



## Feeling Disengaged at Work? Find Someone to Hold You Accountable.

By Deborah Grayson Riegel

During the pandemic, my daughter Sophie started a clothing resale business out of her bedroom. Most days, she was boxing up sweatshirts, shoes, bags, and jackets that she bought at bargain prices and sold at a profit. When business was booming, she would have 30 boxes to fill, seal, and label in a single day. As a full-time college student with a part-time business, she was overwhelmed. And when she was experiencing significant anxiety about getting it all done in time for her customers to receive their packages when promised, she would ask me to come sit with her while she worked.

She didn't ask me to pack or label anything, or give her advice on her inventory. She didn't care if I was answering emails or reading a book. She just wanted me to be physically present with her while she worked. It made her feel less alone, more focused, and more accountable to finishing what she started.

This technique is known as "body doubling" — when you work in the physical or virtual presence of another person. What started as a strategy to help people with ADHD to stay focused on a task is a technique that I use with my coaching clients. It's also one that you and your colleagues can use to help each other start or complete tasks — whether you're working in person or virtually.

The benefits of body doubling are significant. It can lessen your feelings of isolation, since you are in the presence of someone else. It can decrease procrastination and increase your accountability, since you will have made a commitment to your "double" to do your work. You could experience a greater sense of calm, especially if your double models calm on their end. You may learn more effective ways of working just by observing how your double gets things done. You might also develop your

feelings of confidence and competence, since you will have done the work on your own — even though another person was, technically, there. Finally, you might accomplish even more than you intended, especially if your double holds you to a high standard.

With my coaching clients, I sometimes “double” for them when they have to write a challenging performance review, especially one that they’ve been putting off. While we are on a video call together, I request that they draft the review right then and there. While I am available to help them think through what they want to say, or offer the occasional opinion on word choice, I am primarily just being present while they do something hard and vulnerable. By the end of the coaching session, they have completed the task that they’ve procrastinated for weeks.

So, when might you want to call in a double? In our book, *Go to Help: 31 Strategies to Offer, Ask For, and Accept Help*, my coauthor (and daughter) Sophie Riegel and I explain how you may want additional support when you are experiencing any of the these R’s:

Resistance to starting a task or a project — or to finishing it

Reluctance to continue the work

Restlessness, leading to difficulty focusing or concentrating

Rumination about challenges, obstacles, setbacks, decisions, or next steps

Readiness, but you just aren’t tackling the task for some other reason

If any of those sound like you, your colleagues, or team members, try body doubling to create engagement, reduce resistance, increase motivation, and decrease isolation.

Here's how to get started:

1. Set up a block of time for you and a colleague (or colleagues) to work simultaneously on projects that each of you have. To be clear, these are not tasks that require collaboration, nor do they all have to be the same task. You might be writing a proposal, while your colleague updates a database, and yet another colleague edits videos. This can be done in person in a conference room or virtually over video, or in a hybrid mix. (Decide whether you want cameras, screens, and/or microphones on or off during the working time if you're working virtually or hybrid. I often have all three off when I lead "body doubling sessions," and participants are invited to text me, call me, or "chat" me if they want some personal support.

2. Determine some guidelines to make this a positive experience for everyone. You might first discuss:

Can you ask one another for advice, help, resources, or even a pep-talk if needed?

If you notice someone's focus flagging, should you mention it?

If something urgent comes up, how should that be handled?

When will there be breaks?

Are you working silently or is polite chatting permitted?

3. At the start, each person should share what they intend to accomplish, and how they want to feel, by the end of the time block.

4. At the end, each person should share what they actually accomplished, and how they feel. Thank each other for being present, and decide if and when to do this again.

As educator, author, and presidential advisor Booker T. Washington shared, “If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.” Working with a double — and being a double for others — can lift you all up.

<https://hbr.org/2022/01/feeling-disengaged-at-work-find-someone-to-hold-you-accountable>