



AUTISM TRAINING AND TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE PROJECT

Neurodivergent Employees: Embracing and Valuing Autistic People in the Workforce

February 8, 2022

The Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support

The Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support (ICSPS) creates, supports, and delivers professional development for education professionals across Illinois. ICSPS provides technical assistance, develops publications, and facilitates program improvement strategies for our partners as they relate to college transition, recruitment, retention, and completion – encouraging achievement of special populations learners. ICSPS was founded in 1977 at Illinois State University and is housed in the College of Education.



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The Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project

The Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project (ATTA) develops and presents resources that assist individuals with autism in their transition from secondary education to postsecondary education or employment. ATTA provides training and support to important stakeholders as they work to provide an equitable experience for individuals on the spectrum.

<https://autismcollegeandcareer.com>



Illinois
State Board of
Education



Why I Should Hire Someone with ASD

10 CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYEE

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the incidence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnoses is on the rise. Since 2000, the number of diagnoses has more than doubled. Autism Spectrum Disorder is often misunderstood. For every challenging characteristic of being on the spectrum, one can find a positive use of that trait that can be applied in a wide range of jobs. With our current understanding, the term ASD refers to diverse set of individuals who possess a wide range of skills and personality traits. Many individuals who have ASD share an array of traits, characteristics, gifts and talents that can be, and often are, of great value to employers. Listed below are 10 benefits of hiring a diverse workforce that includes individuals with ASD:

1. **Trustworthy, Dependable, Loyal Employees.** Individuals with ASD take their jobs seriously and are hard workers. They tend to be conscientious and committed to their work, often with good levels of punctuality, honesty and integrity.
2. **Strong Detail and Intense Attention.** People with ASD have exceptional memories, including a memory for details that can be astounding. With the intense attention to detail, often comes a need for perfection. Employees with ASD have been praised for their accuracy and attention to detail.
3. **Untapped Talent.** Individuals with autism have a great deal to offer the work world and may have unique skills and abilities that will help an organization thrive. Individuals with ASD are successful in many fields, and are often drawn to computing, scientific research, software testing, and media design and development, as well as other areas too.
4. **Process and Visual Thinkers.** Since people with ASD can quickly see details that others don't, a strong sign of creative thinking. Their thought process is often very different which helps expand the ideas and thinking of other employees.
5. **Problem-Solving Ingenuity.** Since individuals with autism tend to prefer logical and structured approaches to their work, many have an original approach to solving problems. They may enjoy problem-solving and can bring new ideas and take fresh approaches to their job.



6. **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. Individuals with ASD do not have hidden agendas or interest in harming or taking advantage of others. Their values are not shaped by financial, social, or political influences. They are rule followers and stick to the work responsible for completing and tasks outlined.
7. **Perseverance.** Repetition, routine, and endurance are not boring to individuals with ASD. They may have the ability to focus on a rote task for long periods of time. In fact, their ability to focus on one task at a time helps them complete tasks and enjoy their work. Individuals with ASD may have a tolerance of repetition and routine which is valuable to many types of jobs.
8. **Engagement with Specific Interests.** When successfully matched with jobs that align with their interests, employees with ASD can often hyper-focus on the task at hand, which enhances performance, workflow, and productivity for the business.
9. **Retention.** Individuals with ASD have a preference for routine and once settled in a job will often stay in that role considerably longer than others. Workers with ASD are often excellent, dependable, and long-term employees. Employers have noted that the turnover rate employees with ASD is significantly less than that of neurotypical workers (those without disabilities), thus reducing company costs.
10. **All Employees Benefit from the Supports.** Supports that help individuals with ASD be successful in the workplace often provide clarity to all employees. Visual reminders, simplifying job descriptions, establishing short-term and long-term goals for employees – are useful for all company employees. Engaging in more precise communication, setting clear expectations, reducing ambiguity, providing consistent feedback, and checking in frequently can improve the workplace for all employees.

