Overlooked Talent

INVESTING IN EMPLOYEES WITH AUTISM

AUTISM SOCIETY OF MINNESOTA

In collaboration with Vocational Rehabilitation Services —
A division of Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
**THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE**

This guide is for HR teams, managers who employ individuals who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder, and co-workers who work with individuals with ASD. In this guide we hope to foster an understanding of ASD and to assist organizations to unlock the potential and develop the abundant talent and skills of their employees who have autism.

Individuals who are creative, focused, and singular in their pursuit of excellence dominate the landscape of innovation and productivity. Some of history’s creative geniuses likely were, and are, living somewhere on the autism spectrum. Research tells us that only 3 percent of adults diagnosed with autism are employed full time — an alarming fact, considering the motivation of employees with ASD. The gifts of autism — a singular ability to focus, loyalty and efficiency — address many employers’ needs.
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WELCOME

Did you know that Autism Spectrum Disorder is the fastest-growing disability in the state of Minnesota? Or that worldwide one person every 20 seconds is being diagnosed with ASD?

This guide for employers emphasizes the remarkable, sometimes misunderstood, qualities that are unique to employees with ASD. Employment options and workforce development have long been among the top priorities for the Autism Society of Minnesota and Vocational Rehabilitation Services. We believe that individuals with ASD are frequently misjudged, overlooked and underemployed. People with ASD obviously pay a price, but it’s equally true that employers pay a price in lost or overlooked talent.

People with ASD are not seeking a handout from the government or from businesses. They want opportunity — the same chance as anyone else to show the business world their value and their strengths.

Sherrie Kenny
Executive Director/CEO
Autism Society of Minnesota

Kimberley T. Peck
Director
Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Employment is an important part of life. As an individual with autism, I learned very early to sell my work and not my personality. It was my work that spoke to people in a way that I could not. Through my portfolio I could show what I was able to do. In that way, doors opened to me that would have remained closed if I had tried a different approach.

Today many individuals with autism live without meaningful work. However many are capable of doing the job, just not engaging in appropriate social patterns. This deficit keeps them from meaningful work and keeps employers from benefitting from the unique skills and perspectives that those with autism possess.

When people think of autism, they see the face of a child. People with autism grow up and part of growing up is achieving independence. It was for me. But to do this, employment needs to be available to individuals with autism.

This guide, developed by the Autism Society of Minnesota and Vocational Rehabilitation Services, allows employers to focus on what a prospective employee will bring to their organization. Through understanding and support techniques, employers can see beyond the first impressions and focus on what is important — the work.

The information and tips in this guide give employers the tools to focus on skills, instead of personality. It is through resources like this that employers will begin to discover what individuals with autism can do. Too often we focus on labels. And too often those labels become a crutch. When the focus shifts to people’s abilities, opportunities are created.

I am encouraged to see a guide like this one, directed toward employers. A workplace that is dedicated to accepting all ways of thinking seems to me to have a firm foundation for success in the future. It fills a hole in the resource literature and our support for adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Information like this is necessary if we are going to support adults with ASD as they strive toward independence and invite their gifts into the workplace.

Without autism there would be no computers, no electricity, no Internet!

Temple Grandin, PhD

Temple Grandin is known globally for her work in autism advocacy. She is in demand as a speaker and has written numerous books about autism. The subject of an award-winning biographical film, “Temple Grandin,” in 2010, she was listed by Time magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world in the “Heroes” category. Learn more about her at www.temple.grandin.com.
WHAT IS ASD?

Autism Spectrum Disorders are lifelong developmental disorders that affect the way a person communicates, interacts socially and processes complex information. People with ASD very often have average to above average intelligence. There is no distinguishing physical characteristic common to people with ASD. Not all people are affected in the same way. Autism is referred to as a “spectrum,” and symptoms can vary greatly. ASD is an invisible disability and can be misunderstood — but it doesn’t have to be.

