

# EARN

Employer Assistance and Resource  
Network on Disability



## Hiring and Supporting Neurodivergent Workers: Strategies for Success

### LEARNING GUIDE

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## What is Neurodiversity and Neurodivergence?

Neurodiversity describes the natural way that people think, learn, perceive the world, interact and process information differently. “Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one ‘right’ way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and [differences are not viewed as deficits](#),” according to Harvard Health Publishing. Neurodivergence refers to a number of conditions, including autism, ADHD, learning disabilities such as dyslexia and dyspraxia and certain mental health conditions, including PTSD and depression. People with these disabilities are neurodivergent.

Neurodivergent people represent at least 15-20% of the global population, come from every background and are an integral part of today's workforce. More employers are embracing the many benefits of hiring neurodivergent workers and developing initiatives to recruit them and support their success once on the job. Employers who hire neurodivergent employees benefit from their unique skill sets and innovative and creative perspectives, which can improve a [company's bottom line](#). Hiring and supporting neurodivergent workers is good for business.

## A SNAPSHOT:



Around **15% to 20%** of the population is considered to be neurodivergent<sup>1</sup>



Teams with neurodivergent professionals in some roles can be **30%** more productive than those without them<sup>2</sup>



Organizations that provide mentors to professionals with a disability reported a **16%** increase in profitability, **18%** in productivity and **12%** in customer loyalty<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://mydisabilityjobs.com/statistics/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace.html>

## What Neurodivergent Workers Have to Say

*All names in this section have been changed.*

### LINH (RETAIL AND SOCIAL SERVICES, NEW YORK)

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“I used to work in a busy call center and experienced a lot of work stress to the point of frequently needing to miss work and starting anxiety medication. After I was diagnosed with hyperacusis and probable auditory processing disorder, I requested a noise cancelling headset from my employer as an ADA accommodation. My anxiety decreased immediately, I no longer missed work, and within a month of receiving the headset I was able to stop taking anxiety medication.”

### MATTHEW (MARKETING, FLORIDA)

“

“Sending a message to get my attention when I’m available rather than interrupting me in the middle of a project, having my back to a wall rather than an open door, and having the ability to ask clarifying questions all lead to a good workflow for me.”

### DEREK (LOGISTICS, OREGON)

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“The biggest difficulties in most positions have not been anything related to the position themselves but unspoken or contradictory expectations of my social behavior. The interview process is often a major hurdle for me, and office politics can be incomprehensible. If I have an itinerary spelled out, I can often excel. But there’s a problem when I’m told to do things and not how to do them, or not told to do things while managers fume that I’m not doing those unspecified things.”

### NICHOLAS (SOCIAL SERVICES, COLORADO)

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“I’m good at advocating for myself but not everyone may know how to. So be clear that if reasonable accommodations are needed, the lines of communication are clear. Clear communication is important generally.”

### LARA (FOOD SERVICE, FLORIDA)

“

“I’ve been with my workplace for a few years, and I have known my managers for a long time. In situations where I feel like I need a more private area for a longer period of time, I will ask them if I can go sit in the office with them, and that also brings me comfort.”

### RON (JOURNALISM, MARYLAND)

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“As a job seeker with autism, I’m currently looking for jobs that specifically offer the attributes that would best suit me at work. What helps me the most is when a job clearly states what they offer to employees directly in the job description so that I know what to expect before I even apply. Some of those attributes that I look for are flexible work hours, specific details on each of the duties, and a friendly and welcoming work environment.”

## What Can Employers Do? 5 Tips to Recruit, Hire and Support Neurodivergent Workers

### 1 Re-evaluate hiring and interviewing processes

Assess your current recruiting and hiring processes and remove any barriers that could affect neurodivergent workers before they even start the job. A good first step is to revise your [job descriptions](#) to make the role and its duties as clear as possible. Next, review your interviewing processes to learn [how to conduct interviews](#) that are more accessible to neurodivergent candidates. Convey job tasks and expectations explicitly, and select a comfortable interviewing space free from distractions if the interview is in-person.

### 2 Offer accommodations

A workplace accommodation can make a substantial, positive impact on an employee's work performance and productivity. Though each person has different needs, many neurodivergent workers face similar barriers to success in the workplace, most of which can be addressed by simple accommodations.

According to the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), [56% of accommodations cost nothing to implement](#). Some examples of accommodations for neurodivergent employees include:

- noise-cancelling headphones
- flexible work schedules
- written or recorded instructions for reference
- fragrance-free environments

Be sure to have one-on-one conversations with your employees to identify the most effective accommodations for them.

### 3 Be explicit and communicate clearly

Each employee is different and has unique needs. Many neurodivergent employees want their employer or manager to explicitly tell them their workplace responsibilities. Provide clear directions, deadlines and feedback when assigning job duties or stating expectations for workplace procedures. Where possible, avoid comments that can cause confusion. When you provide [feedback and performance evaluations](#), be straightforward and offer constructive critique to allow neurodivergent employees to advance on the job, just as you would with any employee.

### 4 Incorporate management training and mentorship programs

Management training and mentorship are key building blocks for a supportive workplace. Organizations need support for leadership to create a workplace that includes people with disabilities. All levels of management should be properly trained on supporting neurodivergent workers. Such trainings should include the [perspectives of neurodivergent people](#) themselves and can cover topics such as disclosing a disability, effective communication methods and styles, and best practices to use when discussing workplace accommodations. Additionally, [mentorship programs](#) for neurodivergent employees offers a safe space to navigate issues and ask questions or work through issues with someone they trust.

**5****Continue to embrace your supportive workplace culture**

Studies have shown that organizations that have hired neurodivergent employees experience [improved overall employee morale and positively impacted organizational culture](#). Hold team events and roundtables to help normalize neurodivergence in the workplace, internally and within your industry. Become an advocate and spread awareness by speaking out about the benefits your organization experiences because of a neurodivergent workforce. Continuous communication and education about your workplace culture will help employees feel welcome and valued throughout their employment journey and assist in recruiting new neurodivergent workers.

**EARN Resources**

- [Neurodiversity in the Workplace](#)
- [Employee Benefits of Neurodiversity](#)
- [Organizational Benefits of Neurodiversity](#)
- [Management, Peer Training and Mentoring](#)
- [Neurodiversity Hiring Initiatives & Partnerships](#)

**Additional Resources**

- [Disability:IN's Neurodiversity @ Work Employer Roundtable](#)
- [Office of Disability Employment Policy Autism Topic Webpage](#)
- [The Society for Human Resource Management's Autism Hiring Guide](#)
- Article for Harvard Business Review - ["Neurodiversity as a Competitive Advantage"](#)
- [PEAT Podcast - "Building Neurodiverse Talent Pools"](#)