On the ATTA website:

<https://autismcollegeandcareer.com/images/pdf/Why-I-should-Hire-ASD-Top-10.pdf>



Neurodivergent Employees: Embracing and Valuing Autistic People in the Workforce

There will be 500,000+ persons on the autism spectrum aging into adulthood over the next 10 years. Yet 85% of autistic college graduates are unemployed. To change this trend, it is important for companies, educators, families, and others to understand the value of neurodiversity and how to support neurodiverse people. Successful efforts provide specialized training to support neurodiverse employees - tapping into their talents and skills - and train neurotypical staff to create an inclusive and welcoming culture. These factors create conditions where neurodiverse employees can thrive and bring value to companies. Panelists will talk about critical success factors that support and welcome more neurodiverse employees into the workplace.

Tim Fox, Client Account Executive, CAI

Kenneth Mims, CEO, Neurodiversity Education Research Center

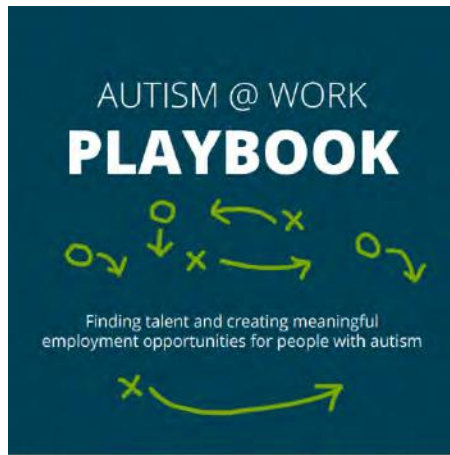
Jim Hogan, Principal Innovation Strategist, Google Cloud and VP, Accessibility in Technology

Moshe Weitzberg, PhD CEO, Co-Founder, Aspiritech

Karrie Pece, Talent and Operations Director, Autonomy Works

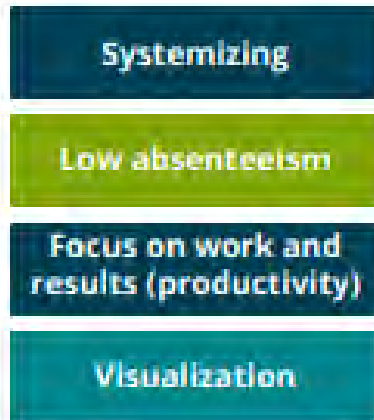
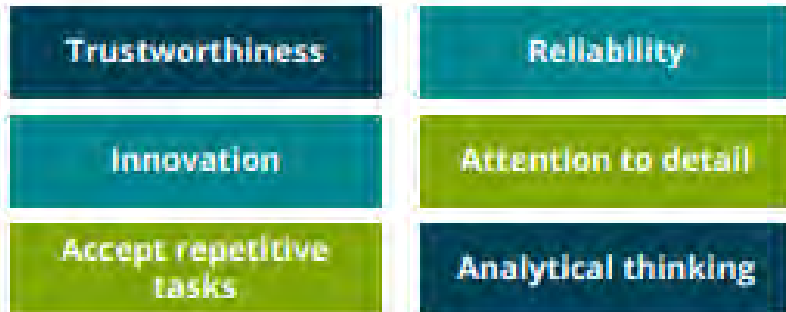
Panel Moderator: George Miller, Neurodiversity Consultant





KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Scholars identified characteristics that, in general, individuals with autism demonstrate that make them desirable employees.



Strategic benefits

Leading organizations experienced the following due to their Autism @ Work programs:

Enhanced diversity

- Hiring employees with autism adds to the diversity of talents within an organization. Research is clear that diversity of employees enhances team creativity, problem solving, ability to meet customer needs, and accessibility of products.

Enhanced employer brand

- Organizations that are perceived to value diversity and inclusion establish a high-quality employment brand that helps them attract and retain top talent. Established Autism @ Work programs enhance employer brand, which is considered a key benefit of their program.

Meeting demand for IT talent

- There is a diversity of talents within the autism community. However, scholars from various fields recognize the leanings of some individuals on the spectrum toward technical interests. Some suggest that systemizing tendencies of individuals with autism make them more likely to succeed, and therefore pursue technology and other STEM-related fields. In fact, 16% of college students with autism who pursue postsecondary education choose computer science-related fields, which is significantly higher than any other major chosen by students with autism.

Desirable employee characteristics

- Scholars identified that, in general, individuals with autism demonstrate key characteristics that make them desirable employees. Leading firms stressed the importance of these characteristics and identified performance benefits in innovation and productivity as a result (please refer to firm documents for detailed examples).

