Transition & Employment: Neurodiversity at Work

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A Note on Accessibility

This session strives to be as inclusive as possible! No one person can grant or gatekeep access. Access is something we create together.

If you need to take a break, answer phone calls, stand up, twiddle your fingers, stim, or feel overwhelmed - this is a no judgment zone! Go for it!

Copies of these slides to follow along have alt text on images and should also be accessible for screen readers. 😊
What is Autism?

• Autism is a complex neurological condition and developmental disability characterized by a spectrum of differences in social communication and interaction, heightened sensory processing and experiences, intense passions or interests, and repetitive behaviors.

• The CDC estimates 1 in 54 children are autistic.
  • Autistic adults make up about 2.2% of the population (about 5.4 million Americans).
Neurodiversity is a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation. Differences that fall under neurodiversity include autism, ADHD, dyslexia and other learning disabilities, Tourette Syndrome, and intellectual disabilities.
Benefits of Neurodiversity at Work

• Neurodiverse teams at SAP created a fix that saved the company nearly $40 million
• 28% higher revenues than companies that do not employ people with disabilities (Accenture, 2019)
• Favorable public opinion of a business
• We benefit from working with all kinds of minds
Employment Disparity

• Despite the benefits of neurodiversity at work...
  • Traditional hiring practices are biased against autistic candidates
  • Neurotypical people misinterpret autistic communication
  • Body language, eye contact
  • Gaps in employment
  • Disclosure and discrimination
  • Fear of the unknown
Disclosure on the Job

• When is the right time to disclose autism or neurodivergency?
• It depends on the person!
  • The cover letter
  • The interview
  • When the person has an offer
  • When the person needs an accommodation
• Under the ADA, the general rule is individuals don’t have to disclose until an accommodation is needed.
Promote self-advocacy by discussing and providing self-advocacy and disclosure resources!


Information about ODEP can be found at http://www.dol.gov/odep/
Disclosure Decisions to Get the Job
Virginia Commonwealth University

2. Decide WHEN to Disclose: Consider Pros and Cons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>Potential Gains</th>
<th>Potential Risks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In a cover letter</td>
<td>Requires less to prepare positive written disclosure and a clear description of job description</td>
<td>Employee may feel pressure to respond to written request to disclose or risk being penalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At interview</td>
<td>Shows that applicant is willing to disclose and makes a positive impression</td>
<td>May not be able to disclose without prior written request</td>
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2. Decide WHEN to Disclose:

- Consider pros and cons
- Weigh benefits and risks

3. Choose HOW to Disclose: General Guidelines

- Stress current accommodation as a positive activity that shows your ability to manage your disability
- Do not assume focus on your abilities and job qualifications
- Review your current accommodation plan with your supervisor or manager
- Consider how to disclose in a way that highlights your strengths and achievements

Three Steps to Disclosing a Disability

1. Determine NEED for Disclosure

2. Decide WHEN to Disclose

3. Choose HOW to Disclose:

Do’s and Don’ts of Disclosure
Job Accommodation Network

Interviewing Tips for Applicants with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

Consultants' Corner: Volume 10, Issue 01

From the desk of Melanie Whetzel, M.A., CBIS, Lead Consultant – Cognitive/Neuropsychological Team

Interviewing

Interviewing for a job can be a very stressful experience for anyone looking for employment, but for job applicants with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) it may be even more so. Many individuals with ASD have social difficulties which can make the interview process quite challenging. This kind of social anxiety could cause individuals to freeze up and be unable to think, talk, or respond in ways that communicate their knowledge and experience.

This article is designed to assist job applicants with ASD in positively representing themselves and their abilities, and to help employers understand the kinds of accommodations that can be made during the job interview process so that individuals with ASD can do their best to represent themselves and their skills.

Disclosures

Disclosure is the act of voluntarily giving out specific personal information about a disability. When disclosing as part of an accommodation request, it is important to provide information about the nature of the disability; the limitations involved; and how the disability affects the ability to participate in the interview process.