People with ASD tend to have common traits:

- challenges with communication
- difficulty with social interactions
- may be overly focused on strong interests

They may also:

- have excellent rote and long-term memories
- have high professional standards
- love routine and repetitive tasks

- As of 2012 the prevalence rate for people with ASD is 1 in 88; two years ago it was 1 in 150; 30 years ago it was 1 in 10,000.
- Research shows ASD has been around for many generations and genetic findings show it will be around for many more.
- The unemployment rate for individuals with ASD is about 90 percent.
HIRING FROM A RICH POOL OF TALENT

Are you ready to become engaged in hiring and retaining employees from the rich talent pool that comprises individuals with ASD? Here’s what two business leaders have experienced.

As a company, Best Buy is constantly seeking ways to hire and retain a diverse talent pool and that pool consists of individuals with ASD. As with all differently abled individuals, we all have our strengths and talents. FACE (Facing Autism in a Caring Environment) has formed a network throughout the Company which employees can get involved and increase awareness of the challenges and wins ASD can bring forth, one of which is assisting those wanting, and needing, to work. Best Buy is in the midst of developing straightforward tools to be used by hiring managers across the enterprise to tap this valuable resource of individuals because it’s not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do.

Susan Larson, Best Buy Diversity Council

When we solicited the experiences of 3M employees in working with people who have autism, or were in some way affected in their lives by autism, we received hundreds of responses to our inquiry. We didn’t really expect to hear from employees outside the U.S… But we did. We didn’t expect to hear from so many of our employees who are working parents raising children on the spectrum…But we did.

Their comments, their stories, were moving and touched our hearts. We realized how so many of these experiences enrich our work community, enrich the lives of our employees and how we need to tap into the capabilities and potential of all people … including those with autism. It is essential that we tap the emotional and intellectual capacity of all people to solve our problems and capitalize on opportunities that we face in today’s world.

Sandra K. Tokach, Vice President, 3M Talent Solutions
DIFFERENCES, NOT DEFICITS

Given the intelligence, tenacity, drive and ingenious ways that people with ASD compensate for their unique challenges, ASD is arguably less a disorder and more of an information processing difference in the brain. Everyone, everywhere, has unique life experiences, gifts, talents and interests. All people do better in life when they can play to their strengths. Savvy employers know that matching the right person to the right job is a win-win.

The first step for employers is to become informed about Autism Spectrum Disorders. When employees with ASD are supported on the job the challenges of ASD need not be barriers.

“We can help them become tax payers not tax consumers.”

LARRY MOODY
ADVOCATE, ADULT WITH ASPERGERS, BOARD MEMBER WITH AUSM, RETIRED ENGINEER

6 Overlooked Talent
Why hire someone with ASD?

Individuals who have an ASD diagnosis frequently are:
- very loyal and productive
- able to think outside the box
- fast problem solvers
- creative and innovative
- detail oriented
- task oriented

What are the benefits of hiring someone with ASD?

An investment in employees with ASD often brings tangible benefits to an employer. Experience shows workers with ASD can:
- Reduce turnover and recruitment costs
- Increase the pool of talent from which companies can recruit
- Demonstrate high levels of performance, productivity and loyalty, which in turn helps build stronger employee engagement overall
- Contribute significantly to innovating company processes and products
- Offer attractive returns on employee investments
- The workplace becomes more diversified and benefits from the perspectives that individuals with disabilities offer as both employees and customers

Where can you find qualified employees who have ASD?

A great resource for finding qualified, pre-screened candidates who have a disability is by contacting Vocational Rehabilitation Services, a division of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. Vocational Rehabilitation Services placement specialists will assist you to find a good employee match for your business.

Where can you attain more information about ASD?

The Autism Society of Minnesota exists to enhance the lives of people with autism spectrum disorder. AuSM seeks to realize its mission through education, support, collaboration, and advocacy. We serve individuals with autism across their lifespan. In meeting our mission on education, we provide autism awareness training to employers. We understand the unique needs and talents people with ASD bring to the work-place. As your partner, we will give you the tools to harness the untapped talent waiting and willing to work for you.

Can’t legislate attitudes.