Individuals with autism have a diversity of talents unique to each individual and not limited to IT expertise. It is important to acknowledge and respect individual differences as you design your program and engage with potential employees.



Neurodiversity @ Work Employer Roundtable

We are a collection of innovative leaders who spearhead neurodiversity-focused hiring initiatives. As a collection of cross industry employers, we lead field-specific recruitment efforts. The results have been significant for our culture development and for neurodivergent individuals.



Building a better working world



Empathy Drives Innovation



We make home possible®



Building the Disability Employment Chain



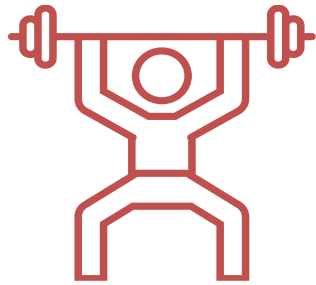
See Success at Work



JohnsCrazySocks.com



Common Success Factors (Not Exhaustive List)



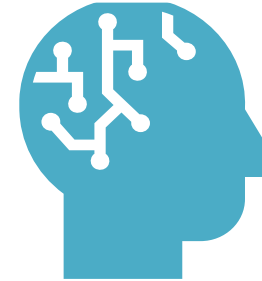
Acknowledgement that neurodiversity is a strength and a competitive advantage



Recruitment and Assessment, including Job Descriptions and Interview Structures



Training & Onboarding, including Job Shadowing, Internships



Support and Accommodations (Autonomy Works uses a Show Me, Guide Me, Support Me Model)



Training and Understanding for Neurotypicals about Neurodiversity



CAI®

**Neurodiverse
Solutions**
Formerly Autism2Work

Introduction to CAI Neurodiverse Solutions

Providing career foundation and advancement opportunities for neurodivergent individuals.



About CAI

CAI is a global technology services firm with over 6,500 associates worldwide and a yearly revenue of \$1 billion+. We have over 40 years of excellence in uniting talent and technology to power the possible for our clients, colleagues, and communities. As a privately held company, we have the freedom and focus to do what's right—whatever it takes. Our tailor-made solutions create lasting results across the public and commercial sectors, and we are trailblazers in bringing neurodiversity to the enterprise.

Learn how CAI powers the possible at www.cai.io



What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits that is part of the normal variation in the human population.

Neurodivergent individuals may exhibit a combination of the following traits:



Strong attention to detail and ability to focus



Memorizing and learning information quickly



Excellent problem-solving skills and pattern recognition



Visual or process thinkers bringing new approaches to innovation



High work standards and strong work ethic

Our Purpose

CAI Neurodiverse Solutions helps private and public organizations drive value, improve productivity, and enhance the customer experience by realizing the benefits of neurodiversity. In addition, we help to provide career foundation and advancement opportunities for neurodivergent individuals.

Our unique employment model is designed to bring the untapped neurodiverse talent pool into your workforce.

CAI manages not only the recruiting, selection, and training of team members, but also the cultural integration, on-the-job supervision, skill development, and ongoing performance management.





The CAI Difference

CAI has mastered the process of finding and aligning the best talent for your business needs.

CAI's Talent Discovery Session replaces the traditional interview with an extensive evaluation that allows candidates to showcase their talents in a supportive environment. After successful completion, candidates are eligible for an offer of employment.

CAI's neurodiversity-certified team leads help acclimate and support team members in their new workplace. They provide leadership, guidance, mentorship, coaching, on-the-job training, and continuous professional development to ensure their long-term success.

Client Partnerships



Affiliations

CAI has built extensive local partnership networks with over 500 organizations globally. Listed below are a few:



CAI Team Based Model

Team-based model is ideally four to six neurodivergent individuals with a neurodiversity-certified team lead who oversees their work, plus provides additional support.

- 1** Team members are typically entry-level, while the team lead is experienced in the technology or the functional area that the neurodiverse team will be working in.
- 2** Team members work together to support and help each other developing strong bonds and comradery.
- 3** Engagement duration is preferably one-year with a focus on skill and career development.





