

Neurodiversity Workplace Suggestions

All too often, companies decide to hire neurodivergent people without doing anything to address the work environment's culture. This often leads to ableism within the workplace, which negatively impacts a neurodivergent person's ability to do their work. This also leads to lack of retention.

Ensuring the culture of a company is conducive to neurodivergent people is reliant on ongoing education for all levels of staff and management. This lessens the probability of microaggressions, unconscious biases, and ableism that neurodivergent folks often experience.

Neurodivergent staff may have accommodations that need to be met. It is important to have accessible, easy to understand methods for employees to share access needs. This information should be shared throughout the work environment, including during onboarding, and should not be reliant on the neurodivergent person asking if there are accommodations available.

Nothing about us without us in a term popularized by the disability movement. It means that nothing for disabled people should be created without disabled people. The same is true for neurodivergent folks. It is important that the methods to access accommodations is built with neurodivergent people to ensure ease of use.

Employees in HR departments should be comfortable talking about neurodivergence. Their ability to support and offer guidance is important to staff feeling comfortable disclosing their neurodivergence and needs.



Image: HR person chatting with employee.

Workplaces that want to increase diversity and work to create an equitable environment, should be a positive environment for all employees. Staff should not need to disclose a disability or say they are neurodivergent in order to get their needs met. Accessibility that works for disabled and neurodivergent folks can also benefit non-



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disabled and non-neurodivergent staff. Valuing the needs of all employees is important to the work culture.

Many neurodivergent folks don't disclose due to fear of how they will be treated. Some wait until they have time to experience the work culture and whether it is conducive to their disclosing. They watch to see how others access information and whether the employer is willing to have conversations about access needs and accommodations. This is a barrier to the success of neurodivergent folks because they may require the accommodations in order to perform in their job.



Image: People participating in employee group discussion.

Neurodivergent employees may leave companies if there is a lack of learning and development opportunities.

While education is vital, it doesn't affect the culture if there is no follow-through. Follow-through includes creating an employee groups that are identity based for people to talk about their shared experiences and help the company create ways to ensure and increase equity and diversity.

Create an accessibility protocol for the work environment. This is a living document that outlines the accessibility available. It is important that people in all positions have access to this information without having to ask for it. This document outlines what accommodations are offered and gives concrete examples such as flexible hours, noise-cancelling headphones, ability to work from home, closed captioning in online meetings, transcripts of meetings, private cubicles or quiet zones, individual lighting, standing desks, access to assistive technology etc.

As a living document, the accessibility protocol expands and adapts as feedback is offered. For example, LET'S recently worked with a company that offered a paid hour per week for counselling. This helped all staff ensure that they were prioritizing their mental health and



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working with a professional to find ways to adapt their working style to their needs. This was based on feedback offered by neurodivergent staff.

Neurodivergent folks work in ways that are different to non-neurodivergent folks. For example, people with ADHD often wait until the very last minute to do their work. It is important, in the workplace, with neurodivergent folks, to focus on the result and not the method.

Job descriptions should use language that makes it clear that neurodivergent folks are not only welcome but wanted and supported. Some job descriptions include requirements that may deter neurodivergent folks from applying. It is important to consider what is a requirement, what is a preference, and what is a hope for. Keep in mind that neurodivergent folks are literal, as I share in the communication video, and they will take the information in the job description literally.

Language that indicates requirements like team environments and communication skills may keep neurodivergent folks from applying. Employers should be specific about whether tasks are essential.

Provide information about job opportunities in multiple formats. For example, text in plain language, video and/or audio recordings.

Interviewing can be stressful and anxiety-inducing for neurodivergent folks. It is important to make sure the environment is comfortable and not sensorily overwhelming. Try to limit distractions and have adaptable environments. For example, have dimmers for lights, close the door to limit noise, provide the choice of natural light, etc.



Image: Potential employee watching video recorded job description.

Offer various formats for interviews, including written responses. Some neurodivergent folks need to have time to process and formulate their responses. Providing questions in advance or having a



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written option allows them the time they need to think out their response. Let them know who will be in the room and why. It can also help to describe, in detail, in advance, what the interview process looks like. Ask the potential employee what can be done to help with the interview process.

Neurodivergent folks have communication styles that may be different to how non-neurodivergent folks communicate. It is important that the person/people doing the interviews is aware of these differences and alters their expectations.

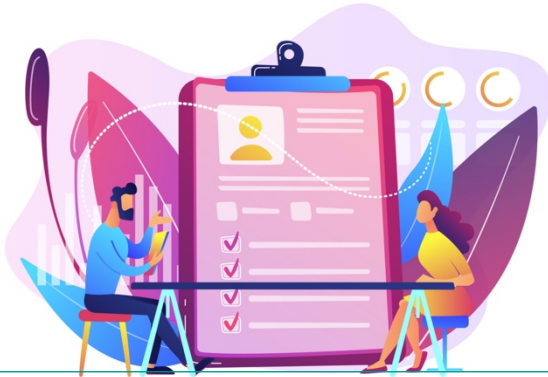


Image: 1 person testing skill of another in front of large clipboard.

Some employers utilize a skills-focused approach. This offers an opportunity to establish whether a potential employee has the needed skills for the position and how they handle or problem-solve the task.

During the interview, open-ended and abstract questions should be avoided. For example, instead of saying “tell me about past jobs”, ask “what is a recent project you worked on and how did your participation lead to its success”.

It is okay to politely tell a potential employee that they are talking too much. As shared in the previous video, people who are neurodivergent can share a lot, for a variety of reasons. You can politely cut in and say “thank you, that is enough for that question, my next question is...”

Let potential employees know that it is okay for them to bring an advocate to the interview. This person may help to rephrase questions, clarify what the interviewer is saying, prompt responses, and generally help with communication. If an advocate is present, ensure the focus is on the neurodivergent person.



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