COLLEEN WIECK
GOVERNOR’S COUNCIL ON
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
THE INTERVIEWING PROCESS

How can you use the interview process to highlight an individual’s talents and skills? Interviewing skills are not usually a strong suit of a job seeker with ASD. The interview is an important step in the hiring process. But remember that you are seeking the best employee for the job, not for the interview. As you talk with your prospective employee, keep these accommodations in mind:

- Consider a preliminary interview by e-mail to explore the candidate’s qualifications, and follow with a one-on-one meeting in person if it’s a good match.
- You will get the best interview results in an environment that is free of noise, clutter, bright lights and other sensory stimuli that may distract the applicant.
- Provide the candidate with an agenda for the interview ahead of time. Include questions, estimated length of the interview, job responsibilities and a map of your facility.
- Don’t engage in small talk unless that skill is required on the job.
- Be specific and be concise. Avoid questions like: “Tell me a time when you experienced…”
- Be aware of your own unconscious response to the candidate’s nonverbal cues. Lack of expression or eye contact does not necessarily reflect a lack of interest.
- Close the interview with a visual overview of expectations, and provide specific information about how the candidate will be contacted.
- Remember that the candidate has gifts, though interviewing may not be one of them.
ON-THE-JOB SUPPORTS

There’s no single solution for accommodating people with ASD in the workplace because there’s no one description of the symptoms and challenges they encounter. Accommodations may be necessary to help them with social and communication skills, organizational skills and sensory challenges. Universal design refers to ideas meant to produce goods and environments that are naturally accessible to people of all abilities. Many of the accommodations for individuals with ASD can also assist co-workers with no ASD diagnosis to be more productive in the work environment.

- Help the new employee with ASD identify a co-worker who can act as a mentor for the person with ASD. This mentor can be their “go to” person when they need clarification. The mentor can also fill them in on the unwritten rules of the workplace.

- Use a job coach or social coach to set up visual aids, information note books, and schedules. Vocational Rehabilitation Services can help the employer and the worker with ASD to develop these supports.

- For the first two weeks of work, have the supervisor schedule a 10-minute meeting with the new employee at the end of each work day. In this meeting give feedback on what went well and what needs to change.

- At least once each month the supervisor and employee with ASD might want to review the work.

- Consider diversity training for the supervisor and the team the person with ASD will be joining. The Autism Society of Minnesota provides this type of employee engagement awareness training.
HOW TO HELP YOUR NEW EMPLOYEE ACCLIMATE AND SUCCEED

All new employees need assistance in their job as they acclimate to their new work setting. New hires with ASD are no different. Young adults with ASD moving from school or college into their first professional job will need supports. Likewise, experienced workers with ASD sometimes struggle when making a change from one job to another. Help them acclimate through the transition. Simple adjustments often cost little or nothing to provide, but are important factors in helping your employee achieve success.

Clarify job expectations
People with ASD think more concretely than most people. Assume that details of the job need to be described in very clear and explicit language.

- Be clear about what outcomes you expect for each task.
- Be clear about behaviors that are expected, such as checking in with a supervisor when a task is complete.

Establish job routines and write them down
People with ASD are more likely to thrive when their jobs are defined in writing.

- The employee could keep a three-ring binder that contains written instructions, company policies, hours, names of staff members and job titles.
- Changes in routines will go smoother with advanced warning. Always build in adequate time for an employee to practice any new routine.
Communicate in a direct manner

Clear and uncomplicated communication is essential when working with an employee who has ASD.

- Keep your language straightforward.
- State goals and timelines clearly and identify the steps needed to reach those goals.
- Break down tasks and ask if they are clear to the employee.
- Avoid double meanings and idiomatic language.
- Think like a reporter and give your employee the “who, what, when, where and how” for tasks with deadlines.

Job assignments

Most people with ASD process visually, not verbally, a unique style sometimes thought of as “thinking in pictures.” It’s important to have a written reference for employees with ASD.

- Encourage your employee to utilize a flow chart, or pictures, or other visual cues help the employee to do the job well. That’s a win-win accommodation.
- Employees with ASD sometimes have a difficulty starting a new project. Encourage the employee to break a project into manageable steps to manage time and due dates.
- Some workers with ASD may have difficulty in a fast-paced environment that requires quick switching between tasks.
GETTING THE BEST FROM AN EMPLOYEE WITH ASD

People with ASD have no hidden agendas. They “call ’em as they see ’em,” which can be jarring to colleagues and co-workers. This trait also sets employees with ASD up to be harassed, exploited or isolated by more sophisticated employees, who may deal with their own discomfort in judgmental ways. Just as with all employees, they have the potential to develop rewarding connections to those around them. Although they may not always show interest they will reward you with solid, reliable work performance. Here are a few tips for achieving success on the job:

Be precise and specific about job instructions. Slang and figures of speech may not convey what you want to communicate; details and examples help.