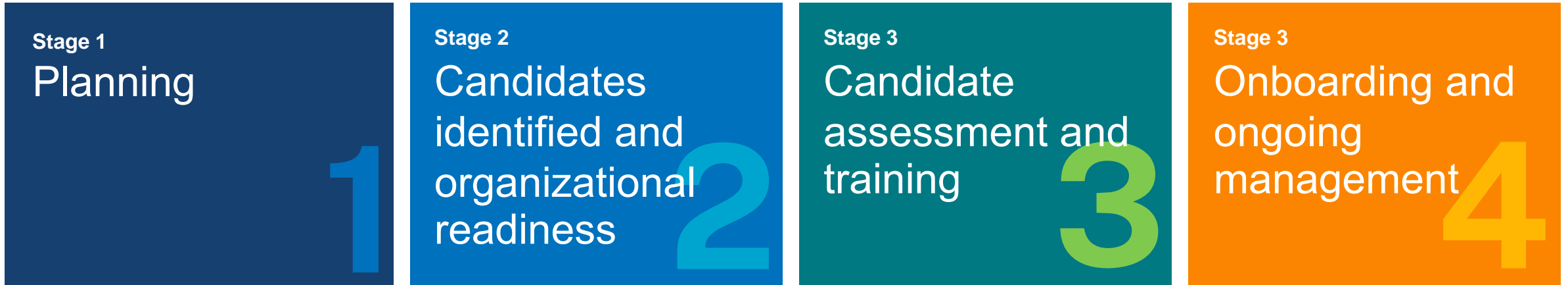
Team Lead Critical to Success

The team leads collaborate with the client's staff to:

- Be the first point of contact and be available to provide guidance, conflict resolution, etc., not requiring a need for reach-back.
- Provide ongoing supervision support, mentoring and coaching for team members including review work product for accuracy, identify additional training needs, determine team member readiness for advancement.
- Develop team member productivity metrics and drive operational efficiencies.
- Deliver a weekly and quarterly status report and conduct the status meetings. The status report will contain an update on all team activities, tasks, and issues.
- Support the reinforcement of neurodiversity training concepts.

How does it work?

CAI manages the entire lifecycle of recruiting, selection, and training of neurodivergent individuals.



CAI partners with clients to develop a program that will achieve business results.

CAI customizes the assessment, screening, training and job fit validation process for client to ensure the acquisition of top talent.

Our CAI Outreach team will identify candidates through networking opportunities and job postings.

CAI will conduct introductory calls .

CAI will evaluate the client's environment and provide recommendations on organizational readiness for neurodiverse teams.

Candidates are assessed through 5-day talent discovery session.

Successful candidates will be selected and hired by CAI and remain CAI employees until such time that client chooses to extend an offer.

Team members are onboarded virtually and/or in-person at a client site or CAI location.

Full-time neurodiversity-certified team lead provides the essential education, leadership, mentorship, on-the-job training, and continuous professional development.

Jobs that fit!



Software Development & Testing

- Data Warehouse
- Agile Development
- SQL Query Development
- User Acceptance Testing
- Functional & Regression Testing
- Mobile Device Testing
- Quality Assurance Testing
- Test Automation



IT Operations

- Access Security Management
- Cybersecurity Management
- Fraud Investigation
- Business Analytics
- Data Analytics
- Assets Management



Finance / HR / Legal

- Accountant / Auditor
- Payroll Administrator
- Accounts Payable
- Financial Analyst
- Share Services Analyst
- Contract Compliance / Paralegal
- Benefits Coordinator



Business Operations

- Image Verification
- Claims / Invoice / Data Entry
- Scanning / Indexing / Shredding / Archiving
- Mail Sorting
- Help Desk
- Risk Management
- Documentation Coordinator
- Technical Writer / Copy Editor



What's next?

Program champion: connect senior leadership and targeted business leaders for a pilot program

Workforce planning: identify potential areas in the business that have the following characteristics:

- Repeatable workflow can be documented in a process
- Where the need for attention to detail is high but quality may be a challenge today
- Sufficient work for a minimum team size of four individuals

Scope services and develop proposal/contract

Identify candidate(s) through job postings, external partners or the CAI network

Train client employees in the business area targeted for pilot

Hire, train, and onboard team members

CAI Professional Services

Candidate Recruiting & Selection

- Candidate Profiles & Scorecards
- Skill Gap Analysis
- Recorded Interviews
- Contractor/Supportive Interview/Direct Hire Options

