



Autism Inclusion in the Workplace Panel

A panel webinar lead by [OAR Panel Guests](#) on October 12, 2023

0:00

Since most of you are now here, let's get started.

0:03

To those, to those of you who've just joined us, good afternoon, and welcome to today's panel webinar, Autism Inclusion in the Workplace. My name is Kathleen, and I'm your host for today's event.

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It's great to have you all here today.

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And I have the distinct pleasure of introducing today's event host, Chelsea Hartner and today's panelists, Shea Belsky, Carolyn Jeppsen, Tiffany Payton Jameson, and Lyric Rivera.

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So without further ado, I will turn this over to Chelsea, Go ahead and take it away, Chelsea.

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Awesome. Thank you so much, Kathleen, and thank you to everyone who's tuning in for our conversation on Autism Inclusion in the Workplace. Before we get into the topic, we're going to go around and introduce ourselves to all of you. We'll introduce ourselves with our names, our self-descriptors, our roles, and a little bit about the companies that we're here to represent.

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So, I will go ahead just to get the ball rolling.

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My name is Chelsea Hartner, my pronouns are she/her.

1:00

I am a Caucasian woman with long brown hair, and blonde highlights that today is pulled off to the side.

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I'm wearing a black blouse with floral print.

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And I'm an operations manager. I'm responsible for client success and strategic business development at Getting Hired, which is an inclusive workforce solutions company that connects folks with diverse identities and disabilities to inclusive employers.

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So, that's enough about me. I'd way rather you hear more about all of our panelists here, so, I will pass the intros over to Tiffany.

1:31

Good morning from Southern California. It's 8 AM here. My name is Dr. Tiffany Payton Jameson. I am in my home office right now.

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I have light brown hair, brown eyes, and I am a Hispanic woman who looks very Caucasian. I am the founding person, and the managing partner of an organization called Grit & Flow.

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As an organizational psychologist, we really, I've seen the workplace needs to change, and that it's not about, you know, all of us changing as individuals, and it's about embracing the person where they're at, to create inclusive workplaces. So, that's really where we focus.

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We actually do not have people we place into jobs. We change the company.

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So, that way the companies can embrace individuals that are coming that are neurodivergent and or just, you know, be themselves. So that's what we do. I'm glad to be here. Thanks for inviting me.

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So was I supposed to pass it on or..

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Yeah, let's go ahead and just pass it on.

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OK, Carolyn?

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Oh, you're muted, sweetie. Let me unmute myself. Can you all hear me? Are we good? Thanks for having me. My name is Carolyn Jeppsen. My pronouns are she/her/hers. I am a white, female, middle aged with brown hair. I am also in my home office. I'm located in Washington, DC, but today I am in Vermont. I'm dressed, per usual, in black, I wish there was more color, but that's what we have. I am a co-founder and serve as the president of an organization called Broad Futures.

3:13

And we serve young neurodivergent folks, through a training mentoring internship program, and we support both the talent, but we also, like Tiffany, support employers, to make sure that we are creating accessible workplaces. So we're kind of working both sides of that equation. Before working with Broad Futures, I practiced as an attorney. Mostly in civil litigation. So I like to think of myself as a lifelong advocate in a variety of ways, and I'm gonna pass it on to Lyric.

3:46

Hi, my name is Lyric Rivera. My pronouns are they/them. I'm a light skinned multi-racial human in my mid-thirties and I have dark, black hair, was shaved sides, and I'm sitting here in gray t-shirt in a dark wood panel RV office. And I am the owner and neurodiversity consultant for Neurodivergent Consulting. I help organizations that want to be more inclusive of both autistic and LGBTQIA individuals in the workplace. So much like Tiffany, I worked to change the

systems, so that they, like a garden, are ready for new employees to come in and have a safe space to grow and be their best versions of themselves.

4:29

Lastly, Shea. Hi, thanks everybody for having me. My name is Shea Belsky. I am a Caucasian male in his mid-twenties, wearing a tie-dye, long-sleeved shirt with brown hair pulled off to the side. I'm also in my home office. I have a Mets poster behind me in a yellow-ish room And I am the Chief Technology Officer at Mentra. Mentra is building a hiring platform for neurodivergent, jobseekers to get connected with employers who value their strengths and skills. We have a platform also for employers themselves to get connected with that neurodivergent talent, and really understand how to make the most of them.

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And also offering services for service providers, and people who operate on behalf of job seekers or to help them get jobs, too.

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And that is Mentra, and that is me.

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Awesome. Well, thank you so much to all of our panelists. We have a lot to get through, and we want to ensure that we have plenty of time for Q&A at the end today. So to ensure I can give our panelists my full attention, any questions that comes through the chat will be stored until the end of the discussion. So, we're going to dive right into it, so we make sure that we have time for that Q&A at the end.

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Now, can each of you walk our audience through why autism inclusion in the workplace is important for organizations? And just to help keep this streamlined, and to kinda keep the same rotation going, we'll go ahead and start with, with, Dr. Tiffany again.

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Hi.

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So, I first started this, my organization, when I found out about the 85% unemployment rate, as somebody who's worked a lot with autistic people, including my son and I was appalled.

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But as the more I got into the research and the practice of this, you know, 20% right now we're estimating the world is neurodivergent? We're everywhere.

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We are everywhere.

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And what it comes down to is, we have such habits, such organizational norms. We have set up that we're so blind to changing them.

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And right now, it's important that we go through and make people more aware of these habits and biases and things that we're OK with and then we just allow organizations to go through.

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So that's why, I think it's most important because it's everybody, everybody's intersectionality, all our diversities need to be embraced in it.

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And, I think autism is a wonderful lense --

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I'm very visual -- to look at the world through, because it's communicating differently, potentially, processing differently those things, but they're not bad things, and that's the problem there. It's just different.

