Hiring an Individual on the Autism Spectrum

Benefits, Accommodations, and Legal Information

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This section defines Autism using Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) criteria, explains the importance of integrating individuals with disabilities into the workforce and provides statistics to educate people who may have little exposure to individuals on the Autism Spectrum.

This section explores the organizational benefits of hiring someone on the Autism Spectrum, as well as the unique skills and qualities they bring to the workplace.

This section explains tax incentives available to businesses that hire people with disabilities.

Provides a brief description of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Provides examples of possible limitations that someone working with Autism Spectrum Disorder may experience in the workplace and provides examples of accommodations that could be made to minimize these limitations. Each of the potential accommodations listed are deemed appropriate under the ADA.

Executive Summary

People diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are massively under employed. In fact, in 2009, the percentage of young adults with Autism who had a job was nearly half that of all young adults with disabilities (33% vs. 59%). The purpose of this document is to provide potential employers with information about the following: ASD, tax incentives offered to businesses that hire people with disabilities, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and additional support that may be needed by individuals diagnosed with ASD as well as ways employers can provide this support. In addition, the last page provides a list of resources for those wanting more information about ASD or employing individuals on the Autism Spectrum.

ASD Overview

According to the most recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-5), ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder (impairments of the growth and development of the brain or central nervous system) that is characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts (school, work, home). This includes deficits in social reciprocity, nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, and skills in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships. The diagnosis also requires the presence of restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (DSM-5, 2013).

There is no known single cause of ASD, but it is thought to be caused by abnormalities in brain structure or function. Researchers are investigating a number of theories, including the link between heredity, genetics, and medical problems. Other theories include problems during pregnancy or delivery as well as environmental factors, such as viral infections, metabolic imbalances, and exposure to environmental chemicals (Autism Society, 2013).

There is no cure for ASD. Treatment goals are designed to maximize the individual's ability to function by reducing symptoms and supporting development and learning. ASD is a spectrum disorder so it is important to note that each individual is unique and each symptom will present on a continuum; no two individuals will present the same. The goal of workplace inclusion is to use the individual's unique profile to their advantage. Individuals with ASD have numerous positive qualities to offer employers. Some common attributes of Autistic individuals include punctuality, greater visual-spatial abilities, improved memory and attention to detail, an ability to engage in repetitive tasks, and an ability to view things from a logical perspective. These individuals can often provide a unique perspective and way of thinking about the work; however, these abilities will vary from

person to person.

Autistic persons benefit greatly from supported employment, which is an approach to hiring and retaining employees with developmental disabilities. Supported employment has a goal of providing stable and predictable work environments for people to flourish and become productive members of society. The transition staff at The Community School will work with participants and their families to support learning about their unique strengths and capabilities, identify areas where they will need additional support from employers, explore areas of interest and translate them into the workplace, help to find jobs and other community experiences where participants can gain work experience, build their resumes, and make connections with people in the field. The transition staff will also, based on the individual's needs, advocate for recommended accommodations when a good fit is identified between the individual and a particular employer, creating opportunities for customized employment.

Did you know …

• Autism now affects 1 in 110 children and 1 in 70 boys

• Autism prevalence figures are growing

• More children will be diagnosed with autism this year than with AIDS, diabetes and cancer combined

• Autism is the fastest-growing serious developmental disability in the U.S.

• Autism costs the nation over $35 billion per year, a figure expected to significantly increase in the next decade

• Autism receives less than 5% of the research funding of many less prevalent childhood diseases

• Boys are four times more likely than girls to have autism

• There is no medical detection or cure for autism

Why hire someone with Autism?

Organization Benefits:

- Gain reliable, loyal and effective employee
- Progress towards meeting diversity goals
- Raise awareness of diversity among its staff
- Managers with understanding of ASD communication difficulties learn communication skills that help their whole team
- Accommodations and awareness can increase co-worker productivity

- Improved internal and external PR
- Non-Autistic employees are freed from tedium of complex, repetitive tasks

Unique skills and qualities people with Autism bring to the job

- Motivation to work
- Attention to detail
- Adherence to established rules and procedures
- High level of accuracy
- Good performance on complex, repetitive tasks
- Honesty and straightforward directness
- Many have advanced technical skills
- Some have academic degrees
- Good retention of facts and figures
- Often prefer work to socializing
- Strong loyalty to their employer
- Great understanding of rule bound communication
- Reliability, and more likely to be focused on the work at hand
- Unique perspective and innovative ideas

Federal Tax Incentives for Potential Employers

The Internal Revenue Code includes several provisions aimed at making businesses more accessible to people with disabilities. The following provides general – non-legal – information about three of the most significant tax incentives. **Employers should check with their accountants or tax advisors to determine eligibility for these incentives or visit the Internal Revenue Service's website, www.irs.gov**, for more information. Similar state and local tax incentives may be available.

