



"Tapping The Hidden Talent Pool"

Transitioning

Throughout the working day, we constantly “shift gears” as we move between tasks, engage in conversations, begin a meeting, or manage interruptions. However, some Neurodivergent employees can have trouble with transitioning and getting “stuck in a gear,” because they are very deeply involved in what they are currently doing. They may have an intense form of attention, known as hyper focus, and may need extra time to pull their focus away from the task at hand and refocus it on something different.

For example, a manager assigns three tasks for the day to a Neurodivergent employee with the expectation that each task will take about two hours – a total of six hours. However, at the end of six hours, the work is still not completed. Although the employee can complete each task within the allotted two hours, they might need time in between tasks to transition from one mental set to another, especially if the tasks are not related. An individual that has issues with transitioning will often insist on extending a discussion after the subject has changed, because they are unable to move quickly from one topic to another.

Disengaging from one activity, changing gears, and focusing on another activity requires large amounts of energy and effort. Consider giving a Neurodivergent employee a break between tasks so that they can fully extract themselves from one task before starting on another. Sometimes, physical movement, such as a quick walk down the hall, can help the employee make a mental break from a completed task, so that they can start on the next one.

Another type of transitioning in the workplace involves accepting a deviation from what was expected and having the flexibility to adapt one’s plans when necessary. Routines and predictability provide structure and security for some Neurodivergent employees, so they may have transitioning issues associated with changes in routine or environment, such as planned activities that are

cancelled, or rescheduled, or organisational, procedural, or location changes. A Neurodivergent employee may also become overwhelmed when multiple people assign tasks, because they might assume that everything needs to be worked on simultaneously, or they are uncertain of how to deal with conflicting priorities.

Our Advice

- Give a Neurodivergent employee on the spectrum a break between tasks so they can fully extract themselves from one task before starting on another.
- Suggest physical movement, such as a quick walk down the hall, to help the employee make a mental break from a completed task, so that they can start on the next one.
- Ask specific questions, such as “Once you completed this task, how long did it take you to get started on the next one?” or “Are there specific times of day or types of tasks when shifting gears is the most challenging for you?” to identify problem areas of transitioning for an employee.
- Review the schedule in advance, so the employee will be mentally prepared for transitions that need to occur.