



9 Things Potential Employers Should Consider for a Neurodiverse and Inclusive Workplace

1. Get management on board with inclusion

To really make a workplace autism inclusive, you need commitment from all levels of leadership.

Inclusion is a culture – and culture building starts at the top. When your management team is on board with creating an autism-friendly workplace, it's easier and more sustainable to implement the practices that make a difference.

Autism training is vital for all managers, key colleagues and human resources staff to ensure they understand the practicalities and mindset of inclusion, and are invested in making it work long-term. The key to success is an understanding manager. As the first step, it's important to identify a sponsor or champion who will drive inclusion practices in your organisation, from changing recruitment processes to implementing environmental changes.

2. Be open to change

Doing things the way they've always been done is one major reason so many autistic people are locked out of the workforce.

Being autism inclusive means being adaptive. You can start by changing up processes that may be deeply-embedded, such as recruitment. Give your managers time and space to get to know and understand their employees. Be flexible with the individual needs of your team members. Ask your autistic employees what *they* think needs to change and be prepared to take action.

If we continue to work in the same ways, organisations will miss out on employees who offer innovative thinking and diversity of thought. By being open to new ideas and ways of working, you can unlock the potential of autistic and neurotypical employees alike.

3. Innovate the recruitment process

Job interviews have limited value in truly telling you if someone is right for a job.

The traditional interview really only tells you about someone's capacity to communicate, be likeable and build rapport in a very stressful environment. It can push out talent who may not have those 'soft skills' but have significant practical skills to offer.

Make your recruitment practices more autism inclusive by removing barriers, such as interviews and resumes. Work trials and practical assessments are great examples of practical ways to assess autistic applicants – join companies like Westpac, Microsoft,



IBM and the Australian Federal Government, who are adopting innovative recruitment practices to engage a neurodiverse workforce.

4. Find the right partner

Don't expect to become autism experts overnight.

Engage with an autism partner who can offer your organisation the autism expertise to innovate the recruitment process, as well as providing the post placement support and autism awareness and capacity building.

Partner with autism employment experts who match your organisational culture. There are different models and services out there – do your research and find one that works for your organisation.

Specialisterne Australia is an example of an autism specialist that works with organisations to identify and fill roles with the untapped talent pool of autistic individuals in Australia.

5. Make adjustments

Autism inclusion needs dedication more than dollars.

Adjustments to create an autism inclusive workplace aren't over and above the needs of neurotypical employees – and they often don't cost anything to implement. The most common adjustments include:

- Flexible hours – e.g. be open to starting early, finishing late, additional breaks during the day
- Sensory considerations i.e.
 - Noise: seating in a quiet area of the office away from thoroughfare traffic/break out areas and noise cancelling head-phones, access to a quiet room is ideal
 - Lighting: being seated in a dimmer area of the office beside a window with blinds to control the level of light coming in, not being seated under fluorescent if at all possible, use of tinted glasses
 - Smell: not being seated near a kitchen, no spraying of air fresheners, discourage team from using strong perfumes
- Written or visual communication
- Clear and concise information (including clarity of role and expectations)
- Regular opportunities for feedback, providing sensitive but direct feedback for reassurance and confidence building
- Providing structure
- Offering ongoing support, such as a buddy system
- [Job Access](#) can assist with financial assistance for workplace adjustments



6. Create support structures

Having an internal support structure will mean long-term success for the employees and managers.

Post-placement support is crucial for at least the first 3-6 months as autistic employees transition into their new role and new environment. This is a great opportunity to engage external experts, such as Specialisterne Australia, to provide autism specialist support.

Other great ways you can support new autistic staff are to set them up with a 'buddy' within their team and a mentor from outside of their team; and provide regular feedback and reassurance to reduce anxiety and ensure they feel valued.

7. Don't make assumptions

When you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism.

One of the biggest challenges autistic people in the workforce face is the assumptions made about them. But each autistic individual has different skills, perspectives and support needs – just as every human being does. Employers should get to know each individual as an individual.

Not all autistic people are good at maths or IT. Autistic people can feel as much, or sometimes even more, empathy as neurotypical people. Some autistic people prefer "autistic person", some prefer "person with autism". Some autistic people love loud noise, but some find it unbearable. It's important to understand autism – but it's even more important to understand the person. When your employee feels understood and supported, they can truly thrive.

8. Believe in the value of autistic employees

Autistic people have significant and unique skills to offer.

While every autistic person is different, autistic individuals often have a strong work ethic, high attention to detail, innovative problem solving, and low error rates in their work. Look at each autistic individuals' strengths first – understand how they can benefit your organisation, and what you need to change within your workplace to enable and empower an autistic employee to achieve.

The right autism employment partner will operate a strengths-based model, such as Specialisterne, to ensure the employer understands the strengths on offer and can then

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simply make the small adaptations to ensure their strengths and skills can be channeled in the right way.

9. Contact Specialisterne Australia

You can find out more, including how Specialisterne Australia can help your workplace become more autism inclusive and engage autistic employees, by visiting specialisterne.com.au / or emailing info.au@specialisterne.com / or calling 03 9088 8052.