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But, when everybody starts using these tools, and, kind of, I guess, you could say, communicating better to work with an autistic individual. You work better with everybody.

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And it's, it's, once again, it's changing all those norms. So, that's why we find it so important, because you really need to embrace every person in your organization, and autism is a wonderful lens to look at it through.

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And I'm going to go ahead and pass it on to Carolyn.

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All all all that, and all that, you know, I came to this work through advocacy, at the educational level, right?

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Making sure neurodivergent folks have access to equitable access to education.

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And then this came to me because we graduate high school and, um, our disabilities don't go away but the supports do and the opportunities often do. And so there's this huge chasm we, as, as Tiffany said, we estimated at 20%, but we think when we think about females and non-gender conforming folks, it's probably much higher and then people who just don't even have access to diagnoses, right? So it's all of us.

8:08

All of us, it's our friends, it's our co-workers, it's our loved ones, it's our relatives. And so, on the societal end, and it's something that has to be addressed on the employer end, and there's a huge talent problem right now. A huge talent problem. And so we're missing, we're missing, if we're not looking at autistic workers as a significant part of our workforce, we're missing out on talent.

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So those are, you know, I feel both the inclusion aspect of it. It's part of who we are as a society, but also there's the business need, right? Businesses need it, and workers are ready to work. And so, we just have to do things like we're doing today and talk about it. We know employers are looking for this talent, we know this talent is looking for the job. So what can we do to make these two things happen?

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I'm going to pass it to Lyric. Thank you, thank you, so I, the reason I am in this field at all is because I'm autistic, but I didn't find out I was autistic until I was 29 years old.

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And, at that point, since I started in the family business when I was a very young person, and then, you know, moved on, had my first jobs.

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You know, as a teenager, I'd been in the workforce for over 15 years, by the time I found out. But I had no idea of autistic, but I was still autistic, right?

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So, my big a-ha being diagnosed at the age of 29, because I was in a workplace system that was treating me like, I was the problem,

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is that you have autistic and neurodivergent people in your workforce right now whether you know it or not, whether they know it or not.

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And even if they know it, you know, they may not feel even safe telling you they're autistic, because I've tried this in workplaces where it didn't go well, and I ended up being pigeonholed because of disclosing, being autistic, and was unable to get the legal accommodations that's required of me.

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Because the system is so biased against autistic people.

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And we need to fix these systems. It's very similar to what was said earlier. Like autistic people and neurodivergent people, we're everywhere, like we're your neighbors, your friends, or your you know we're your colleagues, whether you know it or not. Unless your system really has no autistic people, it's probably really, really toxic. If there really are no neurodivergent people in your system, then it's probably really toxic. But we have a lot to offer. We have a lot to offer. We just need to be given the chance and the right environment, much like flowers. You have to like build a nice garden for your whatever you're trying to grow to grow and different kinds of flowers need different soil and different PH levels and different amounts of water, and human brains are much the same. We need different environments to nurture and be our best selves and so, you know. I, I try to challenge organizations to make things better because it does make things better for everyone when we nurture the individual and their individual needs so that they can bring their best self to work.

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And passing to Shea. Absolutely, I want to re-affirm what everybody else has already said. I am also an autistic self-advocate. I actually was diagnosed at a pretty young age at around 2, 3 years old.

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So, my perspective is similar to Lyric but a little bit different, where I had what I consider to be a luxury of having a diagnosis very early, and I recognize that that is a privilege to have had the diagnosis for such an early point. And what that meant was that I had the option of telling my employers, I am autistic, or choosing not to say anything.

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And, dealing with the burnout from not saying anything or dealing with possible discrimination in the event that I did.

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And all that is to say, when thinking about all sorts of people in the workplace and saying, “oh, we don't have any autistic people who work here.” You're very wrong in assuming that you don't have autistic people who are in your workplace at the moment.

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It's a big part of inclusion, is understanding, not just how would you hire autistic people to give them opportunities that they need and deserve. But also, how do you support people who are already at the workplace, who are maybe just barely scraping by here at the risk of burning out risk of leaving, or something terrible happening. Because they don't get the support they need.

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So, inclusion isn't just hiring people to make yourself feel good or look good.

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But it's also supporting people who are already there.

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I love that, and I feel like the resounding theme is nurturing that individual, like Lyric had mentioned earlier.

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Like, every single person needs something unique, and autism inclusion really does help exhibit that and in that intersectional component of D E and I. Right. So, thank you so much that beautifully well said. And thank you again for sharing the why behind autism inclusion is important and Lyric and Shea, thank you as well, specifically, for sharing your individual experiences.

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It's really, it's really -- thank you. Thank you for trusting for entrusting all of us to hear to hear those experiences.

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Now, Tiffany and Carolyn, from your lens and expertise, can you share some strategies on how you may help other companies implement and promote autism inclusion? And, can you also share any outcomes or positive impacts from those strategies that you may have seen?

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Definitely, I'll go ahead and kick off on that.

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So, what we've noticed is, looking at the entire employment experience in a company, because you really have to get away from the initiatives.

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And I think that was, one of my colleagues said, you gotta get away from the initiatives and really look at the entire experience.

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If you just do one offs and the changing, we're finding, there's a lot of, in all diversity, I call it diversity fatigue.

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Where, you know, we're trying to address just these individual levels of people, so what we found is that by looking at the employment experience, we're looking at all the way from advertising the job, coming into the job, interviewing the job.

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But even more importantly, the retention piece, which is how you give feedback.

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How you give different ways for career advancement. As I talked about, my husband, who's an ADHDer, or if he would have been able to stay in his core job as a salesperson, you would have been a lot happier individual, but the way that industry worked, he had to go into management.

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There's a lot of people right now in our jobs, where it's all about leadership, leadership, leadership. We need to look differently at those things to allow our employees to thrive.