Small Business Tax Credit (IRS Code Section 44: Disabled Access Credit)

Small businesses with either $1,000,000 or less in revenue or 30 or fewer full-time employees may take a tax credit of up to $5,000 annually for the cost of providing reasonable accommodations to individuals with ASD such as sign language interpreters, readers, materials in alternative format (such as Braille or large print), the purchase of adaptive equipment, the modification of existing equipment, or the removal of architectural barriers.

Work Opportunity Tax Credit (IRS Code Section 51)

Employers who hire certain targeted low-income groups, including individuals referred from vocational rehabilitation agencies and individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) may be eligible for an annual tax credit of up to $2,400 for each qualifying employee who works at least 400 hours during the tax year. Additionally, a maximum credit of $1,200 may be available for each qualifying summer youth employee.

Architectural/Transportation Tax Deduction (IRS Code Section 190 Barrier Removal):

This annual deduction of up to $15,000 is available to businesses of any size for the costs of removing physical barriers for people with disabilities, including the following: providing accessible parking spaces, ramps, and curb cuts; providing wheelchair-accessible telephones, water fountains, and restrooms; making walkways at least 48 inches wide; and making entrances accessible.

Americans with Disabilities Act - Overview

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 is a civil rights law that protects qualified individuals with disabilities from discrimination and provides for equal access and opportunity. The ADA protects individuals in three categories from discrimination:

1. Individuals who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

2. Individuals who have a record of physical or mental impairment.

3. Individuals who are regarded as having an impairment (whether they have an impairment or not).

The ADA is applicable in five situations, which include: employment, state and local government, public accommodations, telecommunications and transportation. Below is an overview of Title I of the ADA- Employment. This section requires employers to make reasonable accommodations so that any qualified individual with a disability can demonstrate adequate performance of the essential functions of a job without undue hardship to the employer.

Functional Limitations and Potential Accommodations of People with ASD

The purpose of this section is to illustrate challenges that someone diagnosed with ASD may experience in the workplace and potential accommodations that may help to alleviate any frustrations or anxiety on the part of the individual worker, co-workers, and employers. These are simply examples and will likely not apply to all cases; however, they are used to illustrate how many accommodations are simple changes that can be made to everyday tasks.

Cognition	Functional Limitations	Potential Accommodations
May exhibit difficulty with executive functioning (planning and organizing)	Incorporating feedback to improve job performance is challenging	·Provide written feedback ·Give prompts and reminders ·Make charts/ lists so that they can see information visually

	Difficulty multi-tasking	·Time Management
		   ·Assigning new projects only when the current project is complete
		   ·Dividing larger assignments into smaller segments
		   ·Displaying due dates clearly
		   ·Providing a personal organizer
		   ·Providing written expectations of job

	Difficulty with gray area thinking; most things are seen in black and white terms	·Individuals that struggle with this may be better suited for work that avoids shades of gray thinking ·Be aware of how directives are phrased, and be prepared to provide rationale to help relieve any tension. ·Be direct and concrete in assigning tasks and giving feedback; avoid ambiguity and abstraction
Social	Functional Limitations	Potential Accommodations

May exhibit difficulty with nonverbal communication, understanding tone of voice, and interactions with others.	May be easily confused by social situations/ have difficulties forming relationships with coworkers	·Reducing social confusion
		   ·Provide concrete examples of acceptable behavior
		   ·Recognize and commend appropriate behavior
		   ·Review conduct policy

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		·Use role play scenarios to demonstrate appropriate behavior
	Lack of empathy; may appear insensitive	·Educate fellow employees about the potential for this
	Difficulty reading and expressing nonverbal language; may not make eye contact when communicating	·Educate fellow employees about this ·Give direct feedback when non-verbal communication is inappropriate for job circumstances
	Difficulty reading social cues; may interrupt or talk over others	·Provide direct feedback with examples about why this is unacceptable and help to identify times that might be better suited for them to interject/ share their thoughts
	Difficulty understanding reciprocal conversation; may have a hard time engaging in conversation around topics not of their interest	·Create awareness among fellow employees

