

Employment and ASD

Strategies for Success

Consider Recruitment Ads

- People with ASD can offer employers a level of accuracy, attention to detail and attendance that is second to none. Many also have a specialist knowledge of their chosen field.
- However, this highly talented pool of potential employees are often put off at the first stage of the recruitment process.

"In addition to the above technical skills, applicants should have strong communication skills together with the ability to demonstrate an understanding of customer service and team working".

(taken from recent advertisement for I.T. Engineer)

Consider Recruitment Ads

- Recruitment ads would have us believe that 'excellent communication skills' are an essential requirement for every job.
- Is this accurate?
- If more ads were worded to reflect the reality of the roles, more people with ASD would be encouraged to apply.
- More businesses would then benefit from the specialist knowledge and work ethic that this workforce has to offer.

Adapt Interviews

- Candidates with ASD are at a significant disadvantage at interview stage.
- They have a disability that affects social and communication skills.
- Yet their suitability for employment is being assessed based on their ability to interact and engage with a panel of complete strangers.
- Where at all possible, work trials are preferable.
- If this is not possible some reasonable adaptations can be made to the interview format.

Adapt Interviews

- Abstract thought is something people with ASD find more difficult.
- Interviewers should avoid questions based on hypothetical or future scenarios.

"How do you think you'll cope with working here if there are lots of interruptions?"

- Instead, relate questions to the candidates previous experience.

"Think back to your last job, can you tell us how you coped with your work when people interrupted you?"

Adapt Interviews

- People with ASD process information differently.
- Allow the candidate additional time to answer questions.
- But be prepared to prompt the candidate where necessary, in order to gain all the information you need.
- Let candidates know if they are talking too much, as they may find it hard to judge how much information is required.

"That's all the information we need on that subject, I'd like to ask you another question now."

Adapt Interviews



- Expect the candidate to display awkward or unconventional body language.
- Be aware that the candidate's eye contact may be minimal or prolonged, depending on the individual.
- During the interview, try to make a little less direct eye contact than you would do normally. This can help ease the pressure that the person might otherwise feel under.
- By keeping your own body language and voice tone 'low key' and following the previous steps you will assist the candidate to manage their anxiety levels more effectively.

Your autism clarity

Provide ASD Awareness



- ASD is a 'hidden' disability.
- Colleagues with ASD look no different to anyone else and are often highly intelligent and articulate individuals.
- Their unconventional approach and difficulty reading and responding to social situations means that they can easily be misunderstood.
- It is important that line managers have a general awareness of ASD and an understanding of how it may come across in the individual.
- Awareness amongst immediate colleagues is also very helpful.

Your autism clarity

Provide ASD Awareness



- Most people with ASD recognise that greater awareness is in their best interests.
- With consent given, Prospects provide awareness sessions in advance of our candidates commencing placements and paid employment.
- As the diagnosis rate increases it is likely that more employers will find existing members of staff disclosing ASD. Again, Prospects can assist in raising awareness.

Your autism clarity

Appoint a Mentor



- A mentor from within the immediate team is strongly recommended.
- With line managers often needing to spend time in meetings or away from the workplace the mentor provides a point of contact who will be more readily available.
- Having a named person to approach for clarification when needed will provide enormous reassurance for the employee with ASD.
- The mentor will also be able to ensure that the colleague with ASD is kept aware of relevant developments within the workplace and provide guidance on social aspects/office politics.

Your autism clarity

Consider the Working Environment



- Many people with ASD also have sensory issues where their senses are either intensified or underdeveloped.
- The level of difficulty will vary from person to person.
- Strip lighting is a common source of anxiety and discomfort.
- Some people with ASD are very easily distracted by other people moving around the workplace.
- Others explain that it is difficult to block out background noise from radios and chatter.

Your autism clarity

Consider the Working Environment



- Reasonable adaptations to the working environment can ensure that these difficulties are overcome.
- Ear plugs or headphones help block out distracting noises.
- Allowing the employee with ASD to wear dark glasses or providing an up lighter with natural daylight bulb can alleviate the stress caused by strip lighting.
- Positioning the employees workstation away from busy areas or where others are likely to congregate (at water coolers etc) reduces visual distraction.

