



auticon @10

Best practices on becoming a neurodiverse employer

As auticon celebrates its 10 year anniversary, we're sharing the secrets to our success. Inside are 10 best practices to help your organisation become a leader in employing neurodiverse people.



Hello!

It is estimated that one in seven (15%) people are recognized as neurodivergent, meaning they have been diagnosed as having a neurodivergent condition such as autism, attention deficit disorder, dyslexia, or dyspraxia. This makes it highly likely that you are working alongside someone who is neurodivergent. Neurodiverse people are affected throughout the employment lifecycle: from applying for a job, through the recruitment and onboarding processes, and on to retention.

To ensure that neurodiverse people can succeed in your company, it is necessary to understand how the workplace can impact them. They may need a little extra help along the way, who doesn't, but the benefits of the support you provide will pay off.

At auticon, we are proud to be a neurodiverse company and an autistic majority team! Over the past ten years, we've pioneered best practices for creating neurodiverse teams and supportive workplaces. To celebrate our 10th anniversary, we're sharing some of our best advice in the hope that your company can do the same.

Office environment

Office environment plays an essential role in reducing stress for neurodiverse people, who may have sensitivities to noise, bright lights, and social interactions common at work. The following best practices provide guidance on how your workplace can become more comfortable for your neurodiverse colleagues.

1. Dim bright lights; turn off fluorescent lights

Buzzing in fluorescent lights is caused by the ballast, also known as the transformer, in the lighting fixture. Most business fixtures use magnetic ballasts that operate at 60 hertz, which creates audible humming and visible flickering. This buzzing can cause anxiety in some, especially when combined with the harsh bright fluorescent light. Turning them off or replacing them with natural or non-fluorescent lights is best.

2. Designate a quiet room

Designate a quiet room in the office where workers can escape noise and commotion. Find a clean, unused room or office. Decorate it comfortably and in ways that will be calming for sensory overload. This can include soundproofing so the room can be truly silent, televisions and/or speakers that can play soothing nature scenes or patterns and/or calming sounds, and comfortable furniture. Make sure the door can lock or has an “in use” sign to avoid interruptions.

3. Be mindful of unnecessary background noise

Reduce or eliminate background music in hallways, bathrooms and common spaces. Be mindful of loud, slamming doors. If these noises can't be eliminated, give employees an option to distance themselves from the noise or to wear noise-canceling headphones. These changes will go a long way in reducing stress and allowing greater focus on work.

Personal interactions

Succeeding in a traditional work environment typically includes adapting to the social constructs of a team. It can be expected to shake hands or get a pat on the back as a sign of affection from co-workers. Birthday parties, holiday celebrations and town hall-style gatherings may be a common expression of team building. These social traditions can cause a neurodivergent employee to withdraw, or mask their preferred behaviors in order to fit in – which can be painful and disorienting. The following best practices can help neurodiverse employees feel comfortable and confident at work:

4. Avoid polite touching

Polite touching is a way for many colleagues to express support and kinship for each other. This includes a firm handshake at the closing of a deal, a pat on the back for a job well done, or a hi-five to celebrate a team win. For some neurodiverse people, including those on the autism spectrum, this sort of touching may cause anxiety or panic. This extends to touching of personal property at work, such as a desk, computer, or phone. If a colleague is known to be sensitive to such gestures, it's best to respect their personal space.

5. Make participation in company social events optional

Office birthday parties and similar events give colleagues and opportunity to relax and socially interact with each other. For some neurodiverse people, they may feel pressure to participate. It's best of participation is optional; however, some neurodiverse people may choose to participate simply by being present, quiet, or sitting alone away from the crowd. This shouldn't be viewed as antisocial; it's simply celebrating in their preferred way.

6. Lack of eye contact isn't a sign of disrespect

Lack of eye contact is one of the most characteristic hallmarks of autism. In traditional western work cultures, lack of eye contact may be viewed as not paying attention, or a sign of disrespect. This is an example of mistaken perception; science indicates autistic people track conversations just as well, with or without eye contact (US National Library of Medicine, 2017).

Hiring practices

The average neurodivergent job seeker, who has struggled through interviews due to lack of accommodation and understanding, would appreciate a company that can make some subtle additions to their hiring practices to accommodate them.

7. Be clear about workplace accommodations

Invite people to send any accommodation needs when they schedule an interview. This simple step helps normalize the need for accommodations, alleviates the stress of the job seeker needing to start that conversation themselves, and lets the job seeker know that needing accommodations will not negatively impact their interview outcome.

8. Allow flexible work schedules

Some neurodiverse people prefer not to work a full 40 hours a week. For one person, 35 hours may be acceptable, but another may need a half-time accommodation with 20 hours. Not all positions will be able to be part-time, but whenever possible, consider opening them up to 30+ hours instead of the traditional 40 hour work week. Apart from shortened hours, allowing for flexible hours is often very helpful. Some autistic people can be hyper-focused and get more done in less time but will also need more break time afterward to prevent burnout. Allowing flexibility in the actual hours worked, as long as the work gets done on time, will accommodate this common autistic working style.

9. Be clear about your hiring process

Consider providing a detailed “itinerary” of the hiring process. Most autistic people like to plan and have a lot of detailed information to leave nothing to surprise. An easy way to implement this is to make it an auto-email response early on in the process. Hence, the applicants know approximately how long they might have to wait, how many interviews there could be, and generally what the process is like. At auticon, we do this after our initial phone screen and list out the next steps in detail.

10. Provide an inclusive interview process

The social requirements of a job interview can be stressful under normal circumstances, but for someone on the autism spectrum, greater accommodations are often needed.

Below are best practices for creating an inclusive interview process:

- Be open to conducting phone screen(s)
- Consider not doing panel interviews – large panels can be intimidating
- Provide your full attention when interviewing candidates
- If the candidate asks you to repeat yourself, don't get upset. the candidate is just seeking clarity
- Some may struggle to “sell” themselves or showcase skills verbally – this is not a sign of being unqualified for the job
- Use iPads, tablets, online tools specifically designed to test vocational skills
- Applicant may want a parent, friend or support person present in the interview
- Adopt a ‘strengths based’ approach for working with neurodivergent employees and ‘flex’ job roles to enable them to play to their strengths

Become a neurodiverse organization

auticon's focus is on promoting the strengths of autism and neurodivergent conditions in the workplace. We understand that organisations may wish to support their own neurodivergent talent but are unsure on how to approach this. Our training is carried out by experienced professionals with decades of clinical and applied experience in autism and neurodivergent conditions.

As inclusion is at the heart of what we do, all of our training is developed in collaboration with our neurodivergent colleague as experts by experience or as trainers. Our training is of interest to all employees within an organisation but is of relevance to leaders, human resources, legal, recruiters and managers.

***To learn more about our neurodiversity training services, contact:
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About auticon

With a high demand for data quality and flawless software development, auticon provides a neurodiverse and agile workforce to improve our client's IT projects.

Our hybrid onsite and offsite teams utilize the cognitive benefits of autism to provide the sustained concentration and analytical mindset that makes us wired for success.

Our teams include fully-trained personnel specializing in software development, data analysis, quality assurance and testing, automation engineering, and more. auticon works hand-in-hand with our clients and the local autism community. We encourage diverse work cultures, recognize each employee for their individual talents, and deliver outstanding quality to our customers.

Visit [auticon.com](https://www.auticon.com) to learn more.