



# S1:E10 "My Second Brain" Transcript

May 24, 2022

**Karen Costa:**

Welcome to the ADHD gallery, a podcast about teaching, learning and living with ADHD. My name is Karen Costa, and I'll be your host and curator. This podcast is for the ADHDers in the world. People like me. Join me to venture through this gallery of ideas, curiosities, brain science, random hyper focus interests, and reflections on what it's like to live with the gifts and many challenges of ADHD. Fellow dopamine hunters, let's be weird together. Stay connected at [theADHDgallery.com](http://theADHDgallery.com). I'm aiming to be increasingly less active on social in the coming months and maybe even years. So my website and email newsletter will be the best way to stay in touch.

Hello, everyone, and welcome to episode 10 of the ADHD gallery. Come on in. My name is Karen Costa, and I'm your host and curator. Today's episode is called "My s Second Brain." I just realized I was kind of trying to figure out what to do with my hands because I don't have a dog on my lap, I have someone to help me with my dog today while I record. And usually I'm holding a dog in my lap so this is a nice change of pace.

Before I dive into the second brain concept and how it operates in my life, I want to share a little bit about how I'm feeling as I sit here and record the 10th episode of season one. This is the season one finale. And I'm feeling like, I'm feeling proud of myself. I'm feeling a bit tired. I am looking forward to sharing this with the world and really being able to say it's done. I finished it. I stuck with it. I want to share a little bit about my process with you. I shared in a previous episode that I decided to record all 10 episodes in a row, haven't shared any. I also haven't really done any of the behind the scenes stuff. I need to create transcripts for every episode, write episode descriptions, do a little audio editing, update my website. I haven't done any of that. So that's next week. So that will be keeping me plenty busy next week. Here's why I did it that way. So I think a lot of people would have approached this and recorded episode one, maybe had the description written before, but certainly written immediately after, done the transcript after, updated the website, possibly shared, have gone on to episode two. Repeat. I knew that I would get bogged down in those details. Like very early on. I knew



I would record episode one; I would enjoy the recording process which is the most fun part. It's like the biggest dopamine hit of the entire podcasting experience for me. And then I would go on to do the details, and I would get bogged down, and then that voice in my head would say, do you really want to do this? So I also knew that having recorded the 10 episodes, be you know, come hell or high water, I am sharing these with you. So that knowledge that I have 10 episodes recorded that I'm proud of is going to motivate me through those, you know, murkier details that I have to do next week. So I'm sharing that with you. I think it's really important for us to be strategic whenever we can, and sort of, you know, work with our brains, then play with our brains, and play with motivation and rewards and what motivates us, and how can we capitalize on external motivations without necessarily relying on external approval? Right? So to me that's very different. So I'm very excited. I'm glad I figured out the system. And I don't know if I'll repeat this in a possible season two, but I'm really, I'm really feeling happy now. I'm realizing as I'm saying it, that I didn't try to do this everybody else's way. I really personalized this and did it in a way that works for me.

All right, let's dive in. I want to start by sharing where I learned about this second brain. Several months ago, and I have talked about this so much, wonderful work, wonderful teacher, I took a course, an online course called the people's research with Marlee Grace. Marlee does all sorts of cool things like teaching quilting and dance online. As an online educator, that's just so good. Marlee has written a book, couple books, *How to Do Nothing* is the one that Marlee is most famous for. Marlee is just a really creative online educator who exists outside of that higher education space, which is where I work. One of the first things we learned in that course was this tool called Notion. They showed us their Notion, and I was completely, completely obsessed. And we had time in the course, we met live and we had asynchronous time and a lot of that time I was so inspired to work in Notion. I would find myself working in Notion after the class. Notion was not the main point of the course. The main point of the course was figuring out what your research is, creating a research process. And Notion was one of many tools that we considered, but I fell in love with it. I started to do some of my own research. Again, that's what we were learning to do. Which I call you know, sometimes going down the rabbit hole. And I came across this entire community who is talking about and creating in Notion and specifically talking about using Notion as a second brain. And I discovered that there are a lot of ADHDers who are in this community, who use Notion as a second brain. So, you know, further down the, or is it farther? Go with it. Further down the rabbit hole I went to figure out what is this second brain thing, like, I was just loving, dumping



things into Notion and creating to do lists in Notion. But I kept coming up to this idea of a second brain so I wanted to learn more about that.

