



A Step by Step Guide to Recruiting **Autistic Talent** Into the Workplace

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STAGE 1

JOB APPLICATIONS

Generally, most people are reasonably similar in terms of successfully translating their interview skills into successful employment; therefore, one might listen to an Autistic individual's level of expressive language and assume, usually correctly, that the candidate's skill level is on a par with it. Yet, this may not be the case for the Autistic candidate. They may have an amazingly high level of linguistic expression, an ability to articulate to a splendidly high standard, but receptively they may operate at a far lower level than one might expect. Employers should be encouraged to use their judgement when matching job descriptions and person specifications with a prospective Autistic employee. Recognising that some people's strengths seriously outweigh their weaknesses would not only increase employment opportunities for Autistic people, it would also be an asset to the employer in many cases.

OUR ADVICE

- ✓ Remove generic tasks from job descriptions. Examples include: 'good sense of humour' and 'must be sociable'.
- ✓ Only include key responsibilities that are relevant to the role that the applicant will do on a day by day or weekly basis within the role.
- ✓ State on your application forms that you actively encourage Autistic candidates to apply. You might want to include information such as 'Autism Confident' employer or 'we strongly encourage applications from Autistic Applicants'.
- ✓ Recognise that Autistic jobseekers have spiky skillsets and may be very good at complex tasks but weaker than average on so called 'simple tasks'. For instance, an Autistic applicant might be very skilled at complex financial analytics but may be weak on basic online admin filing.
- ✓ Ensure all colleagues in recruitment are confident in being able to identify applications from Autistic candidates and are able to action appropriately. Don't make assumptions.
- ✓ Ensure that there is sufficient information on the application form for the applicant to disclose their Autism and what reasonable adjustments they may require for the interview.
- ✓ Recognise that some Autistic applicants may have gaps in their employment. This should not be a reason for excluding them from the interview process.

STAGE 2

PRE INTERVIEW

OUR ADVICE

Generally, for most people when we are shortlisted for interview there is a sense of excitement and expectation that we have an opportunity to secure a job that we really want. However, for Autistic applicants an invite to interview can heighten levels of fear and anxiety. Autistic people thrive off structure, routine and certainty. Job interviews can be very uncertain for those on the Autistic Spectrum as we worry about how will we get to the interview, what happens if we get lost on route and how do I prepare for questions that I am not expecting. All these emotions can lead to an increased build-up of anxiety and stress that can prevent the Autistic applicant delivering a favourable impression at interview and ultimately securing employment with your organisation.

Yet, with a few simple adjustments pre-interview, this process can be one where an Autistic applicant excels at the interview and is offered employment with your organisation. We recommend the following steps:

- ✓ Send the candidate interview questions in advance so they know what to expect from the interview. This is not to give them an advantage but to help prepare them for what the structure and format of the interview will look like.
- ✓ Send photos of the interviewers and if necessary a bit about yourselves so they can put a name to the face upon arrival. This will help alleviate their stress and anxiety and will make for a successful interview outcome for both parties.
- ✓ Ensure interviewers are trained on the subject of Autism so they know what reasonable adjustments to provide. This is key as interviewers who have the training and knowledge on the subject of Autism are far more likely to understand the needs and requirements of the Autistic candidate.
- ✓ Set up an initial phone call prior to interview to help reduce their anxiety. This is essential as this will help the interviewers gauge the adjustments required for the interview, but also will allow them to gain a better understanding of the applicant.
- ✓ Set up a visit to your office prior to interview. This will give the Autistic candidate an idea of what working for your organisation will look like. It will help reduce their anxiety and will ensure some degree of familiarity on the day of interview.
- ✓ Send a map of how to get there, with emergency contact details if they get lost. This is important as it will ensure that the Autistic candidate is relaxed and calm when they turn up for interview.

STAGE 3

THE INTERVIEW

For most of us, interviews are a way of selling ourselves and emphasising the skills that we have to secure the role we have been shortlisted for. Yet, for Autistic candidates the interview process can be a daunting challenge which many struggle to cope with. Autistic candidates will often struggle with how to sell their skills to interviewers. They may fail to communicate accurately, resulting in misunderstanding, stress and ultimately rejection for the role they have been interviewed for. Difficulties with communication, sensory issues and meeting someone new in an unfamiliar place all present a challenge.