Delivery Consulting

Organizational Readiness Assessments

- Work Environmental Assessment
- Cultural Assessment & Integration Planning
- Policy Review and Visual Work Instruction Development
- Individualized Employee Onboarding Planning
- Strategic Organization Planning (ex. universal design)

Delivery Coaching & Support

- Governance, KPI's, Metrics & Reporting
- On-The-Job Supervision
- Performance Optimization
- Delivery Coaching
- Retention Strategy
- Dynamic Risk Mitigation Planning
- Delivery Leadership Support
- Customized Employment

Learning & Development Consulting

- Neurodiversity Awareness Training
- Motivation and Engagement Programs
- Crisis Prevention Training for Managers
- Diversity & Inclusion Training
- Unconscious Bias
- Cultural Transformational Programs
- Job Coaching

Professional Services Consulting

Program Development and Start-Up

- Enterprise-wide Neurodiversity Program Roadmap Development
- Strategic & Customized Solution Consulting
- Development of Mentoring Programs
- Management Delivery Consulting
- Learning Effectiveness Consulting

Marketing, Branding and PR Support

- Internal Communication Strategy
- Press Releases
- Success Story Development
- Videos, Social media, Events
- Inclusive Branding





Timothy Fox
Client Account Executive, CAI
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To learn more about the program, visit
www.cai.io/neurodiverse-solutions

To connect with our team, visit
www.cai.io/neurodiverse-solutions-contact





AutonomyWorks

Exceptionally Talented to Empower Your Business

AutonomyWorks

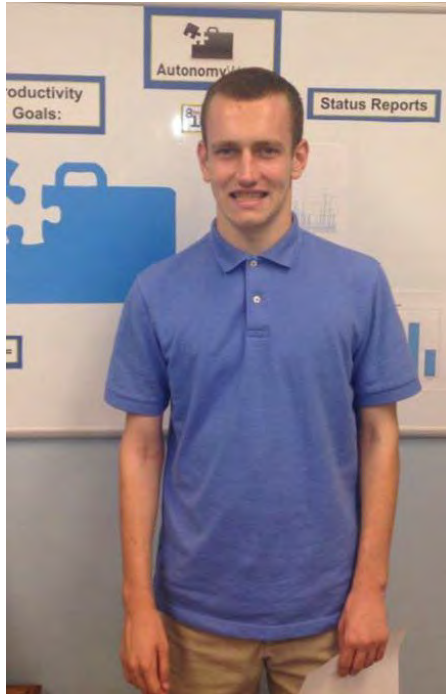
Introduction: Karrie Pece



Director, Talent and Operations
kpece@emailautonomy.com

- 20-year career focused on providing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities
 - Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, CRC
 - Executive education in social impact strategy
 - Fluent in American Sign Language (ASL)
- Business Background
 - Operations management for a team of 40 people, 80% with autism
 - Matching the skills of people with autism to the needs of businesses
- Learner, cake decorator, reader

The inspiration for AutonomyWorks



- Dave Friedman (Founder/CEO) founded AutonomyWorks back in 2013.
- Matthew (Dave's oldest child) was the inspiration for AutonomyWorks.
 - Matthew is passionate about sports, video games, and cop shows.
 - Matthew attends the local community college where he takes computer courses.
 - He is great with numbers and has exceptional spatial skills.
 - Matthew has Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Dave founded AutonomyWorks to match the skills of his son Matt, and many others, with the needs of the business world.

Mission at AutonomyWorks...

Change the way the world views people with autism.



The AW Solution

Align and transform client work to match the unique skill sets of our talent

Business Needs

- Quality matters; 100% accuracy needed
- Repetitive work can be complex and costly to automate
- Recruiting challenges and turnover limit talent pool
- Lack of employee motivation on monotonous tasks damages company culture



AutonomyWorks

Talent with Autism

- Exceptional attention to details
- Intense Focus
- Affinity for repetitive work
- Obsession with quality and accuracy
- Desire to master tasks and gain expertise



Associate Positions

Computer Associate:

- Job Location: Downers Grove, IL*
 - *Remote options
- Tasks: Intermediate Computer Skills Required
 - Transaction Processing
 - Quality Assurance of dynamic assets
 - Reporting and Analytics
 - AI: Intelligent Document Understanding
- Hours: Part-time, M-F, 8:30-5:30 pm
- Additional Details:
 - Pre-employment Training (~6 weeks)
 - Flexible Scheduling



