I don't have a choice if I want to be the best I could be, I need to make sure that I'm doing the right things to get there.

Shannon Waller: Got you. I love that story. Let's jump in and talk a little bit... We'll just bounce around because we like to do that. Let's talk a little bit about teamwork. You have your Megan, I have my Katrina. Prior to that I had Nicole. How critical is it for you to have other people who have complimentary... I feel like this is a rhetorical question a little bit, but how critical has that been? I mean, you talk about it in the book. I think we share a very similar experience with what a difference that can make.

Peter Shankman: At the end of the day, you have to know yourself. If you don't know yourself, nothing you do is really for you. And I think that it's fine to want to please other people. I love making sure my daughter's happy. It's fine to do all this stuff, but you have to start by knowing yourself. If you don't understand yourself and you don't understand the way that you work and you don't understand what's best for you and how to get there... The Greeks have a saying, the ancient Greeks [inaudible], says, "If you're not putting care upon you, there will be no care onto others." And it's a very accurate statement. How can you possibly be the best for anyone else, whether it's your daughter, your business partner, your spouse, your partner, if you're not first taking care of yourself? And I think for many years it was considered selfish to put yourself first. But in certain ways you don't really have a choice. If you want to be the best you, then you have to make sure you're operating the best you can and the best way you know how.

Shannon Waller: I love that. You have to know yourself. One of the ways that I do that at Strategic Coach is I use a lot of profiles. I don't know if that's something you've explored. So we talk about [Kolbe](#), we talk about [CliftonStrengths](#). There's another great one called [PRINT](#), to put common language around how each of us is actually unique. It sounds kind of contradictory, but it's not. Is that anything that you've explored, anything that you've done? Have you found it helpful or not? What's your take on profiles?



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Peter Shankman: I don't really have a... I know who I am and I know what I do. I don't need to examine it more than that, really, until something's not working. When something's not working, I'll figure it out, and I'll go from there. But yeah, I don't really have to put myself into a profile or do anything like that because at the end of the day, the only person I need to make sure that I've done better than is me yesterday.

Shannon Waller: So you're not comparing yourself to other people?

Peter Shankman: No, there's absolutely no point in it. I used to do that when I would race, and I'd go for a regular 10K and whatever. Never mind the fact that I finished better than 6,000 people, it was the 400 people I didn't finish better than that I'd spend the day worrying about. And for what? For what point? So you really have to be aware of that. And I focus on the fact that I did better on this race than I did in the last race and go from there.

Shannon Waller: I love that you're always measuring what we call [The Gain](#). Like it. One of the other parts of the book that I found so insightful was triggers—both professional and personal triggers. And the way that I read it, which I think is how you intended it, is that there's triggers that take you out of being your best self or your most productive self and they can totally hijack your really good intentions. Is that summarized it?

Peter Shankman: Yeah, I mean I am very aware of what certain things can do to me. I'm very aware what alcohol can do to me. And so as such, I try very hard to avoid alcohol and I very rarely drink. It's because of that... The reason I don't really drink is because I don't just have one drink. Again, you have to know yourself. And for me it's not a question of one drink; so it's much easier not to drink. Let's just not have that first one, and then we don't have to worry about not having a second one. That is pretty much always the situation—understanding of what you're doing, how you're doing, and how you're getting there. Again, playing the tape forward 12 hours. If I do this thing, will it affect me poorly in 12 hours? And so a lot of it for me is always that.

Shannon Waller: I really love how you kind of accept yourself for who you are as opposed to trying to be different. That's one of the messages consistently throughout your book is that, "Yeah, this is me, and I want to be this person. I'm just not going to do that."

Peter Shankman: It took a long time to get there.

Shannon Waller: Did it? Okay.

Peter Shankman: It took a long time to get there because the world tells you what you're supposed to be or what they believe you to be.



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Shannon Waller: Yes.

Peter Shankman: And you find more often than not that that's not in fact who you are. And if you're trying to be that, it's very hard to be that when you're not designed to be that way. You're constantly forcing yourself to be something you're not. And so for me it was about realizing who I am and making peace with it.

Shannon Waller: Um-hum. And then working with yourself to figure out what works, what doesn't, what habits. And even though we won't go into that many of them today, you have so many hacks that you've shared. So many applications, habits, the vest you wear when you're traveling, all the things. I loved it. It was such a practical... Like, "Here, I've figured this out. Use this." It's a very helpful book.