Your autism clarity

Consider the Working Environment



- Whilst some employees with ASD will feel comfortable taking breaks within staff rooms and canteens many more will prefer to leave the workplace to escape social pressures and recharge batteries.
- At the outset of employment it is helpful to recommend nearby facilities, walks etc that the individual may use at break times. This also provides reassurance that it is okay to leave the premises.
- It is also useful to highlight any areas within the workplace where the employee may take 'time out' if experiencing high levels of anxiety.
- This facility may never need to be used but knowing it is there and that it has been authorised significantly reduces anxiety levels.

Your autism clarity

Encourage Routine



- Many employees with ASD benefit from some degree of structure and routine to their working day.
- This helps make the working day more predictable and therefore less stressful.
- During initial weeks of a new job it can be helpful to organise tasks into a timetable.
- Encouraging the employee to take their breaks at a similar time each day is also helpful.

Your autism clarity

Make Expectations Clear



- People with an ASD can find it very difficult to 'read between the lines' and will often not pick up on vague comments, subtle hints or sarcasm.
- Use clear and direct language, try to 'say what you mean and mean what you say'.
- Difficulties processing verbal information mean that people with an ASD can become easily overloaded - less is more.
- Back up verbal instructions with written bullet points.

Your autism clarity

Provide Feedback



- People with ASD are more prone to anxiety.
- It is common for employees with ASD to worry or ruminate over their performance, particularly in the early stages of new employment.
- Short, structured feedback sessions, on a weekly basis to begin with, are highly effective in managing anxiety.
- The frequency of feedback sessions can be reduced over time as the employee settles into their role.

Your autism clarity

Provide Feedback



- As well as providing feedback on task related matters, these sessions allow an opportunity to provide the employee with feedback on social aspects.
- People with ASD need clear and honest feedback in order to develop and fine tune their social skills.
- If you have to advise the employee on something they shouldn't have done it is vital that you explain how they should have handled the situation instead.
- These sessions also allow the employee an opportunity to raise any concerns they may have and address any anxieties at an early stage.

Your autism clarity

Plan Ahead



- Change in itself doesn't cause anxiety for employees with ASD.
- Anxiety springs from sudden change or from uncertainty over some future change that hasn't been properly explained.
- The employee with ASD is unlikely to pick up on the rumours and gossip that keep other staff informed or they may get entirely the wrong end of the stick.
- Line managers and mentors should try to ensure that the employee with ASD is kept informed of likely changes, the reasons for this and how this might affect the individual if at all.

Your autism clarity

Team Meetings



- Sensory and processing issues mean it can be difficult for people with ASD to hear and respond immediately to questions and comments from several different people at once.
- It is helpful if the employee with ASD is given a written agenda at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting, in order that they can be best prepared.
- Equally, the individual should be allowed time at the other side of the meeting in order to prepare responses to additional questions they may have been asked during the meeting.

Your autism clarity

Training & Team Building Events



- A common source of anxiety for employees with ASD.
- Individuals are willing to attend the formal, structured aspects of team building and training events but express anxiety over the social interaction that will be required during group work and at lunch times and in the evening.
- Prospects have liaised with employers to ensure that, if necessary, the employee is excused from the informal aspects of the event.
- With regards to group work, it is helpful for the individual with ASD to be part of a smaller group where that group also contains familiar colleagues.

Your autism clarity

Your Approach



- Try to keep your own body language and voice tone 'low key'.
- Make less eye contact than you would do normally.
- Use concise, direct language.
- Back up any detailed verbal instruction with written confirmation.
- Give clear and honest feedback.

Your autism clarity

Examples of Jobs Achieved



Librarian	Insurance Claims Processor
Data Entry Clerk	Quality Control Supervisor
Handy Person	Hospital Porter
Software Technician	Administration Assistant
Lab Assistant	Conveyancing Solicitor
Apprentice Painter & Decorator	Reprographics Assistant
Museum Assistant	Stockroom Assistant
Mortgage Processor	Web Designer
Kitchen Porter	Replenishment Assistant
Computer Programmer	Order Picker
Apprentice Plumber	Computer Games Tester
Events Assistant	ICT Technician

Your autism clarity

Prospects Contact Details



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Your autism clarity