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What we do best, instead of trying to do this, you know, stagnant ladders of things. So that's kind of one way to look at it.

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Another thing to look at is changing the processes that we saw, is having access to, um, being able to get good, and efficient, and, and clean feedback to people, and having constant check ins. So, by encouraging people to have a constant check ins just regularly, and not just because an individual is neurodivergent or autistic, but we all kind of need and you catch things before they get wrong.

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But this is modeled through autism employment, in the sense of knowing that sometimes the communication isn't necessarily interpreted the same way by both the taker and the receiver in both ways, that you need to do clarifying questions. We need to make sure that someone's not going off this direction in here.

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So by, by doing these constant check ins and having these better ways of communicating, we found that all employees felt more empowered to do their jobs better.

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We felt that all employees had a better connection with their there, no team, their boss, we felt there increased, and I'll talk about this, but more psychological safety, Psychological safety is where you feel like you can be yourself.

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So if someone's asking you for help, or checking in with you, you may notice that for some reason, you're not getting the information in a way you process it. And that's something you can come do together by talking about this. Like, I don't know why I keep missing this. Well, maybe if I write it down in an e-mail, in some notes, and we sit down and talk about it, or maybe if I give you a sample.

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Those things we can work on together. So it's not an accommodation. It's like, "how can I do my job better? How can I be my best employee for you?" So those things have really been the biggest outcomes we've seen from some of the things we've implemented with autism employment focus.

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Which is once again, that lens we use. Carolyn?

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I mean, that's almost, not exactly what I was gonna say, but almost exactly on that. We're talking about "how do we promote" and then "how do we include once we're there", and a lot of it's around communication.

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The promote piece of it, I just want to touch on a little bit, because if we think about it, this is where our talent first sees us, right? And so if we do have a one-off program that's hard to find. It's not on the website. We don't see people like ourselves.

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We don't see self-advocates that are loud and proud on our website or on our marketing materials, we're not going to be as interested in the company, I'm just being honest. If we then have an application and interview process that is not accessible, that's also going to be a barrier. So, I think we have to start at the very beginning.

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I'm a big believer that if we actually make that process accessible, we're not gonna miss out on talent and sort of, you know, lessons learned from that.

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I'm just gonna give one real-life scenario where we had an employer who, upon our guidance, gave our applicant questions ahead of time, make sure there was only one person interviewing. We talked about it as a conversation, talking to the person. They were going to walk them through exactly how this interview was going to go and afterwards, give them a timeline on when to hear back and stick to that, right? As opposed to the same organization, we had a different hiring team that didn't do any of those things. These two candidates were equal in their in their application. You can imagine which one got hired, right? The first one. So we miss out on the talent. So I think it does start there. And then, once we're in the job, it is the communication. It is huge!

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And this is going to get to, suddenly - we're talking about later, universal design, essentially all the accommodations, or being a good manager.

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And giving good feedback, clear feedback, being specific, knowing what you want someone to do, asking them for it. And then what Tiffany was talking about is we often find with our neurodivergent talent, we may say oh yeah, I understand that. But two minutes later, when we're trying to reprocess and think about what it was, we actually might not understand it. So that we make sure we have some sort of repeat back function. Right, so we are, we're on the page. With that comes, we're gonna let time go by because we don't want to give feedback to someone

because they have a disability, That's ridiculous, right? We want to give real-time feedback, both positive and negative or constructive, I should say. We want to give it real time so that we can act on it, and it doesn't become a big thing.

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So those are, you know, big, there's so much, but big picture wise, it's making sure your, your, your, for, your first site, for talent is welcoming. And then making sure, once we're there, we have the basics, as far as communication or whatever the supports are.

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You know, I don't want to get in the weeds, but clearly being clear, and having not giving huge projects, having them broken down into steps, are some of the most basic steps that we can take months were on board.

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I want to add something real quick in there.

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OK, and then I went blank.

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Oh, so I'm a neurodivergent, but I'm also a manager of NeuroDivergent. And that constant feedback and giving feedback is hard. And it's hard because we have a lot of good days, bad days.

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We have a lot of trauma that we're bringing to the workforce, from things happening in the past. So if, even though I know these are the right things to do, I have trouble sometimes wanting to address it, because it does trigger other things in maybe me or not.

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So, I do just want to point out to the employers here, and to the, you know, job seekers, that these things were asking for, they're not easy, but they still need to be done. So you gotta gotta, I always say to my (put on) my big girl pants, and move forward. So just wanted to throw that in there. We know this stuff isn't necessarily easy.

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Yeah. And I think if you can ideally stick to the same, whatever your format, as you're just using the same thing, so it becomes routine, and we expect, and we're not, we're not suggest anything either that thins needs to happen every day. But, but with regular routine, where we can expect it, and we know what the format is going to look like. So, we're not surprised by it, right?

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On either side, it makes the manager's job easier, and makes talents job, easier, as well.

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And I love that example, Tiffany, of what you gave to it, because I think it's really important, as leaders, to be thinking about how we're leading by example.

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If we are working organizationally with our leadership, and within strategies to be implementing these inclusion tactics throughout an organization where we need to be leading them individually in our lives to, and with our teams directly. And so, I thought that was a really good example of

being vulnerable for the sake of your people being able to feel comfortable from that psychological safety aspect.

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Now, we talked a lot about the manager component, the leadership component of autism inclusion in the workplace.

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But that does impact everybody within an organization at different levels differently.

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I, so, I would love to hear from Shea. Shea, what are your thoughts on, how we can get everyone across the organization to adopt and support these types of initiatives?

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Absolutely.

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A really important part of this is valuing autistic people and recognizing them without ostracizing them or making them feel as though they are put on a pedestal or singled out or worse, discriminated against whoever is because of an accommodation, a need, or risk because of training that people on a team had to go through. The last thing you want to do is to ostracize any one individual.

