



DISCOVER THE ABILITY IN DISABILITY

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Employing Someone with Autism: Know the Facts

At DVJS we pride ourselves on letting the Ability in Disability shine through. We endeavour to provide you with accurate information about disability and what it looks like in the workplace. However, we acknowledge that our clients are individual people, each with different experiences. We take the time to get to know who they are as a person and we ask that you do the same.

What is Autism?

Autism is a developmental disorder that is lifelong. It cannot be cured, but there are many ways in which it can be managed by the individual. Autism is referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder, as it encompasses a wide range of characteristics that present in varying ways. Each individual living with Autism is unique and faces different challenges.

Frequent characteristics experienced by individuals with Autism include performing repetitive behaviour, being highly ritualistic and reliant on strict routines. People with Autism typically find it hard to understand and express emotions and find large social situations very challenging.

What are the Challenges Experienced by a Person with Autism?

Individuals living with Autism are faced with derogatory stereotypes surrounding their condition and frequently experience bullying because of this. They experience a heightened level of difficulty developing social relationships and can often become socially isolated.

Making eye contact is extremely overwhelming for individuals with Autism. When in a social setting they will frequently look at the floor or the wall in order to avoid making eye contact. This is often seen as rude or anti-social behaviour, when it is not meant to be.

The Autistic brain takes in an increased level of stimulus from the environment, which means visual and auditory experiences are heightened. This can be overwhelming. When they become overwhelmed, individuals with Autism will frequently perform repetitive behaviours, also known as stimming, such as flapping their arms or tapping their forehead.

What does Autism look like in the Workplace?

Employees with Autism are very goal-orientated and logical. They can achieve a high level of intensive focus and attention to detail. People with Autism tend to be more honest and forthright. In the workplace, it is

likely that they would avoid office gossip and politics. They exhibit a high need for structure and enjoy repetitious work. They will tend to avoid spontaneous conversations in spaces such as the kitchen or hallway, instead preferring formalised communication with their colleagues, such as email and scheduled meetings.

What are the Advantages of Giving Someone with Autism a Chance?

Individuals with Autism possess a high level of unique skills that can make them an asset to the workplace. Major corporations such as Microsoft and Vodafone have identified the value of employees with Autism. They have introduced initiatives to increase their employment rates of individuals with Autism, acknowledging the role this has in giving their corporation a competitive edge.

Many employees with Autism enjoy completing work that non-Autistic employees find monotonous. Psychological studies have shown that people with Autism experience an increased Perceptual Capacity, meaning they are able to process a higher rate of information at any given time. When in employment roles that involve checking computer coding, Autistic consultants tend to find on average 10% more bugs than their non-Autistic colleagues.

Additionally, studies have shown the employees with Autism are better at noticing both expected and unexpected items in their visual field. They demonstrate excellent pattern recognition and a superior ability to identify and remember sounds. Some individuals with Autism have a particularly creative mind and can utilise their increased Perceptual Capacity to visualise solutions to complex problems and develop unique insights.

What can you do as an Employer to Support an Employee with Autism?

Don't give into stigma: Instead of seeing Autism as a challenge in the workplace that needs to be managed, it is important to embrace the unique perspective and skill set they bring to the team. If you create an environment where the individual feels supported and understood, they will be able to utilise their abilities to their full potential.

Clear communication: It is important to develop a strong level of communication and understanding. Take the time to ask your employee what kind of stimuli trigger their stress. This will help you identify when heightened levels of stress are occurring and the best way to support them. Employees with Autism require their tasks and performance criteria to be clearly communicated to them. Social coaching may assist them in understanding their social role within the workplace and how best to relate to their colleagues.

Provide structure: Ensure you provide them with a clear position description and clearly outline the expectations of their role. Individuals with Autism work best in quieter spaces and do not enjoy being in the middle of the peak hustle in the office. Ensure there are no sudden or dramatic changes to their work routine that aren't explained. If they do become distressed, instead of crowding and asking them questions, allow them space to manage their stress and return to a calm state.