It is a good idea for job seekers to have a strategy, which simply means that they will want to think about disclosure ahead of time. One thing to keep in mind is that information they are willing to disclose. This strategy could also include having the medical information from their doctors or health care providers so that the accommodation request and disclosure can be substantiated with the facts. Applicants should provide any accommodation suggestions that they have as well.
Preparing Autistic People for Job Interviews

• Interviewers have a very specific set of things they look for and judge candidates on.
• Autistic behaviors can be misinterpreted as not trustworthy or distracting
• Open-ended questions are difficult to gauge
• Skills-based interviews vs. question-based interviews
Preparing Autistic People for Job Interviews

Job Accommodation Network Accommodation Ideas:

• Requesting fewer interviewers
• Requesting that the first interview be conducted by phone
• Requesting a copy of the interview questions to be provided in advance
• Requesting that the interview occur at a specific time of day can also be an accommodation.

https://askjan.org/publications/consultants-corner/vol10iss01.cfm?csSearch=2890279_1#spy-scroll-heading-1
“To me, being ‘openly autistic’ means not having to hide or mask my autism; it is the freedom to be exactly who I am.”

Source: Haley Moss, I’m Florida’s First Openly Autistic Attorney: Here’s What That Means (HuffPost)
Accessibility and Accommodations

• Employers think a lot of accommodations would cause undue hardship
• Accommodations generally cost $500 or less (Job Accommodation Network)
• What do accommodations look like for autistic people?
• How to go about getting accommodations
The Shift Towards Self-Advocacy
What is Self-Advocacy?

• Self-advocacy is both a set of skills and a movement
• Self-advocacy skills empower people with disabilities to make choices that affect their daily lives and allow for greater independence
• “Self-advocacy - as a personal and political philosophy - is a movement primarily of and by [people with disabilities] who are making their own decisions, speaking for themselves and for others with disabilities, and taking control over their lives.”
I’m Not a Self-Advocate. What Can I Do?

• Parents, professionals, and employers can also encourage self-advocacy in respective settings.
• Can be as simple as a someone saying, “I don’t feel comfortable” and respecting boundaries.
• At work, it can be learning someone’s needs: “I need to take a break.”
• In school, can apply to all students:
  • “I Wish My Teacher Knew...” hashtag and conversation.
Disclosing and Requesting Accommodations as Self-Advocacy

• Frame accommodations as a conversation to empower both employers and employees
  • “I work best when...”
• Deciding who needs to know
• Pros and cons
• Advocating for accommodation solutions and workplace policies
What Does the Future Look Like?

- Neurodiverse leadership
- Further collaboration
- Inclusive culture
- Aligning people to strengths
  - All across the spectrum
Neurodiverse Leadership

• Autistic people want long-term careers, not just jobs
• Provide opportunities to allow employees to grow
• Should be part of executive teams and leadership
• Paying it forward - what if we have neurodiverse hiring teams and interviewers?
A Culture of Acceptance and Inclusion

• Starts from the top down with openness and vulnerability
• Employee resource/interest groups
• Aligning people to their strengths
• Open communication
• Shifting the autism training focuses from autistic employees to company-wide trainings
  • Best: having autistic people lead these conversations
Focus on the Strengths

Attention to detail
- Thoroughness
- Accuracy

Deep focus
- Concentration
- Freedom from distraction

Observational skills
- Listen, look, learn approach
- Fact-finding

Absorb and retain facts
- Excellent long term memory
- Superior recall

Visual skills
- Visual learning and recall
- Detail-focussed

Expertise
- In-depth knowledge
- High level of skills

Methodical approach
- Analytical
- Spotting patterns, repetition

Novel approaches
- Unique thought processes
- Innovative solutions

Creativity
- Distinctive imagination
- Expression of ideas

Tenacity and resilience
- Determination
- Challenge opinions

Accepting of difference
- Less likely to judge others
- May question norms

Integrity
- Honesty, loyalty
- Commitment
Let’s Continue the Conversation

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