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What really helps is either having a company undergo training for everybody, or enriching the value of this training, or education, or just learning enrichment throughout the entire company.

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And implementing policies that affect everyone. Even if you don't have an autistic employee on your team.

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If every team is creating an inclusive environment, creating a supportive environment for neurodiverse employees, whether or not they have one, that creates the culture that you want to have throughout the entire company.

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That way, if, and, when an autistic person does end up on your team, the environment, they need, the mindset is already there to help your employees feel like they're ready to go from day one. The last thing you want to do is say, oh, I have an autistic employee, now I have to go for this training and it takes about six months to actually get anything done by the time you do. I mean, I've already burned out and left.

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So, starting this is starting. The product road to inclusion starts early. It doesn't have to happen in reaction to an autistic employee coming on, it should almost preempt it and come before.

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Yes, that proactive component of creating an inclusive workplace, the workplace of belonging, I love that. Thank you.

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So, as we've talked about strategies, there, many elements that were already kind of mentioned that really connect to this next question. And Carolyn actually already kind of touched on it very briefly, And that is around universal design.

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Carolyn, can you kind of talk a little bit about how you might help other organizations be more accessible? And if you could talk a little bit about what that universal design is as well, that would be really great to hear.

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Yeah.

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I mean, I think it starts with some of the things that have already been said, Lyric's metaphor with the garden, which I want to expand on a little bit and Shea talking about, we're not just doing this as a one-off, right? We're doing this as an organization.

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So, the idea behind for, I mean, I don't mean to be pedantic, for those of you, who are very well aware of what universal design is, But the idea is, is the garden, right?

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If the flower is not growing in that garden, are we like, forget it. I'm going to just get rid of this flower. No, we're gonna change the soil. We're gonna put it in the light, we're going to do whatever we need to do. We're gonna change the environment. We're not going to change the flower.

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So, Universal design is all about changing the environment, not the individual.

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Universal design is the idea that if what we're doing for our neurodivergent talent is helpful for them, it's helpful for everyone. Obviously, you know, the classic example that everyone always gives us. Universal design is wheel chair cuts, curb cuts, right, for wheelchair users that we all benefit from in a variety of ways.

25:09

So, when we are working with employers, especially employers who are honest about that, they may not have any experience that they're aware of in supporting neurodivergent talent. We want to start with this concept of universal design. If we if we are to create workplaces that are accessible for neurodivergent talent, it's going to make us all better in the workplace. And so what does that mean? Some of the, you know, basic strategies are what we a little bit of what we already talked about, right?

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So, having very clear job roles, having very clear expectations, on, when you're going to have performance, How you're going to be performed, How are you going to get things done? What are the due dates for what's going to be done? All those things that require actually being a good manager, or what we would think of as universal design. Also, what does inclusion look like, right? We want to be inclusive of everyone so we're not just a neurodivergent person. We're also a neurodivergent, LGBTQ, and person of color. Right?

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And so, I think that, um, if we can create those environments, where, what we're. We're not just doing it for this initiative, or not just doing it for this one person. We're doing it for the culture is the basis of everything we're doing. When we're walking in and talking to employers. And then what we find is good employers are already doing a lot of this stuff themselves, right? They're already doing this.

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We just have to possibly shift how we're doing some of it, to make sure that we're doing it well, Um, yeah.

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The idea of I just want to touch on this, on this: this piece that we were talking about before.

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Um, the idea that we want to provide environments real-time, that provide feedback, real-time is, is, I'm just gonna say that to me is one of the most important parts of this universal design piece. Because what we find is when things don't work is when miscommunication happens, there's a misunderstanding for a variety of reasons on both sides of the equation, and then it starts to go sell, Right? So, that's, I'm just using that as an example of what would probably be one of the most important pieces, and then what I said earlier, making sure all your pieces along the way are accessible for everyone, right, that's part of Universal Design.

27:43

Thank you, And I think, Lyriq, you also have some examples of customizing one's environment and the workplace. Can you talk a little bit more about that, too?

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Yeah, so the communication is a big thing, especially for autistic people, but then there's also other considerations for authentic and other neurodivergent brains. Autistic people, we have a lot of sensory things. So, you know, for me, I need to be able to work remotely or work in a quiet space on my own, but, that's not just an autistic thing.

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Thinking about universal design, even people like, and even light sunlight, for example, Some native people like ADHD, or sometimes need that chaos and background noise that I can't focus with, because I can't turn it out. Like, one of my best friends is ADHD, autistic, but she actually like, needs more of that, to like as like a sensory stimuli, but that's too much stimuli for me.

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So like, it's important to think about, even people with the same diagnosis can have very different needs.

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But then also looking at it outside of Autism are Neurodiverse general, your, your performers who love to work in this open office with all the chaos and all other co-workers around them making noise all the time and loved and thrive in that.

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At times, gonna need places to go quietly focus on work and not be distracted.

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Like, everyone's going to need quiet time to complete something. Maybe they're up against a deadline. Maybe they're stressed out. You know, maybe it's something they don't know how to do, you know, and so there are situations where these things, you know, can benefit everyone. Not just your neighbors or people having places where people can work quietly, having places where people can escape and take a quiet break. Having a culture where, you know, if some people are more efficient working in like little little spurts and then taking breaks between and letting people pace themselves.

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Because that's something else for me, letting me adapt my own schedule.

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Because, you know, I, depending on what I'm doing, because the tasks I'm doing or sometimes more difficult for me, even if they're simple for other people, when I'm doing something that's harder for me, just like any other human. It takes more energy, more mental energy, and I get worn down faster. And it takes me longer because I'm not proficient at a skill versus doing something I'm proficient at is sometimes energizing. I can sometimes do it for 12 hours straight and not run out of energy.