Peter Shankman: Well, thank you. I mean, I think a lot of it again, comes down to the fact that this works for me. This may or may not work for you.

Shannon Waller: Yeah.

Peter Shankman: Try it and maybe if it doesn't, maybe alter it, maybe change it a little bit and see what you can do differently. But understand that everyone is different and everyone's going to come up with different ways that work for them, but figure out what that is for you and go from there.

Shannon Waller: It sounds so simple, but people don't do it.

Peter Shankman: Well they don't because they're not really trained to. They're not designed to. It's not thought of as a good thing. I think we're taught more to adapt ourselves to the lifestyle than make the lifestyle work for ourselves. And so I've just tried to make the lifestyle work. It's not always easy—quite often not easy—but you do it in such a way that it becomes a little easier every day. And at the end of the day, what I want to be able to do is help people. And so again, I tell them what works for me and I try that; but again, it's not going to work for everyone. And so I made peace with that too. I am free to give you this advice, and if you don't want it, tell me to go away and I'm more than happy to.

Shannon Waller: Yep. Yeah, it is a gift given very freely. But again, as someone who loves practical strategies, it was like, "Oh my God, I'm going to check this, I'm going to check that out," and highlighted all of the things because it was useful. And so it's a very practical way to think about things that can also be very helpful for people who are not ADHD. As Ned Hallowell talks about, there's pseudo ADD. We live in kind of a culture where things are coming at us all the time and we all need to have these skills and these hacks and this awareness to be functional with all of the inputs that we're getting.



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Peter Shankman: Yeah, I mean, I'm not a fan of that term because I think that people tend to drop the pseudo. "I can't find my keys, it must be ADHD." No, how about just put your keys somewhere where you can find them? I think might be a little easier for you. And so that's been an issue as well. And I see that a lot. I don't think we need to start giving the name itself different names. I think that we deal with enough sort of as it is.

Shannon Waller: Enough challenges as it is. Excellent point. I like that. So I want to go back and talk about, tell me about your Megan and how you guys work together.

Peter Shankman: Megan has been my assistant since 2008 and she controls the majority of my life. She is in charge of my travel schedule, she's in charge of my calendar. She doesn't let me do many things without her permission and that's for both our sakes. She took access away from my calendar when, about 10 years ago when I booked two dinners on the same night. And I said, "Oh, it's not that big of a mistake. You're overreacting." She goes, "Well you booked them on separate continents so you're done." And that was the last time I had access to my calendar. It's the right thing because I pay her to keep me at peak performance, for lack of a better word. And she's able to do that by doing the things that she's very good at and taking them off my plate, the things that I'm not very good at. So because she can do that, I don't have to worry about them. And more importantly, it's guaranteed I'm not going to screw them up, which wasn't a guarantee when I didn't have her.

Shannon Waller: 100%. I have travel trauma stories where, because I didn't have the right birth certificate, we were delayed on our African safari trip, so we missed the first safari and then there was another delay going to Australia. All the things. So I was reading your travel things and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I could write similar things. I should just not be allowed to book travel. Bad things happen."

Peter Shankman: Well, and that's what you have to understand. So when that's the case, that's the case.

Shannon Waller: Yeah.

Peter Shankman: You have to let it work in your world.

Shannon Waller: Hundred percent.

Peter Shankman: Don't bother trying to fight the fights that either aren't winnable or that take too much time away from the fights you enjoy fighting.

Shannon Waller: I like that story. I want to talk more about how ADHD is a superpower. What are the gifts that... We've talked about how to manage some of the downsides, but what are



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some of the gifts that you notice? And you also work [with] communities of ADHD people and entrepreneurs and that's our audience. So what do you see as being the real wins? How do you define the gifts? How do you define what the actual opportunities of ADHD are?

Peter Shankman: One of the biggest problems with big companies is that if they're not constantly engaging and innovating, they tend to fail. Well, when you work at that same company with the same people, it's kind of hard to innovate that much. And one of the nice things about ADHD is that ADHD creates ingenuity. Part of being ADHD is thinking about things differently and thinking about, "Well, what happens here? What if we do that? What if this?" And from there, it's very, very easy to grow different ways of being. And so what I found, what I try to tell companies when I teach them about neurodiversity, is that if you are able to hire the neurodiverse and give them a safe space to create and to engage and to grow, they will come up with ideas that you, in a million years, you and anyone in your company would never have thought of.