Be specific about what is rigid and what is flexible. Explain which tasks must always be performed in a prescribed manner, and allow the employee with ASD to create other pathways when there’s some flexibility in the task at hand.

Make logical lists of steps for tasks. People with ASD like to make sense out of things. Supply the logic behind necessary steps for routine tasks and they are more likely to become automatic.

Fill in what’s missing. You’ve done your best to describe the job accurately, simply and logically — but some things will be overlooked until the employee is actually on the job. Be alert to these gaps, and fill in what’s missing, adding it to written instructions whenever possible.
Transfer responsibility gradually. It’s effective to ease employees with ASD into their jobs by offering support as needed. As the employee becomes adjusted and more comfortable gradually decrease support and increase the employee’s responsibility.

Try to give advance notice of changes. If a schedule or routine change will affect an employee with ASD, allow extra time and plan on reinforcing the change with encouraging feedback.

Encourage a collaborative culture. Co-workers help each other. An employee with ASD brings strengths that will be an asset to the team. Encourage team members to apply their own gifts when offering help to a colleague with ASD. Relationships thrive in a collaborative environment.

Be receptive to requests for accommodation. People with ASD, or with any disability, should be encouraged to speak up and ask for what they need. Some employees with ASD may feel uncomfortable about disclosing their disability for fear of losing the job or being stigmatized on the job. Be sensitive to their needs and encourage conversation about what works well and what would help to improve their comfort and efficiency.

Provide regular feedback and evaluation. Schedule sessions, provide notice, and create an agenda if possible. Be positive at the start of the session and offer very specific examples of a job well done. The employee is probably very aware of shortcomings or weaknesses, so there’s no need to be anything but direct.

Go ahead — be blunt. Rude? No. But “blunt” can be helpful, direct, and more easily understood. Remember, people with ASD take what you say literally; so being simple and straightforward in what you say can help you both avoid confusion.
WORKING THROUGH A CHALLENGE

An employee who has ASD may lack insight into what’s happening around the work place and may appear insensitive to how and why supervisors, colleagues and co-workers act as they do in the work environment. It’s important to understand that an employee with ASD may not realize what’s being asked and may misinterpret the actions of others.

- If an employee performs a task incorrectly, tell the employee what you want them to do by breaking the process into steps or tasks, giving them time to process each before going on to the next.
- Focus on the correct procedure rather than on what they are doing wrong. Positive supports work the best.
- Many workers who have ASD appear to be insensitive or aloof in challenging situations. In reality, the worker likely knows that you are upset, angry, or disappointed but, because spontaneity is difficult, might appear to lack empathy or to react inappropriately.
- Sometimes employees with ASD do not realize when things are not going well at work. They lack insight and may be unable to determine the importance of an event or to understand the thoughts of others. These employees are often unaware they are in trouble. Clear communication can negate this challenge.
- Individuals with ASD are easily bullied in the workplace because they do not understand manipulation or deceit. They can be easily set up and exploited by co-workers. Mentors can really help the worker with ASD understand office politics and culture.
- People with ASD sometimes are very sensitive to certain sensory stimuli. Exposure to bright lights, sounds, smells and noises can trigger behaviors that might not be appropriate in the work place. But these situations can be avoided if you’re aware of these triggers and make adjustments to minimize them.
GIFTS AND TALENTS OF EMPLOYEES WITH ASD

Many individuals who have ASD share an array of traits, characteristics, gifts and talents that can be, and often are, of immense value to employers. Here’s a partial list:

Problem-solving ingenuity
People with ASD typically possess a sharp intelligence and many have exceptional memories. Many have highly developed talents and an original approach to solving problems.

Trustworthiness and dependability
Individuals with ASD have no hidden agendas and no interest in harming or taking advantage of others. They tend to be loyal and honest in their relationships.