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And if I'm in my niche, I'm doing really well, but sometimes we have to do stuff that's not really like that skill, do assets, That's work. You know. Sometimes you have to. But so letting me like kind of be able to pay my schedule around those things like after I do something that's really draining and tedious even if it's easy for you. I might need to take a break. Because I'm done mentally done. Until like letting people flex their schedules and things like that and see a good example of this real-time during the pandemic is you know, that organization that I've mentioned.

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I don't know if I mentioned I work, or I worked for a consulting firm, and they let us all work remote eventually, but I was the first remote foy.

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And they hadn't had anybody remote before that. And at this company, when I said, hey, this is something I need as an accommodation.

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Instead of saying, this isn't how we do things, which is something you get a lot. When you're trying to build an environment that wasn't built for your needs, this company took the stance.

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Okay, I don't know how this works, tell me how to make it work. And, I had plenty of ideas, because you know, I worked part-time remotely before it had been really well for me, so I just kind of told them exactly how we could do it.

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And eventually, the whole team was remote, because it worked so well for everyone.

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And during COVID, when nobody was allowed to work face to face with anyone anymore.

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That fall before, we had just closed our physical office, and so we knew because of accommodating you know one employee, how to work remotely. Um, and it, that the, being flexible of people's schedules, wasn't just beneficial for those of us who needed to, like, change our work a little bit; it was beneficial for parents who suddenly had kids at home, and they had to be a teacher, while they were working, and taking Zoom calls. So, it let us flex around our lives. It's letting people bring their full person to work, instead of saying, oh, it doesn't matter what you've got going on at home, you're at work no, you gotta leave it when you shut the door. Which that's not true. Like if you're dealing with, like maybe your your, your parents are getting older and they're sick, or you know, you've got a loved one in the hospital, or you have a migraine.

32:17

Uh, hopefully if you have a migraine you don't have to come to work. Nobody should expect you to be the best version of yourself. But I've been in workplaces where it's like, you got stuff to do, it doesn't matter like if you have a deadline. **** your migraine.

32:28

And it's like that's not a nice way to treat people universally. And it's gonna destroy your neurodivergent talent. Like we're like the canaries in the coal mine, we can't handle it when these places and situations are so toxic, because the environments already weren't designed for us.

32:44

So, like, let's give everyone more flexibility to say, hey, this isn't working for me, I need to change and flex this a little bit so that it works for me.

32:58

And if it's not going to cost you a lot of money, because a lot of the things you can do to make people more comfortable cost nothing.

33:06

Why not flex and let people have what they need to be the best versions of themselves in your spaces?

33:13

I just want to say one thing quickly, because you've got me thinking about something, is, I don't remember what it was, but it's this idea.

33:22

I think it came with whether we're a sensory seeking or sensory, need sensory deprivation of what we want to focus on is what is the end goal. Whether it's in an interview, what are the skills we're looking for. Whether it's while we're on the job, what is the it we're trying to get someone to do. And we shouldn't care if they need to be in a dark room,

33:41

humming tunes to themselves, or if they need to like, be standing up against a wall and feeling like a fabric, that is you know, going to make them the sensory input that they need. We, we've gotta not focus on how we get there, and we've got to focus on the end goal of what it is, whether it's in the hiring phase, or once we have them work.

34:01

I'm going to be quiet now. Are you watching me? That's creepy. No, I'm joking. That's a great add, fantastic. Just in regards to, I think a lot of organizations get stuck on how work is done versus the angle of the job just getting done. Whatever way is best for the individual. And what I loved as well about your story Lyric is that they pulled you in, they wanted to hear from you.

34:29

And I think that, and that's something that I personally advocate a lot for in my DEI space, is that if we're going to make policies, changes, anything for a specific, especially for a specific individual or identity group, we need to hear from those people. We shouldn't be making those decisions without them. And I think that also applies to that universal design aspect, as well, because it adds to that flexibility that is needed for all of those people that are going to be impacted by those changes.

35:00

And so, that leads perfectly to, like, hey, we've talked a lot about what to do.

35:06

But Tiffany, as an organizational psychologist, I want to hear about what not to do. Like, what are some things that organizations, organizations, should just not do?

35:17

Well, a lot. I think, a couple of things just to add on to that, which goes into the not do, is, because you have somebody who says, this isn't working right for me. Like in Lyric's situation, like, I can't work here, and they asked her, okay, what do we need to do? A lot of times, the individual doesn't know.

35:37

Just because I know something's not working doesn't mean I have the solutions.

35:42

And sometimes, things are working until they're not working, and that's the episodic nature of it.

35:49

So, I think that's a lot of times what we do wrong is we think one is one and done.

35:54

We promote we want to be the experts in ourselves, but I'm not the expert and myself in every environment, and every situation.

36:01

So, let's look at the fact when you move,

36:04

like we're working with some law teams.

36:07

They move a lot from partner to partner, or different groups.

36:11

So, every time you move, you have to establish a brand-new operating style with the individual you're with. And, as much as we always say, come with your own manual, not everybody wants to read your manual. And, also, does your manual now need to be changed, because that way,

that person works best themselves or manages best, or you're working with the external client, Like, those all things come into play.

36:34

So, what I think organizations do wrong is they don't, they're not agile, and I think they also just don't realize that things are always changing.

36:46

Nothing is static in the work we do.

36:48

So that's probably one of the biggest, I think, mindset mistakes.

36:52

Um, when you're, once again, those check ins. When you're trying to find out what's going wrong and right, and that's part of your processes, that's part of your culture, it's part of your universal design that we all check it off, and you catch those things when they're not going right. And you work towards finding solutions that work for you, and potentially other people in your group.

37:12

Plus, more importantly, as a manager, as you're learning these things, you're learning to be a better manager.

37:20

So, something we're realizing is that companies are trying to really focus on one level of diversity at a time.

