# **Managing Neurodivergent Employees**

## How to Navigate the Unique Challenges and Maximize the Talents of Your Neurodiverse Workforce

‘Management’ is an active and ongoing process with the goal of creating an environment where all employees flourish and unwrap their potential. When workers are empowered to use their entire spectrum of gifts, they are in better stead to advance company objectives, while simultaneously achieving their personal goals as well.

Adjusting to the individual personalities that make up the rich tapestry of life, however, can require some intentional strategy. In this sense, there’s no major difference when it comes to managing neurodivergent people. You do need to acknowledge, however, that they think differently and process information in dissimilar ways (Forbes Councils Member, 2021).

## **So, How Should We ‘Manage’ Neurodivergent Workers?**

I recently came across an [article](https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2021/04/29/13-productive-ways-to-support-neurodivergent-employees/?sh=53c2bf084fa7) released by the Forbes Expert Panel, which met to share ideas about how to best support neurodivergent employees. I found [this article](https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2021/04/29/13-productive-ways-to-support-neurodivergent-employees/?sh=53c2bf084fa7) to be so meaningful, in fact, I decided to summarize these important concepts and share them with you. Here are the main takeaways:

***One: Understand the Breadth and Depth of Neurodiversity***

Set your preconceptions aside. Neurodivergent people share your humanity, even though their conscious and subconscious processes may unfold in ways with which you are unfamiliar.

***Two: Reach Out Directly to Subject Specialists for Advice***

Accept that your education, training, and experience may not prepare you for managing neurodiverse employees. Sum up the courage to ask others to assist you in your leadership role. Seek advice from subject specialists if you are short on answers. Be open to deferring to their wisdom and offering up that part of your leadership role. Reach out to your business network and see what has worked for others.

***Three: Take Steps to Create a Supportive Environment***

The key to managing neurodivergent people is building a support base within which they can optimize their potential. Engage neurodivergent workers on a one-on-one basis. Be transparent as you explore *their* strengths and needs. *Ask how you can support them.*

***Four: Walk the Extra Mile by Providing Extra Mentoring***

Every new employee requires guidance as they begin their career with your company. Neurodivergent people, however, may need extra support interpreting job requirements. They may likely need a more supportive work environment as well (Morris et al., 2015).

To effectively manage neurodivergent employees, you must acknowledge that their longing for enrichment and success matches your own. Put yourself in their shoes to help them find the extra support they may need.

***Five: Empower the Employee to Reach Their Full Potential***

Neurodivergent people think differently. Tap into this potential, questioning those boundaries you thought were fences. Empower your neurodivergent employee to challenge your tried and tested ways of doing things. Have the courage to be open to fresh perspectives. Accept the company ‘normal’ is not the only way.

***Six: Place Your Neurodivergent Worker Where They Best Belong***

A neurodivergent worker becomes a real asset when you enthusiastically place them in a role that enables their difference to shine. Identify their best skills, then find a role that complements them. Take pause until you have a neuro-appropriate match for their skills. *Don’t hire an unsuitable person just to meet a diversity target*.

***Seven: Reconsider Whether Coming in to Work is the Best Option***

Some neurodivergent people — especially those with autism — genuinely prefer to work on their own. They may have a home environment that inspires them more than a workplace setting. Bright lights, noise, and constant interaction with coworkers may be actively counterproductive. Ask them where they would rather be to work at their best.

***Eight: Reach Out and Learn What Others Are Doing***

Be humble and accept you may not have all the answers, especially if you are managing a neurodiverse workforce for the first time. Reach out to your peers and ask them about their experiences with placing neurodivergent employees in fun, creative, and rewarding roles. You may discover that a neurodiverse workforce gives you the competitive advantage that’s been absent in your team.

***Nine: Encourage Neurotypical Employees to Celebrate Diversity***

Hiring people who think differently from us cannot be a one-way street where the benefits flow in a single direction. Neurotypical employees interacting with colleagues who think alternatively will also experience intellectual stimulation, growth, and a rejuvenated imagination. Implement accommodations that work for *everyone*. Create trainings and educational programs that help neurotypical workers understand and work with their divergent thinking counterparts. Organizations are stronger when their employees are on the same team.

***Ten: Keep Thinking and Growing your Neurodivergent Perspective***

Invest time to understand what makes neurodivergent people tick. Lower your shields as you enter their world. They may think, even behave differently from you, but this does not mean they are wrong. Connect with the neurodivergent community, read their words, and seek out their voices. Learn to appreciate their experience and perspective.

***Eleven: Continue Being Accommodating***

If you are neurotypical, then you were born in a comforting world where most things seem natural and work for you. For divergent thinkers, the world (and particularly the workplace) can be chronically challenging and disheartening. As the need for accommodation presents itself, stay flexible and focus on creative solutions.

Managing neurodivergent employees takes time and energy because it forces growth and growth is hard. But it is also an enriching experience to see their talents bear fruit and become better for it.

## **A Neurodiverse Workforce is Worth It**

Acknowledging and respecting the divergent thinkers in your workforce is inevitable when you do these eleven things. Managing neurodivergent employees involves accepting that they think and feel differently from you. But working together, your organization can achieve more.

***This is the role of the empowering manager.***

## **References and Recommended Reading**

Forbes Councils Member. (2021). *13 Productive Ways To Support Neurodivergent Employees*. Forbes Coaches Council. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2021/04/29/13-productive-ways-to-support-neurodivergent-employees/?sh=2d399eb4fa7d

Morris, M. R., Begel, A., & Wiedermann, B. (2015). Understanding the challenges faced by neurodiverse software engineering employees: Towards a more inclusive and productive technical workforce. *ASSETS 2015 — Proceedings of the 17th International ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers and Accessibility*, 173–184. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2700648.2809841>

\*\*\*\*\*

Copyright © 2022 Susan Fitzell & Aim Hi Educational Programs, LLC. First published March 14, 2021.

#####

Susan Fitzell, M. Ed, CSP, is a nationally recognized presenter, author of nine books for teachers, trainers, and parents, an educational consultant, and CEO of Aim Hi Educational Programs, LLC. As an independent consultant and coach, Susan offers the personalization, continuity, and consistency necessary for true change in any organization. She works side by side with teachers, school administrators, and business leaders as a coach and trainer, employing Brain Power strategies that take learning to the next level.

For more information, visit Susan's website at [www.susanfitzell.com](http://www.susanfitzell.com/).

**Permission to Reprint**

Aim Hi Educational Programs  
PO Box 6182  
Manchester, NH 03108

1. Permission to reprint articles by Susan Fitzell, at no charge is granted with the agreement that:
   * The article bio be included following each article used.
   * One copy of the publication in which the article is published be provided to Susan Fitzell.
   * A fee per article will be expected for articles published without the closing bio and contact information; $300.
2. Permission is also granted for reasonable:
   * Editing content and industry specific example exchange.
   * Length.
   * Article title change.
3. Electronic publishing of articles must include a live, click-able link to http://www.susanfitzell.com

Any questions, please email to [sfitzell@susanfitzell.com](mailto:sfitzell@susanfitzell.com).