Freedom from prejudice
People with ASD accept the quirks and idiosyncrasies of others. They do not usually discriminate, but judge people based on their behavior. They do not recognize hierarchies.

Work ethic
People with ASD take their jobs seriously and pay attention to detail.

Integrity
Employees with ASD do not follow the crowd. In fact, if they know that something is wrong, they stick to their positions, even in the face of intense social pressure. Their values are not shaped by financial, social or political influences.

Perseverance
Repetition, routine and endurance are not boring to individuals with ASD. In fact, their single-minded focus helps them complete tasks and enjoy their work.

Process thinkers and visual thinkers
People with ASD can quickly see details that others don’t, often visualizing a quick solution by seeing what is and what it needs to be.
THE UPSIDE OF AUTISM

“There is compelling evidence that autism is not merely a list of deficits. Rather an alternative way of making sense of the world, a cognitive difference that, in many instances, comes with unexpected benefits. The reality is there are many different kinds of minds.”


It’s important for you as an executive to be aware that you almost certainly have employees today who have ASD, and probably more to come in the future. It’s likely that you also have employees who are parents of special needs children who have autism. And it’s absolutely certain that some of the customers you serve have ASD or are intimately acquainted with someone who does.

As the ASD prevalence rates continue to grow your company has a great opportunity to recognize the upside of autism and become the “employer of choice” and the “place customers want to do business.”

With education comes change, with change comes acceptance, and with acceptance comes investment. We believe it is important to ensure that all individuals on the autism spectrum have the opportunity to engage in meaningful work during their adult lives. Many people with ASD define themselves by the job they do, not the networks they have established or the friends they have created, and not by the material things they own or the accomplishments of life.
I had the privilege to be invited to hear Dr. Temple Grandin speak about autism at the University of Minnesota in 1980, when she was in her 30s. The small classroom buzzed with energy as she walked to the podium and switched on the overhead projector. But the energy level dropped abruptly when the machine failed to come on. Temple stared at the machine. She said nothing, just stared at the lifeless projector. Someone from the back said, “Oh, Temple, I will get a bulb for the machine. The existing one must have burned out.” Not knowing what else to do, many of us in the audience began chatting with one another — and Temple just stood there, silent, motionless, bewildered and alone.

Soon the bulb was replaced and the machine turned on. Temple started with the first word of her speech, with no recognition and no acknowledgement of what had just happened.

Thirty-two years later, the Autism Society of Minnesota identified a need to educate and raise awareness among employers about autism, to improve hiring and retention. We joined with 3M, Best Buy and Cargill to co-found and co-sponsor the first Autism and Employment Forum. We invited Dr. Temple Grandin, PhD, to be the keynote speaker.

Now in her 60s, Dr. Grandin is an undisputed autism icon. The movie produced by HBO about her life a few years ago was critically acclaimed and won seven awards. Many books and articles have chronicled her work in autism, and she is recognized worldwide.

At the 2011 Autism and Employment Forum, before more than 1,000 people, she once again moved through the crowd, and again I felt the energy in the room move with her as she approached the stage. Her speech was very informative, much about her life and the challenges of employment. And then, in the middle of her presentation, it happened again, a repeat of what had happened 30 years earlier. The stage went dark, the lights went out, the screens went up, and the crowd went silent.

The silent seconds ticked by, and then she spoke: “Ladies and gentleman, I think this is management’s way of reducing costs.”

The crowd erupted in laughter and she went on without missing a beat to share her message about the need to hire people with autism. A minute or two later someone found the switch to turn everything back on and it was as if nothing at all ever happened.

Has she grown? Or have we? Did having employment make a difference? For whom?

Sherrie Kenny
COLLEAGUES AND CO-WORKERS

An ideal employment situation for a person with ASD would be to work on a team whose members are knowledgeable about the abilities and challenges of autism spectrum disorders. A network of colleagues, mentors, superiors, subordinates and allies offers a natural support system and encourages personal growth and fulfillment. People with ASD often require help to formalize these networks of supports in order to be successful. Co-workers can help to engage and guide this person in the workplace, just as they would any new hires.

