A Collaborative Approach to Equitable Opportunity

Removing Barriers to Career Success for Neurodivergent Students

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Neurodiversity in the Workplace™
Welcome!
Today’s Agenda

1. Defining Neurodiversity
2. Different Neurotypes
3. A Neurodiverse Workforce
4. Barriers to Employment
5. Strategies for Success
6. Employer Relationships
7. Q&A
Objectives

a) **Define** neurodiversity and **identify** the benefits of a neurodiverse workforce

b) **Understand** the unique challenges facing autistic job seekers during their journey through career exploration, goal identification, and job searching
Objectives

c) **Identify** strategies for effectively preparing autistic students for the job search, as well as support models for autistic job seekers

d) **Explore** ways to connect with neurodiversity-friendly employers and increase internship, co-op, and job opportunities
How do you feel today?

1. enthusiastic!
2. ready to learn!
3. exhausted!
4. blah!
5. kooky!
Defining Neurodiversity
What is neurodiversity?

Natural variances in the brain which result in different ways of thinking, learning, and socializing
What is neurodivergence?

Neurologic functioning that diverges from the societally deemed “normal” neurotype

e.g. ADHD, autism, Tourette’s, dyslexia, dyspraxia
What is the **neurodiversity movement**?

A social justice movement that supports the idea that neurological differences among people should be recognized and respected, and calls society to further adapt to meet the needs associated with neurodivergence.
Talking about Disability

➔ Person-first language vs. identity-first language

➔ Functioning labels vs. support labels
Different Neurotypes
2.21% of US adults are autistic
source: CDC

7.2% of people identify with ADHD
source: CHADD

10% of the population has a learning disability
source: University College London
“Spiky” Profiles

On cognitive tests...

➔ Neurotypical individuals = similar scores across categories

➔ Neurodivergent individuals = large peaks and troughs
Strengths & Challenges

- ADHD
- Autism
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
Neurotypical “Operating System”

→ Neurotypical tendencies have heavily influenced society
→ From an autistic perspective, a neurotypical “operating system” is quirky
“I view ‘autistic’ as a word for a part of how my brain works, not for a narrow set of behaviors and certainly not for a set of boundaries of a stereotype that I have to stay inside.”

Mel Baggs

Autistic blogger and self-advocate
A Neurodiverse Workforce
What are some possible benefits of a neurodiverse workforce?
Hiring neurodivergent talent makes good business sense.
Companies with neurodiverse teams report:

- 30% greater economic profit margins
- 2x net income
- 28% higher revenue
- 30% more productive than neurotypical teams

Source: Accenture

Source: Harvard Business Review
“Innovation is most likely to come from parts of us that we don’t all share.”

Anka Wittenberg
Former Chief D&I Lead at SAP
But...
fewer than 1 in 6 autistic adults are employed full-time
source: Drexel

Adults with Tourettes syndrome experience higher unemployment
source: Budman, Scaghill, Walkup

Adults with ADHD are 60% more likely to lose their jobs
source: WHO

72% of HR professionals do not consider neurodiversity in their practices
source: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
Any questions?
Barriers to Employment
So, we know a neurodiverse workforce is best practice.

What’s the holdup?
What are some barriers to employment faced by neurodiverse individuals?
Barriers

*a non-exhaustive list*

- Company engagement
- Socialization
- Hiring process
- Lack of preparation
Company Engagement

- Over 1 billion people worldwide have a disability
- Disability is often left out of D&I initiatives
one survey of employees found that

86% went through a diversity training but only 12% of those trainings mentioned neurodiversity

source: NDGiFTS
90% of companies claim to prioritize diversity but only 4% consider disability in their initiatives.

Source: Harvard Business Review
Company Engagement

➔ Lack of knowledge on disability
➔ Accessibility, disclosure, accommodations

Cost of Workplace Accommodations

- No Cost (58%)
- One-Time Cost (37%)
- Ongoing Annual Cost (4%)
- One-Time and Annual Costs (1%)

Source: Job Accommodation Network
Socialization

→ Divergent ways of socializing and communicating
→ Tone of voice
→ Sarcasm is not always understood
→ Eye contact
→ Social norms and conventions
“And now I know it is perfectly natural for me not to look at someone when I talk. Those of us with Asperger’s are just not comfortable doing it. In fact, I don’t really understand why it’s considered normal to stare at someone’s eyeballs.”

John Elder Robison
Author, Speaker, & Advocate
Hidden Curriculum

➔ Set of assumed knowledge that is generally not directly taught

➔ May not pick up on these unwritten rules
For example...

Should employees email, call, or instant message their boss with questions?

Times you should call me instead of texting:
Literally never.
What are some examples of hidden curriculum rules in the workplace?
Traditional Hiring Process

➔ Standard interviews are biased and unreliable

➔ Research indicates that a “work sample test” is the best predictor of job performance
Traditional Hiring Process

How do you feel about working in a team environment?

I prefer to work independently.
Lack of Career Experience

→ One-third...
→ 58%...
→ 36%...
Lack of Career Experience

➔ Autistic college students struggle to connect with career centers

➔ Briel & Getzel (2014) findings
Autistic students are graduating with empty resumes and unanswered questions.
Any questions?
Strategies for Success
What are some challenges you have faced when working with neurodivergent students?
What are some strategies you use to reach and engage students?
Strategies
*a non-exhaustive list*

➔ Campus collaboration
➔ Open communication
➔ Peer mentoring
➔ Skill-based hiring
➔ Employer relationships
Campus Collaboration

→ Reaching autistic and other neurodivergent college students can be difficult
Campus Collaboration

➔ Disability services can support this process

➔ Ways to collaborate?
Campus Collaboration

➔ Where do neurodivergent students get career information?

➔ Make information available to ALL students!
Clear, Open Communication

➔ Straightforward and literal language
➔ Step-by-step instructions
➔ Written communication
➔ Check-ins and feedback
Clear, Open Communication

Universal design for written communication:

- Plain language
- Bullet points
- Dyslexia-friendly fonts
Peer Mentoring

- Research shows the efficacy of peer mentoring
- Answer questions about hidden curriculum and everyday procedures
Utilizing Skill-Based Hiring

Essential job skills → Skill-based project
Utilizing Skill-Based Hiring

➔ Talent over background
➔ Collaboration over commonalities
➔ Business asset!
Utilizing Skill-Based Hiring

➔ Benefits?
Building Employer Relationships
There’s a big disconnect here, but there’s a ton of potential for successful partnerships.
Building Employer Relationships

The ideal (but often unrealistic):
Dedicated staff for forming these relationships and identifying disability-friendly employers
Building Employer Relationships

➔ Ask companies about their disability initiatives
➔ Reach out to companies with neurodiversity hiring programs
➔ Create supported coop and internship programs
Supporting Employers

➔ Manager/company training
➔ Skill-based hiring
➔ Peer mentoring
➔ Increased support
Our Talent Pipeline

1. Log on to **www.nitw.org** and click **Get in Touch**

2. Fill out the **Job Seeker Survey**

3. NITW will call when a **hiring program** fits your skills
“Showing **kindness** towards those who are different and **embracing** our imperfections as proof of our **humanness** is the remedy for fear.”

— Emma Zurcher-Long; 16-year-old activist; co-director of UNSPOKEN, a documentary about autism acceptance
Q&A
Let’s connect!

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