However, by making minor adjustments to your interview process an Autistic candidate can be the ideal hire for your organisation. We recommend that you implement the following processes for interviewing an Autistic candidate:

- ✓ Ensure that the interview is held in a quiet room or 'designated quiet zone' with incandescent lighting or anti-glare lighting to reduce sensitivity for the Autistic candidate.
- ✓ Ask the Autistic candidate direct questions so they are clear on how to answer your question. Avoid open-ended questions as they are ambiguous and may lead to confusion.
- ✓ A clear and concise interview, asking for clear and concrete examples, together with a work trial or test, may be a better way to test a potential employee's skills and suitability for the job.
- ✓ You could allow the candidate with Autism to be accompanied by someone who can rephrase questions, or duties to make them easier to understand.
- ✓ Candidates may also benefit from extra time to complete written tests, which should comprise short and concise questions. It is good practise to inform the Autistic Applicant prior to interview that they will be required to do a competency assessment as part of the interview. This will reduce stress and anxiety and will allow them to perform to the best of their abilities.
- ✓ Avoid idioms, and abstract language, such as 'ballpark figure', 'blow your trumpet' or 'cast your mind back', as many people with Autism interpret language literally and perhaps will not understand what you mean.
- ✓ Hypothetical or abstract questions, such as "Where do you see yourself in ten years' time?" can be very difficult for people with Autism to answer, as they may find it impossible to project themselves into the future.

STAGE 4

EMPLOYMENT

OUR ADVICE

At this stage of the onboarding process the Autistic individual is now an employee within your organisation. At this stage of the process it is essential that you have implemented appropriate workplace adjustments for them within your organisation. We would recommend that you review these workplace adjustments on a regular basis. The workplace adjustments that you agree with the Autistic employee upon commencement of their employment will in many instances evolve over time and it is important to recognise this.

This is undoubtedly the key stage of the recruitment process. As a responsible employer it is essential that your teams have had training to support Autistic colleagues in the workplace. The greater your level of knowledge of Autism, the better the outcome for both your organisation and the Autistic employee in ensuring that they sustain their employment with you. Training should not be solely confined to HR/Recruitment teams and should be delivered to all teams and colleagues within the business. We would recommend you implement the following steps when supporting an Autistic employee in your organisation:

- ✓ Appointing a colleague as a mentor.
- ✓ Bringing in help from external support organisations that offer job mentoring, coaching and general and specific job assistance to people with Autism.
- ✓ Arranging general and specific Autism awareness training for colleagues who work alongside employees with Autism.
- ✓ People with Autism may find it difficult to assess their own abilities and limitations and may agree to take on roles and responsibilities that they do not understand.
- ✓ If someone with Autism is behaving in a manner that appears to be unusual- don't be afraid to ask them questions about their Autism and how you can support them.
- ✓ Identify why the person comes to work – what are their motivators? These might not be ones you expect.
- ✓ Be direct with instructions and requirements. Do not wrap up the message with meaningless words. Keep it brief and clear, allowing for no misrepresentations.
- ✓ Communication between the employer and employee is essential for the working relationship to work.
- ✓ This communication may need to be initiated by the employer, as someone with Autism may find it hard to know how to broach the subject or may find it difficult asking for help or admitting they have a problem.
- ✓ A structured, regular, scheduled meeting time provides a recognisable, appropriate place for discussions about performance or other work issues.

STAGE 5

UNSUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

OUR ADVICE

For most of us that dreaded email or phone call to say we didn't get the job can be frustrating but a fact of everyday working life. However, for those of us on the Autistic Spectrum a rejection for a job can be a disheartening experience that can put us off applying for future jobs. Many people on the Autistic Spectrum struggle with low-confidence and self-esteem. Just attending an interview in the first place can be a big step on the road to gaining employment and self-confidence.

Getting rejected for a job for many of us on the Autistic Spectrum can be a chastening experience that puts us off wanting to apply for jobs and ultimately acquiring employment. We would advise that your organisation looks at providing feedback for Autistic applicants when they have been unsuccessful for roles with your business. Good constructive feedback will encourage the Autistic candidate to apply for future roles with your organisation. We recommend the following steps:

- ✓ Thank them for attending the interview with your organisation. This is really important but seems to get forgotten much of the time. Emphasise what went well with the interview.
- ✓ Suggest tips and strategies for how to improve their confidence at future interviews.
- ✓ Inform them of what they need to improve upon with constructive, practical advice.
- ✓ Suggest roles within your organisation that maybe more suitable to their skills matrix.
- ✓ Consider where possible offering them work experience or a work trial to help them acquire the necessary skills.