And you will find them to be pretty incredible if you give them that shot. But you have to make them feel safe enough to do that. Because I remember one of my first jobs is...ice cream store, whatever. I suggested something crazy and they fired me. They didn't get it. And that's fine. But you know, you have to understand that the people are different and give them that safe ability to sort of create and know that they're going to be safe when they do that. The idea might not stick, company might not go with the idea, but give them the opportunity to create those ideas.

Shannon Waller: That's a really great point. I mean the term "psychological safety" has been very well researched by Google, but this is really applied to very specifically neurodiverse people that you actually need and want if you're focused on innovation and growing.

Peter Shankman: Um-hum. A hundred percent.

Shannon Waller: But you may not have capacity, you may not have coached your leadership team, your management team on how to be inclusive of those people.

Peter Shankman: That's very true.

Shannon Waller: Inclusive is not my favorite term, but you know what I mean.

Peter Shankman: Um-hum.

Shannon Waller: Yeah, very cool. So I love the ingenuity part. What else? What's another gift of ADHD that you notice?



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Peter Shankman: I think a lot of it is being great in emergencies. The downside is we're not great in the day-to-day. We have to work on stuff in the day-to-day. But when it comes to... I'm the person you want when something blows up. I'm the person you want when there's something that needs to be solved or a crisis that you would never have expected that needs to be fixed. I'm that person you want on that team, because I'll fix that.

Shannon Waller: I love it. When everything changed on March 13th of 2020, my calendar blew up. Dan Sullivan, co-founder of Coach, his calendar blew up. And we were like, "Oh goody, what can we do now?" We started recording new podcasts and created a bunch of new tools and created value for our entrepreneurial community. It was so fun. That was not how most people were looking at the lockdown, but we were just like, "Ooh, creativity central." And we innovated so many new things, him especially. So, yeah. And that is a very unusual approach to emergencies. Love that one.

Peter Shankman: Yeah, big believer in that.

Shannon Waller: Yeah, a hundred percent. Let's talk about deadlines. How crucial are deadlines?

Peter Shankman: You have to have them. I mean, for me, if I don't have a deadline and I don't have a specific date and time when something needs to be done, then when I get the assignment, it's the most important thing in the world until the next most important thing in the world. The second I get a new assignment, that's the most important thing in the world. But if I have a deadline, I can back it up. Say, okay, the most important thing in the world is this because it's due in three hours or it's due tomorrow. And then the thing after that is due on Thursday, so that's the next most important thing. Day after that is due next week—that's the next most important thing.

So, it's a wonderful way to tell your brain, "Hey, focus on this because you have to." As opposed to, "Ooh, focus on that because it looks interesting. Oh no, how about that?" So even when the client says, "Oh, just get it to me whenever," I'm like, "No, give me a date."

Shannon Waller: Yes.

Peter Shankman: I need a date. I need to know when this is supposed to go because if I don't have it, I won't do it.

Shannon Waller: Well I think team members need to do this, too, because you kind of have to manage up when you have an ADHD owner...

Peter Shankman: Yeah, most definitely.



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Shannon Waller: ...or team leader. It's like, okay... Even a friend of mine—one of the three of us is not ADHD—she's, "Okay, it could be this day or this day." I'm like, "Choose a date, Hon." We just have to know. It's like if you don't give me a deadline, there is none. You'll never get it.

Peter Shankman: No, a hundred percent.

Shannon Waller: The shorter the deadline, the faster my creativity kicks in as well.

Peter Shankman: Yeah, yeah, most definitely. That's exactly how it works.

Shannon Waller: I love it. I really like how you make the distinction between habits and rituals. Let's chat about rituals for a moment because I found that a very useful distinction that, again, a different perspective.

Peter Shankman: I mean you get a lot of people who say, "Okay, on January 1st, I'm going to start dieting and exercise; I'm going to drop 20 pounds a month." You're not. But if you start, on the other hand, January 1st, I'm going to make it a priority to walk four times a week or walk three times a week or do something like that. In the course of 30 or 40 days, that becomes a ritual. And then once the ritual happens, it's easy to continue it and that leads to the success you want from the habit. So habits fail; rituals succeed. And so resolutions fail, rituals succeed as well. So the goal is to figure out the thing that you're good at and the thing that you don't mind doing and turn that into... For me, getting on that bike is now a ritual and I have in certain ways... I sleep in my bike shorts, I get up, I'm on the bike, I'm doing it. I don't have to think about it. I know what's going to happen, I know how it's going to feel.