Like anyone else, people with ASD are keenly aware and self-conscious when they are being ridiculed, ignored, or left to cope with confusing social situations. It’s important in your work place to eliminate these stressors to the greatest extent possible.

Use language that focuses on the person, not the disability. This is sometimes referred to as person-first language. Don’t say, “We have an autistic person on our team.” It’s preferable to say, “John, one of our team members, happens to have autism.”

For people with ASD to be effective self-advocates they need a safe work place in an environment they can trust.

When conversations involving people with ASD break down or spiral into confusion, a supportive co-worker can help redirect or repair the conversation. They will not be offended and, most likely, will thank you for your support.

Disability needs to come off the shelf, off the paper work and into the halls of Corporate America.

MARK DAYTON
GOVERNOR, STATE OF MINNESOTA
Engaging a person with ASD in your workplace requires concise communication and a willingness to be an active listener.

- Be direct and straightforward: you will not offend.
- Be concrete and specific: helps with focus.
- Break down tasks into their smallest components.
- Give feedback, both positive and negative, in a matter-of-fact way.
- Use written words, diagrams and other visual forms of communication.
- Don’t assume that a person with ASD will pick up or understand non-verbal cues or body language.

Assign someone from the team to be a mentor, someone who can offer safety, guidance, direction, and advice — especially concerning appropriate behaviors in social situations.

- Clarify and explain the importance of, and reasons for, going through proper channels or chains of command.
- Explain cultural nuances.
- Recognize small attempts to get things right; offer positive feedback.
- Mirror the right workplace behaviors; be role models.
- Give concrete examples of unacceptable behavior and explain the consequences.
- Offer guidance through changing environments; explain why things are changing.
- Recognize and accept that people with ASD might move at a slower pace than other team members; they may be seeking perfection.
Employees with ASD may be highly intelligent or hold advanced degrees, but they may have trouble understanding other perspectives. Here are a few common challenges:

- They may take language literally and miss nuances, like implied meanings, sarcasm or idioms. For example, a sarcastic “compliment” from a coworker (like “Nice tie!”) will very likely be misunderstood.
- They may make statements that are too honest and direct, unintentionally offending others. For example, if a co-worker strays from a routine, the employee with ASD may say, “You’re doing it wrong.”
- They may seem unfriendly because they don’t smile or make eye contact, and struggle with small talk and may seem unfriendly.
- They may talk at length about an area of their own interest, not noticing that others are bored or disengaged.

**BE CONCRETE/BE SPECIFIC**

We always knew when Sean finished his portion of the job. He would wait for one of us to tell him what needed to be done next. If we said, “Look around to see what else you can do to help,” he did nothing. When asked why he wasn’t helping, Sean responded that he did not know what to look for, so he did nothing.

**INCLUSIVE/NOT SINGLED OUT**

Kelly was very confused the first time she was asked how much she planned to donate to a co-worker’s going-away gift. So she did nothing. Later her mentor told her that it is customary to give a small donation of cash toward a gift and that everyone usually contributes.
IN CONCLUSION

Individuals who are creative, focused, and singular in their pursuit of excellence dominate the landscape of innovation and productivity. With simple workplace accommodations, we all stand to win. We can’t allow ourselves, as a society, to overlook such talents, just because people with ASD approach life differently. Think of the genius innovators: Einstein, Van Gogh, Mozart — evidence suggests that they might very well have been “on the spectrum” of autism.

Here’s what we hope for the future:

1. Corporations will recognize and value that many of their customers may be affected by autism spectrum disorder.

2. Corporations will acknowledge the value for their employees who are raising special needs children and need an employer who values their work and allows them to balance home and work challenges.

3. Corporations will support current and future employees who are affected by ASD.

The time is now to educate your organization and invest in the future of this talent pool.
**INSIGHT FROM MANAGEMENT**

In considering employees with ASD I would look at a few different things. We all know that a common theme with people who have ASD is that they will not typically look you in the eye when having a conversation until they feel comfortable with you.

In the interview we should not expect to see that behavior, but rather focus on the content of the answers to the questions. Typically you will not get a lot of “fluff” with the answers that they give you but you should still look for the right answers and ensure that they will understand what the expectations of the job would be.