So the best I can tell, the term second brain specifically was coined by a creator, teacher by the name of Tiago Forte. He has a book coming out in June 2022 if you want to check that out/ I will link to it in the show notes. That said, my take is that this phrase or term second brain is very much related to a somewhat older concept called extended mind. At the very least there's a ton of overlap here. Extended mind theory, or EMT, was coined in the late 90s. Which I also need to say sounds like, when I say the late 90s, I'm like, oh, it's fairly new. Well, we'll carry on. So extended mind theory is this idea that our mind is not limited to inside of our physical body, but it exists out there in the world. This is not out of the field of metaphysics or spirituality although we might see, you know, layers of that in this theory. This came out of the field of psychology.

We can be mindful about what information we choose to store inside of our heads inside of our head minds, I guess I'll say, because we have limited cognitive resources. I want to say that again. I think sometimes society, capitalism, wants us to believe that we can, we have unlimited resources so we can just work, work, work, work, work and produce and produce right? That's not what the science tells us. We have limited cognitive resources. And because of that, because of that realization, we can choose to store some of the information that is valuable to us, outside of our heads. For example, in a place like Notion. I would argue that a notebook can be a second brain or an extended mind. Google Docs, my goodness, my Google Docs. Definitely. It's not an organized second brain. It's a chaotic second brain, but it seems to me that is a second brain. The pile of post-its that you have on your desk could also be considered part of your extended mind.

I am kind of thinking of this concept. Again. It's new to me, I'm learning. I'm kind of thinking of it like a clothes closet. So we don't carry around all of the clothes that we own every day, right, like carrying them around, maybe in a suitcase or in our arms. That would be way too much for us to carry and just not be reasonable. So for most of us, who are privileged enough to own clothes and to have access to a home and a closet where we can store them, we go to our closet, and we pick out the clothes that we need for the day. We can store information in our Notion closet for example, and then we can say which information do I need today? I don't need to carry all of this around with me inside of my, you know, head mind 24/7. Instead, I can put it in my



Notion closet or my notebook closet or my Google Docs closet, and I can go in and I can know where things are. And I can say okay, that's what I'm going to work with today.

I used to try to carry around every idea and thought about, you know, projects and creativity. I used to try to carry it around all day. Don't recommend. Instead, I now have Notion. In particular I have this project database that I learned in the Marlee course in Notion. I review it when I need it. I review it when I'm called to it. I add to it when I have a new idea. But I don't feel like I have to carry around all of these ideas with me.

I want to talk for a minute about second brains and extended mind and ADHD a bit more specifically. There's a growing conversation around how a second brain or extended mind can be particularly useful for people with ADHD. Lots of research out there, I'll link to just like the first research article that I found in Google that I thought was interesting in the show notes. But I encourage, folks should do research of their own. In my experience, this is not something we are going to get if we have access to clinicians. This is not something, unfortunately, maybe you're lucky, but in general, I don't think this is something that they're going to bring to us. So it's something we can bring to ourselves in our community.

So here's a couple of reasons that I think this is a good fit and useful for ADHDers. Number one. We get a ton of ideas. I can remember soon after my diagnosis in March 2020 reading a book by Sari Solden about women with ADHD. Someone she interviewed talked about being bombarded with ideas on a constant basis and described it as being one of the hardest parts of living with ADHD. I did not know that anyone else on the planet understood that feeling until I read that book. This is also, I think, a great example of what Hallowell and Ratey, in the book ADHD 2.0, call the condition of paired traits, right? So it's like the blessing and the curse of ADHD. So many blessings that are also curses. Neurotypical folks might be like, wait a minute, I'm sorry. You're struggling because you get a lot of ideas. What is the big deal? Ideas are great. I wish I got more. I can only tell you, I wish you got more. First of all, maybe it would take some pressure off of all of us. But now creativity is one of our greatest strengths and idea generation and innovation. But everything in moderation right? Before my diagnosis, I thought I had to act on every one of these ideas. And I'm talking constant ideas, just you know, you're walking around the house and you haven't remembered, you know, to turn off the stove or where you put your keys or what you came into this room to do. But you're coming up with an idea for your next thing, right?