	Low participation in social activities	·Interacting with coworkers
		  ·Provide sensitivity training to promote disability awareness
		  ·Make employee attendance at social functions optional
		  ·Allow employee to transfer to another workgroup, shift or department
		  ·Allow employee to work independently
		  ·Encourage employees to move personal conversation away from workplace
		  ·Provide telework, or work-at-home when appropriate
		  ·Allow alternative forms of communication between coworkers, such as email, instant messaging, or text messaging

Behavioral	Functional Limitations	Potential Accommodations
Impulsivity	May display disorganized/disruptive behavior	·Explore options like taking regular breaks, having fidgets or other small toys that the individual can use to occupy their hands while working, and talk to them about other things that can help to limit this impulsivity
Inflexible adherence to routine	Difficult to adjust to change	·Preview changes in schedule allowing plenty of time for adjustment ·Provide changes to schedule in writing

Body and mind regulation	Environmental stimuli can be overwhelming, making it hard to concentrate	·Reducing tactile distractions
		  ·Instruct other employees to approach the individual in a way that is not startling if necessary
		·Reducing visual distractions
		  ·Install space enclosures (cubicle walls)
		  ·Reduce clutter in the employee's work environment
		  ·Redesign employee's office space to minimize visual distractions
		  ·Relocate employee's office space away from visual distraction
		·Reducing auditory distractions
		  ·Provide noise canceling headphones
		  ·Hang sound absorption panels
		  ·Provide white noise
		  ·Relocate employee's office space away from audible distractions
		  ·Redesign employee's office space to minimize audible distractions

Health	Functional Limitations	Possible Accommodations
Mood Disorders	Generalized Anxiety	·Reducing anxiety ·Provide advanced notice of topics

		to be discussed in meetings ·Provide advanced notice if individual is required to speak at meetings ·Allow employee to provide written response in place of verbal response when possible ·Provide structured breaks
	Depression	·Employers and co workers should remain empathetic and treat these individuals as they would anyone else suffering from depression
	Obsessive thoughts and/or compulsive behaviors	·Educate employers and prepare them for this ·View compulsive behaviors as a sign that this person is anxious or stressed and try to help them find a way to calm and re-regulate ·Design work assignments to maximize benefits of this kind of thought - high levels of detail or thoroughness needed
Employment	***Functional Limitations***	***Potential Accommodations***
May need additional support in the workplace	Routine oriented; difficulty adapting to new environment/schedule	·Provide schedule changes in written form and preview ahead of time
	Narrow interests	·Try to connect areas of interest to the work and slowly add in areas that are not of interest
	Quick to learn skills but may experience difficulty applying skills	·Role play or provide other examples ·Consider having them shadow another employee and assign a point person that is willing to help answer questions and support them if they get stuck or confused

References and Resources

1. Americans with Disabilities Act National Network
   - ·Information, Guidance, and Training on the Americans with Disabilities Act
   - ·http://www.adacourse.org
2. Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (VCU-RRTC)
   - ·A center of excellence dedicated to the employment and advancement of individuals with disabilities.
   - ·http://www.worksupport.com
3. US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
   - ·Responsible for enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information.
   - ·http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/
4. DSM- 5
   - ·The fifth edition of the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. In the United States the DSM serves as a universal authority for the diagnosis of psychiatric disorders.
   - ·Treatment recommendations, as well as payment by health care providers, are often determined by DSM classifications, so the appearance of a new version has significant practical importance.
5. Autism Research Institute
   - ·ARI continues to pioneer in research, outreach, and cooperative efforts with other organizations worldwide. ARI advocates for the rights of people with ASD, and operates without funding from special-interest groups.
   - ·http://www.autism.com/index.php/about-ari
6. Autism Society
   - ·A comprehensive resource network for people on the autism spectrum, their families, and professionals who work with them.
   - ·http://www.autism-society.org
7. Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
   - ·Specializes in workplace accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and other related legislation.
   - ·http://askjan.org

8. http://www.inc.com/margaret-heffernan/hire-autistic-people-heres-why.html
9. http://autismmclean.org/forAdults/hireSomeoneWithAutism