



# Autism's Hidden Strengths: Interviewing and Hiring People with Autism

# TODAY'S CONVERSATION

---

- Understanding individuals with Autism in the workplace
- Interviewing and Hiring
- Video review
- Tip Sheet

# Intent of Project

---

## Messages

### *The Autism Advantage, it's good for business*

Individuals on the autism spectrum often have natural abilities which make them better at tasks which require attention to detail, repetition, and sequencing. These individuals are among the most honest, loyal and committed people you ever employ, reducing your turn-over and training costs significantly.

*With simple adaptations and modifications to the recruiting, application and interview process, high quality candidates will not be overlooked.*

The goal is to interview to find the right candidate for the job, not the best interviewer

# Understanding individuals with Autism in the workplace

- Autism does not define the person.
- Everyone is a person first and has his or her own unique characteristics that play a part in who they are and who they can be.
- The autism spectrum is very broad.
- High attention to detail. Logical thinking. Perseverance for repetitive tasks. Ability to retain information. Ability to be precise. Focused. Accurate. Diligent. Timely.

# DSM 5 Diagnosis: ASD has Two categories

- Deficits in social communication and social interaction
  - Social-emotional reciprocity
  - Nonverbal communication
  - Developing, maintaining and understanding relationships
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
  - Stereotyped/repetitive behavior, interests or activities
  - Sameness, routines, rituals
  - Fixated interests, abnormal in intensity or focus
  - Sensory differences

# Social Interaction Challenges

- Desire social interactions, but lack the skill and social understanding
- Socially stiff, awkward
- Apply social conventions universally
- Rudimentary social skills such as greeting, but can't extend or maintain interactions
- Poor at social small talk
- Poor conversation skills (monologue, change topics, assume too much knowledge)
- Social nuances provide a hidden curriculum not picked up incidentally.
- Can appear self-centered or rude

# Theory of Mind

- The ability to understand another person's point of view, to “step into his/her shoes”. Allows us to understand how a person feels or what they think
  - Difficulty inferring a person's internal mental state based upon external behavior exhibited
  - Difficulty predicting future behavior based upon one's inferences of mental states
  - Modifying one's own behavior based upon judgments made

# Communication Differences

- **Maintaining interaction that does not involve a narrowly defined topic area**  
*Perseverate or ramble about a topic*
- **Understanding abstract aspects of language**  
*Different meanings for the same word, metaphors, idioms, parables, rhetorical questions, irony, sarcasm*
- **Using nonverbal communication**  
*Limited or inappropriate facial expressions and gestures, awkward body language, difficulty with social proximity, peculiar or stiff eye gaze, unusual prosody*
- **Understanding nonverbal communication**  
*Body language and facial expressions of others*
- **Using Filters consistently** (*think before you speak*) may be *challenging*



# Cognitive Differences

- May have processing delays
- Weak Central Coherence: Difficulty seeing or breaking down the “Big Picture ”
- Executive Functioning deficits

# Executive Functioning

- Using past experiences to support current functioning

**Tracking**

**Self-monitoring**

**Tasks/Time**

**Evaluating and Reflecting**

**Working Memory**

**Impulse Control**

**Organization and  
Planning**

**Shifting Attention**

# EF Skills Involving Thinking

## *Cognition*

- Working memory
- Planning/Prioritizing
- Organization
- Time Management
- Metacognition



# EF Skills Involving Doing

*Behavior*



- Response Inhibition
- Emotional Control
- Sustained Attention
- Task Initiation
- Flexibility
- Goal-Directed Persistence

# Sensory Sensitivities

- *You have walked into an environment overcrowded with people whose language is too fast and too loud to decipher. The lights in the room are so bright that they hurt your eyes and the hum of the air conditioner is at a frequency that makes you clench your teeth in pain.*
- *To most, these sensory stimulants go unnoticed, but for some these are extreme conditions where you are expected to work*

# Understanding the Impact

## *In the area of daily work*

- Prefer routine and predictability, repetition is a good thing,
- Difficulty with abstract concepts, understanding the whole
- Reliance on cues, learned routines, and familiar people
- Visual learners
- Difficulty with unstructured time and waiting
- Difficulties with attention shifts and focus
- Challenges in frustration tolerance
- Rote memory gives appearance of greater competence

# Academic Profiles

- Word recognition skills more advanced
- Mathematical computations stronger than solving practical math problems
- May be challenged with time pressures due to accuracy as a priority
- Increased difficulties with subjects relating to humanities. Less difficulty with subjects that rely more heavily on facts and figures (e.g., science, history)

# Understanding the Impact *in the world of employment*

- Literal thinking/rigid with routines
- Challenges with open ended questions
- Repetitive or obsessive behaviors may cause conflict in a work environment
- Co-workers may not be sensitive to the needs of individuals with ASD
- Misunderstandings due to “mind blindness” or problems understanding the emotions of others.
- Difficulty navigating the social environment



# Understanding the Strengths

- At least average to even very superior intellect



- Many enter the workforce with advanced and multiple degrees
- Unique perspectives, creativity, sense of humor

# Understanding the Strengths

- Great specialists given their attention to detail and sustained concentration resulting in accurate, high quality work.
- Excellent long-term memory with a superior recall of details
- More interested in things and systems so they often excel at systematizing
- Comfortable with repetition and routine
- Vast, deep knowledge of specialized fields
- Honest and loyal, fair-minded

**Consider if these characteristics are ones that would interfere with the job they are applying for. Sometimes yes, but sometimes no.**

- Unusual greeting, handshake, or body proximity
- Inconsistent or too much eye contact
- Reduced or flat affect or exaggerated facial expression
- Slouching posture
- Monotone or unusual voice tone, overly loud or soft voice
- Slight rocking back and forth while sitting

# Interviewing and Hiring

- provide sample questions ahead of time to assist the person in processing and understanding the intent of questions and prepare examples.

# Interview Question Modifications and Adaptations

- If possible, avoid too many behavior-based interview questions.
- Questions that ask potentially abstract concepts or using terminology that can have varied interpretations may be difficult for a person with autism.
- It is helpful if the interview questions or process can be experiential.
- Before asking a question, provide an example to demonstrate the intent of the question.

# Interview Questions

- Try to keep the interview questions relevant to the job. Small talk can be challenging and distracting for people on the autism spectrum.
- Reframe questions to be directly relevant to the job. Keep questions literal and not abstract.
- It can help to break down questions, slow the process, and use examples.

# Autism's Hidden Strengths: Interviewing & Hiring Individuals with Autism

Source: <http://www.fraser.org/Resources/For-Employers/>



*Made possible with*

*Wells Fargo Foundation Funds.*

**High attention to detail**  
**Logical thinkers**  
**Perseverance for repetitive tasks**  
**Ability to retain information**  
**Ability to be precise**  
**Focused**  
**Accurate**  
**Diligent**  
**Timely**



These are just a few of the abilities that can make individuals on the autism spectrum extremely valuable employees to your organization.

And, people with autism are among the most honest, loyal, and committed people you may ever employ, which can help to reduce your turnover and training costs significantly.







AUTISM TEEN WORKING IN STARBUCKS (YOU HAVE TO SEE THIS) ➔



▶ 🔊 0:30 / 2:07

CP Fraser  
⚙️ YouTube 🗄️





Chris Bentley

Fraser Career Planning & Employment  
1801 American Boulevard East, Suite #1

Bloomington, MN 55425

612-798-8331

[Chris.Bentley@fraser.org](mailto:Chris.Bentley@fraser.org)