Constantly. And then there is this sense of pressure, that we have to act on all of these ideas. And self regulation is something that we struggle with. So there is that lack of self regulation about what we should do with these ideas. I have learned in the past couple of years to let ideas sit most of the time. Some of the time. I do my best to see if they still interest me in a week or two. You know, before I order seven books and sign up for a class and declare that this is my new path in life, right. I have learned to let things sit and see if they are still interesting to me. I have learned, this is a big one for me. I have learned that I can sometimes share my ideas, and that maybe they are something that other people can explore and take that idea and run with it. You know, I'm like an idea gift giver. Right? Just because I came up with the idea, sometimes I want to, you know, own it and take the lead on it. But many times I don't. And I have learned that. I don't have to, if I put an idea out in the world, that doesn't mean I have to run with it. And that it's okay for me to give myself and other people permission to run with it instead.

Putting my ideas into a second brain in Notion helps to release me from feeling like I have to carry them all around and act on them all. I feel like I'm doing something. I'm giving them a home. And if the time is right, and they are mine to pursue, they're waiting for me in Notion. So I probably have, right now, 30 ideas in my project space for things I want to write or courses that I want to create, or communities that I want to create or podcasts I want to create. And they're all just, knowing that they're sitting there helps me to feel okay, takes the pressure off, takes the stress off. We know that stress exacerbates ADHD symptoms.

The other thing I'll say is that ADHDers, right, have a lot of executive function challenges. We've talked about this a lot. So there are things that we struggle with, these executive functions like focus, concentration, time management, and executive functions also include decision making and working memory. I think those last two in particular are the reasons that second brains are so helpful, helpful to us, decision making and working memory.

The way that I explain working memory when I'm talking to educators about supporting people with ADHD is that I think of working memory like the Play-Doh of the mind. So you get a piece of information, and then you hold it in your hands or your brain to manipulate it and to work with it right, and we mold Play-Doh into what it, we used to make probably a lot of hotdogs right? Wasn't a great Play-Doh maker. So we hold it in our hands, we manipulate it, we work with it. Neurotypical folks can hold on to that



Play-Doh for longer periods of time, generally speaking, than ADHDers. We can hold on to it for less time. You know, maybe like three seconds. So an example of this: when I am learning, we love to play board games in my house, and when I am learning a new game, and we are reading the directions out loud, it's usually my husband, my son and I, I need to pause and sort of practice each step in the directions. I can't go through all of the directions and then start playing the game. Because if we do that, I only remember the last direction that was read. I forget everything else, because I'm not good at holding things in my working memory. So it helps me if we read one part of the directions, we pause, I kind of practice it on the board or with the cards or whatever the case is, and then I say, okay, got that one. Let's go on to the next one.

This can also be a barrier for us to learning and to making decisions, these executive function challenges. So if I'm going to make a good decision, I think if anybody's going to make a good decision, we need to have the relevant information in front of us. And if I can't remember, if I can't hold on to that relevant information that is going to impact the quality of my decisions, so decision making and working memory challenges are very intertwined. I think for ADHDers, if I can't remember the relevant information, if it falls out of my hands like Play-Doh, that is going to impact the quality of my decisions.

So for example, let's say I am offered a new opportunity, and I have to decide, am I going to do that? Am I going to do this or not? Am I passionate about this or not? Do I have time for this or not? So if I'm going to make that decision, one of the things that is helpful is to understand my current workload and my upcoming workload, right? Do I have time to fit this into my schedule? If I'm just trying to consider that in my brain, I'm not good at holding things in my brain and manipulating them and forming them into something right? So it's very common for ADHDers to perhaps think they have more time to do these wonderful things than they actually have. Now I have my workload, current and upcoming, entered into a section in Notion. Time for me to make a decision about whether I have time for a new opportunity. I pull it up. I have it in front of me. So I have that visual support. I'm not trying to just think in my head. What do I have coming up here? Because odds are I'm not going to think realistically about my actual workload. I need to see it in front of me and I have that in Notion. So I think second brains very much support working memory challenges and decision making.

