

Autism World



Magazine

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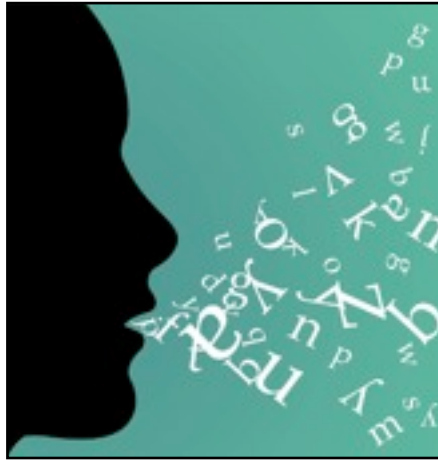
A mother who cries quietly

What's in a face?

An ally in Library

Future Employment:

Part 6: Training



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For the past six months, I have been exploring possible causes that could explain the AJ Drexel Autism Institute research findings that individuals with autism spectrum conditions have worse employment and independent living outcomes than people with other disabilities.

I have left lack of training until last because it is a direct consequence of all of the previously explored causes of overwhelm, fear of making mistakes, lack of self-belief and societal perceptions of the labels of autism and Asperger syndrome.

Two factors must be in alignment before effective training can be achieved; motivation and opportunity.

Motivation is directly affected by overwhelm, self-confidence and self-belief. Opportunity depends on one more ingredient for success; the cooperation of the individuals and organisations that are delivering the training. Therefore negative perceptions about the autism spectrum will create limited training opportunities for autistic individuals.

We could spend our time debating allocation of blame. Should we blame the autistic individual? Should we point the finger at the teachers or the organisations that employ the teachers? Or is it the system that is “broken”? Indulging in such a debate will achieve nothing, because solutions are found in action, not in blame.



But what about the many undiagnosed autistic individuals that populate the scientific, information technology and engineering sectors?

They are highly trained and respected individuals who have contributed many of the great advances to society. Where do they fit into the overall picture presented by the Drexel research?

The answer is in the word “undiagnosed”. One of the factors contributing to the Drexel findings does not exist for those individuals – the perception of society. The undiagnosed do not possess a label that is considered to be negative.

Therefore such individuals have been mostly unimpeded in finding solutions to the other barriers of overwhelm, confidence and self-belief. A problem is only a problem while a solution remains unknown.

So what is the solution to the problem of lack of training? The answer to that question is multi-layered and draws strongly from solutions offered throughout this series:

- Implement strategies to deal with overwhelm;
- Concentrate on strengths to build a platform of self-confidence and expand from that foundation;
- Encourage the view that mistakes and errors are necessary for learning and success; and
- Open your attitudes and beliefs to encompass the concept that anyone and everyone has the right and the ability to learn and to expand, regardless of their labels.

Temple Grandin talks about autistic thinking categories in her book, “The autistic brain”. She lists three main types of autistic thinking: visual, pattern and verbal.

The visual thinker is proficient at creating visual constructs in the mind and imagination and excel at ‘big picture’ thinking. However, visual thinkers could have difficulty with subjects such as mathematics and music.

On the contrary, the pattern thinker will adapt to mathematical and musical concepts easily and readily and will often be able to observe and identify patterns in the world around them. Such thinkers could be more adaptable to learning social patterns and can therefore “blend” into social structures more readily. The pattern thinker will likely have difficulty with visualizing and big picture thinking.

The verbal thinker is the walking, talking dictionary who will be able to provide detailed and accurate facts from memory about the focus of their interest. Such individuals will be great at statistics and detail oriented fields.

Verbal thinkers could have difficulty creating links to subjects outside of their particular interests.

The above categories exist in all individuals, whether they are on the autism spectrum or not. The difference for autistic individuals is that the abilities in the above thinking categories will often be considerably more pronounced in their “natural” style and noticeably deficient in the other styles of thinking.

Of course there could be so called islets of ability in a combination of the above. However, one of the above thinking categories will likely be stronger. It is to the strengths of thinking that training should be targeted first. Any further training can then be built upon strong and confident foundations.

The following is taken from “The autistic brain”, where Grandin suggests career matches against each of the three thinking categories:

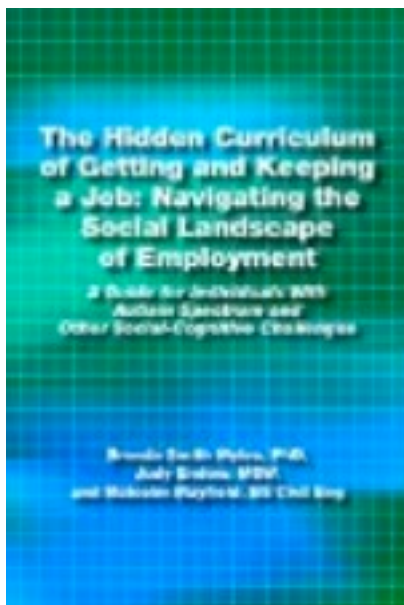
Possible career paths by autistic thinking category

Visual Thinker	Pattern Thinker	Verbal Thinker
Draftsperson	Engineer	Journalist
Photographer	Mathematician	Translator
Designer (craft/fashion)	Computer Programmer	Tour Guide
Graphic Designer	Musician / Composer	Specialty Retailer
Technician	Statistician	Accountant / Book Keeper
Auto Mechanic	Chemist	Historian / Archivist
Landscape Designer	Electrician	Technical Writer
Interior Designer	Scientific Researcher	Bank Teller
Plumber	Investment Analyst	Information Kiosk Attendant
Cartographer	Electronics Technician	Inventory Control

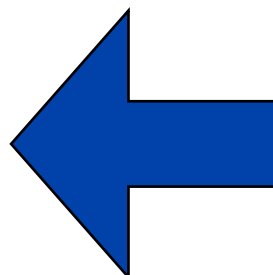
Anyone can learn given the right environment. Therefore anyone can be trained given the right opportunity. Put aside limiting beliefs for understanding and acceptance. It is time that autism is allowed to shine.

Next month will be the final part of this series or future employment.

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Malcolm Mayfield is co-author of “The Hidden Curriculum of Getting and Keeping a Job: Navigating the Social Landscape of Employment.”



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