Getting the Best from an Employee with ASD

10 TIPS FOR JOB SUCCESS

The autism community provides a hidden pool of high-potential employees, as well as a growing customer market. Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) affect 1 in 68 individuals (www.cdc.gov). With recent improvements in understanding and diagnoses, more children with ASD receive early interventions, increasing their functional abilities as adults. Individuals with ASD become valuable employees and work successfully in jobs as diverse as data entry, digitization, computer technology, scientific research, inventory, shipping/ distribution, teaching, medical coding, and animal management. Navigating the social world can be a challenge for individuals with ASD in the workplace. Individuals with ASD have no hidden agendas. They "call 'em as they see 'em," which can be upsetting to colleagues and co-workers. Unfortunately, this trait also sets employees with ASD up to be harassed, exploited, or isolated by neurotypical employees. Just as with all employees, individuals with ASD have the potential to develop rewarding social connections to those around them. Although they may not always outwardly share social interest, they will reward you with solid, reliable work performance. Here are a few tips for achieving success on the job:

1. **Be precise and specific about job instructions.** Language that includes slang and figures of speech may not convey what you want to communicate; so instead provide details and examples. Share the big picture or the end result and then break the task down into manageable steps.

2. **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 routines when there's some flexibility in the task at hand.

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

4. **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 engaged with the tasks of the job. Be alert to these gaps, and fill in what's missing, adding it to written instructions whenever possible.

5. **Transfer responsibility gradually.** It's effective to transition 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.

6. **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.

7. **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. Develop a mentoring system for all employees.

8. **Be receptive to requests for accommodations.** Individuals with ASD, should be encouraged to advocate 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 supports might work well and what would help to improve their comfort and efficiency.

9. **Provide regular feedback and evaluation.** Schedule sessions, provide advance 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. Together develop a clear plan when making changes to job tasks and responsibilities.

10. **Go ahead — be blunt and straight forward.** 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.

icsps impacting educational equity

Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support,
Illinois State University, College of Education

http://icsps.illinoisstate.edu

AUTISM TRAINING AND TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE PROJECT

autismcollegeandcareer.com