And if you say, "Oh, I'm going to start getting up at 5 a.m. and you've never done it before, you're not going to get up every single day at 5 a.m. That's difficult. And figure out a way to make it once a week, then twice a week and three times. You build it from that.

Shannon Waller: Nice.

Peter Shankman: But you have to start somewhere.

Shannon Waller: Yeah. You start small. I love it. You're not the first person I've heard that sleeps in exercise clothes, makes it a habit. Twyla Tharp, phenomenal choreography.

Peter Shankman: I know exactly who she is.

Shannon Waller: Yeah, exactly. It's getting in the cab. Once she's in the cab, she's committed. It's going to happen. That ritual?



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Peter Shankman: Yeah.

Shannon Waller: Which is so perfect. And Dan Sullivan has talked about that for a long time. One of the other things that I also appreciated was eliminating choice. And then I was rereading the section about clutter and I'm looking around being very happy you can't see my clutter at the moment. I mean, it's kind of obvious that clutter can be distracting, but you found some really cool ways to simplify and to reduce choice because I guess that just taxes our mental energy.

Peter Shankman: Yeah, I mean for me, I know exactly what I'm going to be wearing. Am I going to the office? Am I going to... Am I working from home? Am I making a speech? Am I on TV? And so I have two sides of my closet and one is office and travel, and it's T-shirt and jeans. The other is speaking/TV and it's buttoned-down shirt, jacket, and jeans. And that's it. Everything else is in my daughter's closet. I don't want to have to look at my vest, my sweaters, and my suits, all that nice stuff because I'll, "Oh wow, that sweater, I wonder...? Laurie gave me that sweater; how's she doing? I should look her up." Yeah, it's three hours later, I'm laying in the living room with Facebook, and I haven't even left the house. So, you really want to sort of make it a little bit harder to have that happen. So for me, that's limitation of choice.

Shannon Waller: Oh my God, that is a genius example. I love that story. Oh my gosh, I could interview you all day about all those things. Now, the last thing I want to kind of touch on before we tell people how they could reach out to you is entrepreneurship and ADHD. I see an incredible correlation, read lots of stuff that says there's a correlation. You know a lot of audiences in terms of both. What's your take on that?

Peter Shankman: See, I mean, I think for me, the best entrepreneurs in the world are ADHD. And it's not surprising that almost all of them are because the ability to juggle a million things at once, to do different things, to think differently, is definitely part of that process. And so I realized one of the things after I sold my last company, is that there really wasn't a group for people like us. So I launched [ShankMinds](#). And the premise behind ShankMinds was simply that we should have a place to come together that doesn't cost an arm and a leg, that isn't judgmental, that sits there and offers help when people need it. And so that's what ShankMinds became.

It's a mastermind of about 30 or 40 people, and we get together once or twice a week by Zoom, and we have a 24-hour Facebook channel. The premise is just a place where we can all come together, ask questions, talk about things like that and not have to worry about "Are people going to think I'm crazy for this?" Whatever. We're all crazy. We're all a little bit different. And so it's been going on about seven or eight years.



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Shannon Waller: Very cool. That's awesome. That's my experience, too. I mean, we only work with entrepreneurs, and so many of them have ADHD. And this is where you create a community. You found community. Coach is a community. I mean so many people have said, "Oh my gosh, I finally fit in the Island of Misfit Toys."

Peter Shankman: Yeah.

Shannon Waller: We're all the same.

Peter Shankman: A hundred percent.

Shannon Waller: And then we're not misfits anymore.

Peter Shankman: Hundred percent.

Shannon Waller: So it's so critical to find a community and find people with whom you can relate, aren't judgmental, can listen to your version of crazy, not think it's crazy, add constructive advice, saying, "No, no, no, that's going to do you more harm than good. Stay with the plan." Yeah, all the things. So I could not agree more. Now I also... My husband's ADHD, my daughter is ADHD, so we exist quite happily in our little world. Yep. Love that. So Peter, if people want to know more, obviously they can get the book everywhere—it was very easy to find. But if people want to connect with you, your community ShankMinds, how can they find you?

Peter Shankman: I'm @PeterShankman on all the socials. Peter@shankman.com is my email. And ShankMinds is shankminds.com.

Shannon Waller: Very simple. Awesome. Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and your time with me today. Again, brilliant book, super practical, super clear, very positive take on something that often gets a bad rap. And I appreciate your contribution to the conversation. Thank you.

Peter Shankman: My pleasure. Thanks so much.

Shannon Waller: All right, take care.

Peter Shankman: God bless you.