I think why Notion works well for me, I'll also add, over other possible options like you know, we mentioned analog notebooks. We mentioned Google Docs. What I love about



Notion for a second brain or extended mind is that it's got an element of fun and color and life to it. I can add emojis and images to all of my pages. It's very clean, creative and cool. I also think it's a really adaptable system. I am not a super user, and I talked about this on a previous episode. I use Notion in a way that works for me, which is to say I just create pages and start adding stuff. Through that mindset, I was able to learn it really quickly and get to work really quickly. Am I using it the way it's quote unquote supposed to be used? No. Do I know all the fancy terms and hacks for Notion? Absolutely not. I make a new page. I add a fun emoji fun image. I create it as a blank page. I don't do a ton of fancy databases and I start adding information and it works for me.

So a little tour here inside my Notion second brain. I've been using Notion for a couple months now. And I have it open on each of my work days which typically that's Monday through Friday for me. Some of the sections I use the most are a projects page. I mentioned that before. That's all of my ideas for projects which is a lot. I then have a couple of specific expanded project pages for things I'm working on right now. And whenever I get an idea about maybe a podcast I want to share with my learners, I pop it into the page. So there's a lot of this sort of brain dumping energy in how I use Notion.

The biggest way Notion has supported me right now and the reason I'm using it most often is for this podcast. So I do have a podcast database set up with sub pages for transcripts, ideas and episode notes. It's a combination of a really unorganized brain dump for podcasts related ideas, and also somewhat more organized pages for things like episode notes and transcripts. I haven't done those yet, but I've got placeholders. I went into those brain dump pages, picked out specific ideas, and then those fed into the specific episode notes and scripts, and then I just repeated that. I don't think I could have made it here to, you know, 10 of 10 episodes, without Notion; it really has supported me and you know, I've heard people lately in the Notion world talking about the importance of having a good system. Nobody ever taught me that. I think for many neurotypical folks it is much more intuitive than for us ADHDers. And I'm just very, very grateful that I've learned to take some time to create a system before diving into the work.

All right, speaking of making it this far, I want to thank everyone who has joined along on this journey, this ADHD Gallery journey. This has been a dream of mine to create a podcast for years and years. I appreciate everyone in the universe who has showed up



to offer me even a breadcrumb of a nudge to move me forward. And there were so many breadcrumbs particularly over the last few months when I started to say into the world and thinking maybe I want to do this. And so many people are showing up to kind of nudge me forward. I don't know what my podcasting future holds. I do know that I'm really proud of myself for doing this despite what I would describe as terror, emotional terror, about doing it and sharing it with the world. And despite many executive function challenges that might have held me back in the past.

I really believe that my fellow ADHDers hold the key to so many answers about how we can create a better future. Our minds and outlooks and approaches are so unique and weird and wonderful. And I really think that we are in need of some unique and weird and wonderful solutions and movements in the world right now. Too many of our systems have failed too many of us for too long. So with that, I will say thank you again. And as I started this podcast, I said this is for me, this is really for me, I'm doing this thing need to do this. I've been wanting to do it for so long. And I had to think of it that way. I had to think of it as just a gift I was giving to myself. Absolutely. In the back of my mind and heart. I had all of you right there hoping maybe I can say this now right? At the end of episode 10 hoping that this will add value to your lives will give you ideas, will inspire you. You know the greatest thing I can hope for is that it will inspire you to share your weird and wonderful minds and ideas with the world as well.

Okay, everyone, that's a wrap for episode 10 and season one. Thank you so much for making the time to listen today. I know that you have a lot of choices about what to give your attention to, and it's an honor that you chose me and the ADHD gallery. Your support means the world to me. Please rate the podcast share with your friends and colleagues. And of course, make sure to sign up for my email list by visiting [theADHDgallery.com](http://theADHDgallery.com) Thank you friends.