



Workplace neurodiversity: the power of difference

Case study: Reece Coker, SEND Workshops and Training Service Manager at [POINT](#)

- **What is your experience of being included, or excluded, as a neurodivergent, in the workplace?**

I've been included and excluded in the workplace. I believe that most people actually want to include you; but often, the lack of understanding about neurodiversity means they're not sure how to do this. Many people think that by *trying* to include you socially, they believe they're being inclusive. For example, being invited to a work social event seems to be inclusive, but if the environment is stressful (e.g. noisy, too bright), the attempt at inclusion just doesn't work. Likewise, extroverts are often more vocal at work meetings and the subject can move on before you've had chance to think about your own input. It can also be triggering when people talk over each other and interrupt.

Passive aggression within management is also difficult to deal with. In a situation where a senior manager asks if everyone is happy, or if everyone has any other ideas, you quickly realise that the question isn't actually real and the answer being sought is actually agreement. Having your ideas dismissed when they've been asked for stops you from wanting to contribute in future, so I'll often ask, "is that a real question?" in these circumstances.

- **How, specifically, does your neurodiversity help you in your own role?**

My memory is exceptional, when it comes to remembering every word in a conversation or being able to remember information quickly. I'm very direct and honest, and not prone to becoming emotional where problems and conflict arise at work. I'm also loyal and consistent, and a long-term advocate for the organisation where the environment fits.

- **What do you think the benefits are of having a more neurodiverse workforce?**

Apart from being the right thing to do, neurodiversity encourages lateral thinking, a different perspective, a control on office politics and promotes a space where many personality types can flourish, not just the extroverts.

- **Have you ever experienced issues with recruitment due to your neurodiversity?**

I've experienced huge recruitment issues in the past, either in making it through the initial sift or performing well within an interview. If someone asks me, "can I think of a time where I performed exceptionally well within a team?", my answer will usually be a resounding "no", followed by "I don't actually like to work within teams", which is completely true. Where I am asked "what are my strengths, or what do I love to do?", the answer will be a far richer answer. I'm not always sure how to match my skills and strengths to a person specification or job description.

Employers should be looking for values in action and virtues (strengths according to positive psychology), rather than employing based on skills and performance. Skills can be learned, whereas honesty, integrity, kindness and courage have uniquely innate qualities and trump skills every time, and cannot be learned.

- **How does including neurodiversity in policies help to bring about a more inclusive workplace?**

Neurodiversity in policies doesn't actually bring about a more inclusive workplace; it ticks boxes, eases the conscience, even gives rise to awards and brings a certain kudos to the organisation. Neurodiversity and acceptance within an embodied culture is what brings about real change and inclusivity. The first question that needs to be considered is 'who writes the policies?' The best policies are coproduced with the neurodiverse employees – how many leaders at the top are neurodiverse, as opposed to leaders *philanthropically* giving roles to neurodiverse individuals and making policies to support them?

- **How do we ensure that recruitment is inclusive and doesn't discriminate?**

The individual needs to be seen, encouraged to find a voice, and if they don't fit the current system, then arrange a conversation rather than a pre-formed interview. Bring someone in for a day, a week, or maybe longer to witness their strengths in action and let them interview you too. Ask yourself why you're sticking to the usual rules around hand-shaking, dress-code and eye contact; for many neurodiverse individuals, wearing a tie and a collar shirt is horrendous, and yet if they don't, they will often be judged. Have courage to challenge your own rules.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

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