Once hired, I would also give a specific point-of-view to your leadership team around this employee. Here is what has worked for me:

Ask your managers if they have ever had to coach any one employee more than once around a specific expectations or behaviors. I think the answer is always “Yes.” After that question you can make connections to how this employee may need to be coached. It may take more than once to explain a process or behavior, but once they fully understand the expectation, your follow up with them will be little to none.

When it comes to feedback to this employee around their performance, don’t shy away from it. This employee will want to know, very specifically, how they are doing. If you try to dance around the honest and blunt truth, you will lose this employee in the conversation.

You need to be respectful and to-the-point when giving feedback. Understand, too, that they have been told most of their life what they can’t do. Be sure to tell them what their strengths and talents are and ask how they’d like to utilize them. That is why honest feedback is so important to this person.

Chris Banuelos, General Manager, Best Buy Co.
AuSM IS HERE FOR YOU
Autism Society of MN

As more and more people with ASD become members of the workforce, the Autism Society of Minnesota is dedicated to supporting you, your employees and their families. Our vision is simple: by educating employers about ASD we open the doors to this overlooked talent pool.

Let us work with you to create successful avenues that will help employees with ASD thrive and contribute to your bottom line.

1. Autism & Employment Forum
Employer to Employer: Embark on the journey toward becoming the employer of choice, and share how hiring and retention strategies that include this talent pool have helped them meet their goals.

2. Educational workshops
We provide autism awareness training to raise awareness about workplace diversity and inclusion of those affected by ASD. This is designed for employee engagement brown bag lunch environments on diversity/sensitivity training.

3. Consulting services
We meet with human resource professionals and hiring managers to train on awareness and adjustments and develop customized strategies for hiring and retaining existing and new employees with ASD. In addition, we are a vendor of the state Vocational Rehabilitation Services and a partner with placement providers. We believe that through education comes investment.

4. Educational tools
- Employers Guide (this book is available through www.ausm.org)
- Videos — 3M in partnership with AuSM depict real scenarios on interviewing, acclimation, and accommodation strategies for the work place
- E-learning tool for furthering the awareness to be used on employee engagement programs.
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

Vocational Rehabilitation Services, a division of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, provides individualized services and consultation for employers and counseling, training and supports for persons with autism.

- Job placement helps make a good match between an employer’s needs and a worker’s skills and abilities.
- Job coaching, through consultation and training, helps a new employee understand an employer’s policies, identifies a mentor, helps set up the employee’s work space, provides social coaching, and helps the employee learn complex work assignments.
- Job accommodations and modifications help make the new employee with ASD the most productive worker he can be by addressing sensory issues and instituting simple job site accommodations.
- On-the-job evaluation allows your business and the job candidate to determine whether there’s a good job match. Businesses are reimbursed for the costs of the OJE.
- On-the-job training is financial reimbursement to your business after hiring a person with ASD for the additional on-the-job training costs that sometimes are needed by workers who have ASD.
- Extended Employment (EE) services provide support for the employer and the worker with ASD. EE is available to help the worker and employer work through misunderstandings or performance issues that could result from a change in managers, job duties, and co-workers.

To speak with a Vocational Rehabilitation Services program specialist about hiring individuals with ASD or other disabilities, contact: Marci Jasper, 763-279-4364 or email marci.jasper@state.mn.us

www.PositivelyMinnesota.com/vrs
Disability Employment Resource

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development has an online resource for businesses that shows how hiring people who have ASD or other disabilities can add a valuable dimension to recruiting and building a solid workforce in almost any company. The Disability Employment Resource has tips on why it’s just plain good business to tap into this talented pool of workers. And it shows how to find, recruit and hire people with disabilities. It’s available here:


Resources

- Autism Society of America: www.autism-society.org
- Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services: www.PositivelyMinnesota.com/vrs
- Job Accommodation Network: http://askjan.org
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN): www.askearn.org
- Make diversity part of your workforce by hiring individuals with ASD: www.mncdd.org/asd-employment/3c-media-coverage.html
- Be open to hiring individuals with ASD: www.mncdd.org/asdemployment/2b-mn-success-asd.html
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