Manufacturing Associate:

- Job Location: West Chicago, IL
- Tasks: Basic Manufacturing Skills Required
 - Putting pieces into bags
 - Putting bags into boxes
 - Assembling, sealing, weighing, and labeling boxes
 - Refilling production supplies
- Hours: Part-time, M-F, 8:00-4:00 pm
- Additional Details:
 - Job coaches and sensory room on site
 - Pre-employment Training (~3 weeks)
 - Flexible Scheduling



MULTIPLE PATHS TO EMPLOYMENT

BECOMING AN ASSOCIATE AT AUTONOMYWORKS



JOB SHADOW



ASSESSMENT



APPRENTICESHIP



LONG-TERM EMPLOYMENT

Sources

- DRS
- Partners
- Public



TRAINING PROGRAM

AW Success

We are not just building a business; we are building lives.



- The Business:
 - Team of more than 45; 80% have autism
 - 10 clients; including: PepsiCo, Land O'Lakes and Bridgestone
 - Clients reporting:
 - 90% reduction in errors
 - 30% reduction in cost
 - Increased employee engagement
- The Impact:
 - Over 200 times each week, a person with autism gets up, and works for AutonomyWorks
 - Associates are taking on management tasks
 - 95% of Associates independently manage transportation
 - 100% of our team members have bank accounts
 - Associates report:
 - Best place to work
 - Very supportive environment
 - Focus on skills and talents



Thank you!

Director, Talent and Operations
kpece@emailautonomy.com



AutonomyWorks

Question 1

Many programs that help increase employment opportunities for those on the spectrum focus heavily on preparation for neurotypical workplace cultures and environments. What steps could employers take to shift their workplace cultures to be more welcoming, such that neurodiverse employees thrive more and struggle less?

Question 2

In addition to training neurodiverse employees for existing neurotypical workplace environments, it is also necessary to train current neurotypical employees. Committing to training both groups is paramount to successfully integrating neurodiverse employees into workplace cultures smoothly. Training efforts for existing neurotypical employees seek to create a workplace environment where neurodiverse employees do not feel the need to mask and as such can achieve greater success in collaborative tasks. What training programs for existing neurotypical employees have been most effective in shifting workplace cultures in your experiences?

Question 3

Each of you has spent time working with neurodiverse individuals or are neurodiverse yourself. What steps, taken to increase inclusion, have had the greatest impact on neurodiverse individuals, and how could such steps be applied in other environments, such as education?

Upcoming Events (sign up for ATTA emails)

Feb 8 (TODAY @ NOON): Autism Speaks: Illinois Advocacy Webinar

Feb 16: Carving Out a Job: Milestones Event

Mar 8: ATTA Webinar TBD

April 12: ATTA Webinar: A Conversation with Eric Garcia, author of We're Not Broken, Changing the Autism Conversation

May 10: ATTA Webinar: Coaching Model for Postsecondary

June 14: The ROI Benefits of Hiring Talented Autistic People in the Workplace

July 12: Culturally Responsive Advocacy for Individuals with Disability presented by Debbie Shelton
Doing Academia Differently: In conversation with Neurotypicality, Univ of Missouri Higher Ed Series

Resources From Today's Webinar

- [Aspiritech](#)
- [Autonomy Works](#) and [October 2020 slides](#)
- [CAI Neurodiversity Initiatives](#)
- [International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards](#)
- [NERC and NERC's College and Career Summit 11/2021 Sessions](#)
- [Google Cloud's Autism Career Program](#)
- [Stanford Neurodiversity Project](#)
- [Autism@Work Playbook](#), Disability: IN
- [Autism@Work: Employer Roundtable](#), Disability: IN
- [Autism Workforce](#)
- [Autism at Work: Hiring and Training Employees on the Spectrum](#), SHRM
- [Neurodivergent people make great leaders, not just employees](#), Fast Company
- USDOL [Office of Disability Employment Policy: Autism](#)
- EARN: Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion's [Neurodiversity in the Workplace Resources](#) & [Neurodiversity Inclusion Checklist](#)
- [Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms and Definitions](#)

Video Clip Library



Autonomy Works on 60 Minutes



CAI Autism@Work



Integrate Advisors



SAP Autism@Work