37:31

But diversity in some ways, like I'm, I, personally, the way I am, I am constantly a female. I don't, that's something that's constant at me. So, that's not a diversity of mine that's going to change. So, you can always address that identity in me.

37:46

But I'm bipolar.

37:48

That's an episodic thing. So, if I am great today, tomorrow, I could not be great.

37:56

And that's going to change. So, the difference when you have neurodivergence, and neurodivergence you'll find, you know, individuals who are autistic, ADHD.

38:06

Or are autistic people.

38:09

They are always compounded sometimes with different mental health things that happen, things outside, just the basic you know autistic traits, there's lots more layers to that.

38:22

And so, when you're looking at embracing the diversity of the mind and the individual, which is what I call neurodivergence or your mental health, mental illness.

38:31

You need to take into account that it's not consistent.

38:34

And so, when we are looking at diversity programs right now, we're doing them wrong because we're looking for cookie cutters. Okay.

38:44

You're black, you're not black. You're women, you're not women.

38:47

You know, you record, you know, those things, we just, it's not that straightforward. And so, when we're trying to take this DEI cookie cutter model and now trying to bring it into cognitive diversities, it doesn't work.

38:59

And so, we have to stop thinking about initiatives. We need to stop doing that.

39:05

So, more importantly too, I think, someone brought up, is that education component.

39:08

So, we know. Let's just tell you, people we said 20%. Two out of every 10 people you hire are going to probably need to work differently than the way you have it now.

39:19

And that's everybody probably can work differently, but for sure 20% is probably going to need to work differently. You know this is coming, so why are you gonna wait for a great employee to come in, and then train your staff?

39:31

So, you need to prepare your environment for the things you know are coming. So, everything we do with an organization,

39:37

So, they say we want to increase the attracting, you know, neurodivergent talent. We don't see a hiring initiative. We want to increase our attraction to them by sourcing differently, sourcing through Mentra, something else, because that's great. Let's prepare your environment first.

39:52

Do you

39:54

39:54

have people who understand these things? Are you educating people?

40:00

Are you teaching people to be person centered leaders?

40:04

Because everything we've said is about that manager.

40:06

The research says left and right managers make or break it.

40:10

So, as much as you may see as an organization, we support it, you know at the top. You get to the individual.

40:17

If they're not given the tools, they need to do that job, you're going to fail and you know what, when you fail, when you're hiring people that you're not able to support, but you're saying you are, those are lives of people that you're impacting.

40:32

And as a manager, you're going to be taxed and emotionally taxed from having an environment you don't know and have the skills to manage.

40:41

So that's why it's so important to stop looking at DEI in a cookie cutter way.

40:47

It's so much more complex, and unfortunately, and I'll stop on this because I keep going forever.

40:53

Unfortunately, on this, we have that diversity fatigue. So now all the people in your organizations are going, okay, what are you worried about this week?

41:00

You know what's big on the news this week?

41:01

You know what I mean, and now we're tired, and now we can't focus. We just know that's gonna change tomorrow. Oh, we're going to lay off today the economy's bad so now we're not focusing on those efforts.

41:12

Well, these are people. Our people in our organizations are the only constant thing we have, and they're not coming and going, and they're going to add effort to things we can change. That's why I love being an organizational psychologist because it's about those people in your organizations. You have to prepare for what's coming; you're going to have multiple generations. That's a fact. And you're going to have neurodivergence, that's a fact. So, start doing it now and putting into the culture of your organization.

41:37

That's all I'm going to say about that because I could keep going. I want to jump in really quick before we move on, because I know times counting down on us. But the other, like really quick, just really quickly, thing I see that, especially managers and people do wrong and organizations, is instead of like when something goes wrong, you know, when there's a problem, when someone misses a deadline, when something's late or when something doesn't go as planned, a lot of managers look for someone to blame.

42:04

Instead of, like, looking at, like, okay, where where was the problem? Is there an obstacle that needs to be removed, and how can I help, as a leader, to help remove that obstacle? And so, when you come at it automatically with blame, looking at who you can point fingers at instead of trying to come from a place of understanding, and how can we prevent this in the future instead

of blame? It also, it kind of stifles people. So, what, regardless of neurotype, but especially with neurodivergent people, because it a lot of us kind of as Tiffany said, we come with our particular traumas, and a lot of us have experienced trauma with being blamed for things that are sometimes, like, outside of our control. Like, you know, maybe we had a bad day or something happened, and then we couldn't function at the level we normally can.

42:52

And so, it takes away that emotional safety when we get blamed all the time for things.

42:59

Great add. Thank you for jumping in with that, you know, and I heard a couple of times, as well, from Doctor Tiffany in regards to preparation. And this is a shameless plug for your ERGs and BRGS, like, if you have ERG and BRGS that sit for, according to this, for this topic.

43:17

Words are hard. Specifically, in regards to neurodivergence, or just people with disabilities, like, lean on them, right? Like, that's what they're there for. They're there to provide community for folks within the organization, but they're also there to advocate. They're also built by people with those types of identities. So lean on those ERGs and BRGS of your organization. And if you don't have them, I think all of us here,

43:45

we can probably help you. I think all of us have that ability and capacity to be able to meet with you and your, your leadership to be able to help you with that.

43:54

But give them money.

43:55

Yes. Chelsea, there are so many people who come to me and say, oh, we were able to start a BRG or an ERG, or whatever it may be.

44:04

But we don't have any money.

44:06

We have nothing.

44:07

So you need to give tools once again. So I just had to throw that in here that far too often.

44:13

Yes, invest. Invest in them.

44:16

We have one question left, and then we will move with our remaining time over to Q&A. And this one's for shea. Um, you know, we've talked a lot about the employers, but as a former recruiter, I'd love to have something for job seekers that are on this call too. You know, I just think that it's really important. I know that there's some that are probably attending this call. So, what advice would you give candidates with autism during their job searches? And what else, what other advice would you give candidates that might get the job, now what, you know, what do they do for that to continue to build their development and to also build a potential for promotion in their field? Sure, so, in terms of the job search itself, something that I believe in

pretty strongly, and this may be a hot take or a spicy take, but I do believe that disclosing or describing your neurodiversity pretty early on, works to your advantage during the interview process. Because either the company is going to want to work with you to make something happen,

45:16

or they're ableists, and they don't like you and at that point, you know to back away anyway.

45:21

So really my most important advice is where appropriate to talk about your being neurodivergence to your recruiters, you can get the support you need as early as possible, so it has context for them. And the right company will be able to support you, and get you what you need to be successful, and help you for the interview, for your first 90 days, and get you to where you have to go. And a bad company will fumble completely, and then you know that is not the place for you. So, it only works to your advantage to know either, this is a good fit for me, or it is not a good fit for me.

45:53

When it comes to, you land a job, then what? Being able to advocate for yourself to management is a really important deal. I think we live in a world where there's not a whole lot of neurodivergent leaders out there.

46:06

I don't know that, I myself don't know that many people who are autistic and are leaders. Speaking about the ERGs for a second.

46:14

Another way to really amplify the impact of an ERG, or BRG, is to have the leaders of those organizations, those communities, be the people they represent.

46:24

Be it an autistic person, a disabled person, whoever it is, and really helping put them at the top, because that really opens up so much opportunity for folks underneath to see, wow, here's this leader.

46:37

This important decision maker who is out and open about their neurodiversity, about stability, whatever it is, I want to be open and talk about my neurodiversity, just like them.

46:49

So to answer the question, it's advocating for yourself, understanding what career path in your company looks like, and working with your manager, to ensure that, that career path is still open to you, and not closed off to you, because of neurodiversity, as it should not be.

47:06

But, really, just having that open transparency with your manager, to say, this is where I want to go. How are we going to get there?

47:16

Go ahead Lyric, I think you had additional. Yeah, I just wanted to chime in, too, on that real quick. From personal experience, disclosing, there is a sweet spot to when you are disclosing in the interview process. Unfortunately, especially with being autistic and different forms of

neurodivergents, there are a lot of stigmas and stereotypes about some of these different brain types that we can have.

47:37

And so, I've found that, and like I, I've tried it, like, I did a social experiment when I was looking for work before I decided to just do consulting full-time, where I had a resume that got every single callback previously. I just changed it by putting a little actually autistic sticker on it and sent it out, and I got, after like 60 to 70 applications, not a single callback.

48:03

Yeah. So the sweet spot is disclosing after they've met you.

48:08

After they've spoken to you and after they see you as a person, because otherwise they might see you as a stereotype first, if they don't know, which is sad. And I used to be, like, tell everybody, anybody, get, does it has a problem with it, doesn't deserve you, and I still agree with that.

48:24

But like for me, even like the job I had, that was very accommodating and was willing to shape their environment for me.

48:34

They did know me first because we both sat on the board of a specific autism charity together, so they knew who I was, and they knew a little bit more about autism because of that, too, which is good, too, but, and that can also depend on what kinds of positions and what field you're in. Some fields are going to be naturally more neuroinclusive a lot of the technology, engineering and, like, artistic creative fields are going to be more inclusive, because they are more aware of, like, what their main producers are. It's the creative folks, you know and a lot of us are very creative. But like certain fields, like I was like applying and other like similar roles to VP and executive level roles, very different career fields you're looking at. So, I would definitely say disclose, but I would let them have met you first, and they've seen you. They've spoken to you at least. So they have a person they can tie that to so you're not just a stereotype to them.

49:34

That's great too, because that actually destigmatizes right, because now they are, you're debunking a stereotype that they might have on that diagnosis.

49:44

Great, thank you Shea and Lyric, Thank you. We have a little bit of time left. And with that being said, I am going to move. We're gonna go ahead and move into the Q&A portion, so Kat I know you've been helping just to kind of funnel those Q&A questions. Do you mind starting by reading the first question for our panelists to answer. Absolutely.

50:07

Sorry, and panelists, just jump in if you hear something you want to add, just jump right in.

50:12

Perfect. So I want to thank everyone as a reminder, you can submit your questions through the questions pane, in the control panel because time is limited. We may not get through all your questions but they will be addressed after the event, by e-mail. So let's, I'm going to start with a lot of accolades. This was a great topic as you can see how much time we have left for Q&A, everyone loves your experience and appreciates you, so I'm gonna start with that. So, first

question, I'm a high school teacher. My administrators know I have autism and ADHD, the cognitive overload is literally killing me. How should I help my administrators understand how I feel and how they can make our school more accessible and positive as a workplace for neurodivergent teachers?

50:58

We work a lot with school districts, in general, for the job.

51:06

The individuals that are supposed to be in these school districts, helping the students that are in that position, they need to be, you know, practicing what they preach, but I find that situation you're talking about really goes into everything.

51:19

You're in an environment where you think that, hey come on this is what we do, you know, but you're not doing it.

51:24

So, I think being able to, in this case, is have that relationship.

51:31

Again, with the people you report to, your administrators. And maybe bring in the fact that we're supporting students. And we're teaching the students to self-advocate for themselves as they leave here. So, you know, we start in our school, we want to teach our students how to learn best. And then we gotta teach our students how do we work best. Why aren't we practicing what we preach?

51:50

You know, I'm a great example. We should be doing this. So, almost trying to push that you know, universal design perspective.

51:57

But if you're getting that cognitive overload in your job, I think maybe seen too if you can have a coach in some ways and have them do support. Sometimes you need somebody to come in who can look at it with a fresh eyes.

52:10

I mean, we do it, we get coaches all the time, or we coach people all the time. Fresh eyes to come in and see what you're not seeing. And sometimes there's coaches that have more of a neurodivergent lens on them. So they can know that the different way the the mind works, and where it may be coming in. You can ask them for that type of accommodation.

52:26

And they may give you the words or the opportunity to be able to, to explain to your administrators what you can do to be a better inclusive, you know, environment, which will also help your students. Because, you know, in education, as long as you're helping the students too, and be more efficient and budgets, you're gonna get bigger support. So unfortunately, you do have to do what I call the ethos, pathos, logos. You could do the value proposition. You have to tell them how it works. But you also need to give some solutions in your situation, because you are an educator. And you need to appreciate the fact they want to be educated, because that's a field they are in. Remember, they're also limited on money. So you have to go find solutions probably that are going to be affordable, and bring them to you.

53:07

Otherwise, it probably won't go anywhere. I don't know if that made any sense at all. And then the problem that's happening in school districts for everyone, right? So it's, you know, people are overworked and having cognitive overload. And so it's it's, I just want to reiterate that universal design, whatever you come up with is going to benefit everyone.

53:29

But it also ties to one of those specific things we were talking about of how to make the workplace more accessible, is getting support on creating a schedule that works for you, or folks like yourself are in the same position. Right. That is what.

53:45

that is what a good manager should be doing because part of the overload can be avoided if we have, you know, Tiffany said it as a coach and the coach could do this. But helping figure out the schedule of how you're going to get things done in a way of when your brain is ready.

54:04

Or if it's, you know, maybe, you know, is there someone you can like, if it's administrative things, are overloading you, like, what is it that the overloading you? Because sometimes depending on your job functions. They may not, the things that are overloading you might not be essential to your job function, it might be things that maybe someone else could help with.

54:31

Great, I think we have time for one more question.

54:35

Okay, perfect. The idea that neurodivergent and autistic professionals they face challenges in traditional leadership positions doesn't necessarily mean they aren't a good match for leadership roles. Is it possible that conventional leadership standards and expectations in many workplaces may not align well with the unique strengths...

54:55

Excuse me. ...unique strengths and traits often found in neurodivergent individuals.

55:02

I think the really quick the leadership styles where you're not a servant leader, really don't do well for neurodivergent brains. My last role before I decided to stay on my own forever, and I don't know if I'll go in house anywhere again, because that [*Inaudible*] was that I was the VP of marketing for an organization. So I had people that reported to me, but, you know, having my neurodivergent leadership style be respected and embraced, actually, really contributed to a healthier, happier team. Because I, you know, communicate in these ways that are more universally inclusive, because I'm used to adapting my communication to other people's communication styles, and not having people stretch to meet me. So, it sets a different standard. I think what we need is more neurodivergent leaders to be open with the fact that they're neurodivergent.

55:59

Because I think neurodivergent leaders are already out there now and autistic leaders are out there now.

56:04

They just may not know they are autistic because maybe they're leaning into their skills really well and they're avoiding their weaknesses because as a leader you can kind of find other team members to kind of do the things that aren't your wheelhouse. Well, you know, so we need people to kind of say, hey, I am a neurodivergent leader so people can see how we actually already impacting your organizations whether you realize we are or are not.

56:24

Wanted to jump in too, I just actually put a paper in yesterday.

56:32

Nancy Doyle and I are working on a presentation about being a neurodivergent leader, Nancy's with genius within. So, what we find is, and there's a lot of studies that have come out that says like all these popular leadership theories, you know, transformative or transformational, all these things, they don't always work for an autistic individual. So the studies are showing us, these aren't working, but currently we're still doing them.

56:57

So we're going to talk about how you know, you take like, certainly leadership styles and how they're contradict the strengths of a neurodivergent individual.

57:06

So we're, this gets to another issue I'm working with, with Tim Bogus at Vanderbilt and Jennifer Spore at La Trobe in Australia is the business schools. So there were making leaders that are not inclusive, we're not teaching our leaders that are coming out.

57:22

So you know where people are coming out of these business schools don't have the skills to be a neurodivergent leader or leader to neurodivergent. And the second challenge we're finding is that the business schools themselves are not cohesive to having people who are neurodiverse in the programs because of the various ways it's taught, the social, you know, capital, the oppression management that goes on. All these things that they're expecting. Once again, these norms to go in, so we're not able to get people out of the systems that have some other form of management skills and the social networking skills that go into business school to get to those positions.

57:59

So those are two issues we're looking at, i'm looking at as a researcher because it's a systemic thing that goes on. Like, we have to go back a little bit farther into those things because they don't work.

58:09

One size does not fit all. It's pretty much what it comes down to. And we have to stop looking at it like that.

58:17

Thank you, Tiffany and Lyric. And I know we're at time.

58:21

I believe Shea you wanted to add something to this, and Carolyn has to hop right at the minute mark. Shea, do you want to include what you have to say really quick, so that I can get captured on the recording? All I'm gonna say is, I see a career coach and that has been super helpful for me as a neurodivergent leader. So, if there are people out there who are looking for that development, and want something kind of unique and specific, I recommend seeing a career

coach. Different from an executive functioning coach, it was specifically someone to help you with your leadership style, and what's going to do in your career.

58:51

Love it. Thank you. Thank you so much. I'm gonna pass, pass it back to Kat who's going to close this out. Thank you, everybody. And thank you again to our panelists.

59:00

Thank you so much Chelsea, Shea, Carolyn, and Tiffany, and Lyric. And thank you everyone for joining us today. This will conclude OAR's fall webinar series. Once you close out of today's event, you will receive an exit survey, and we would appreciate if you could complete that and provide your feedback.

59:17

Everyone will also receive a follow up e-mail today with their certificate of attendance, so on behalf of the Organization for Autism Research, thank you for joining us and have a great rest of your day.

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