

• 5 MYTHS •

about autistic employees debunked

There are many myths and prejudices about autism in the workplace. Employers and colleagues often have somewhat stereotypical ideas of autism. We, therefore, collected common prejudices with the aim of debunking them. For this purpose, we talked to various autistic individuals.

Myth 1:

AN AUTISTIC EMPLOYEE CANNOT FUNCTION IN A TEAM.

Some autistic individuals work well and like to work in a team, while it requires a lot of energy for others. Also, every team is different. A lot depends on the dynamics of the work team.

Chelsy (28 years old, secretary): 'Since I started working, I have worked in a team. A colleague told me recently that we are able to get a good idea of each other and our talents complement each other, which allows us to do good teamwork.'

Steven (32 years old, bioinformatics): 'Not everybody can fit into any team. For example, in a team where the content of the work is central, where roles and agreements are clear, where the strengths of the employees are utilized, an autistic colleague is actually a huge advantage.'



Koen (37 years old, production): 'It depends on the openness to neurodiverse personalities, on the mutual willingness to make efforts to improve the relationship. If there is openness to let the autistic employee grow, then a lot of possibilities can open.'



Marcia (41 years old, social work): 'Working in a team sometimes requires some extra effort from me. However, working in a team has been very inspiring and motivating. It does depend very much on the team I have to work in. I sense the atmosphere in a team very quickly and when the motivation of some team members is low, it is more difficult for me to work together. I can work very well with people who are driven and want to move forward.'

Ann (47 years old, laboratory): 'Managers do not need to have specific knowledge on autism, but they do need to have a degree of empathy. Being willing and able to empathize with the other person is worth a lot.'

Myth 2:

AN AUTISTIC EMPLOYEE CANNOT WORK IN A BUSY AND STRESSFUL ENVIRONMENT.

It takes a lot for some autistic employees to function in a busy environment, while others are not bothered by it. Positive stress can help to focus and move forward, other forms of stress can make someone have a mental block or burn out.

Evi (45 years old, government): 'It's hard for me to work in a landscape office every day. My work is usually done well, but it especially bothers me in the evenings. Now that I make more use of the quiet rooms and by working from home from time to time, I have more energy left in the evenings. I can certainly handle stress as I set myself regular deadlines. Sometimes these deadlines can be quite short, nonetheless the evaluation of my work is good.'

Marcia (41 years old, social work): 'What causes stress for someone with autism may not be stressful at all for someone without autism, and vice versa. So, it is important to take this into account.'

Dirk (61 years old, government): 'What causes stress differs from person to person and does not always lie in the work environment. As an autistic employee I can focus well on a task that really suits me. I then get so caught up in the flow that I experience it more as a form of mindfulness than as stress.'

Koen (37 years old, production): 'People with and without autism are not two different species of people. Autistic individuals can also enjoy positive stress, a tight focus on goals that need to be met. I can then work on a task with complete dedication. However, when it becomes too busy, it can quickly become a little overwhelming'

Ann (47 years old, laboratory): 'Some autistic people work in the ICT sector, whilst other autistic people have entirely different interests. Don't force them. Every sector needs diversity.'



Marcia (41 years old, social work): 'Everything depends on the interests. I work in the social sector and autism is my strength. I have a good sense of the needs of autistic children. I am also good at introducing their parents to the world of autism.'

Koen (37 years old, production): 'A few years ago I took a course in program logic. Theoretically very interesting, but this form of abstract thinking was totally alien to me and I couldn't get a grip on it. My talent lies more in other skills.'

Steven (32 years old, bioinformatics): 'Some autistic people work in the ICT sector, because their brain function often lends itself perfectly to that. But not everyone works in that sector. This is good for other sectors, because an autistic view is often particularly complementary.'

Myth 3:

AN AUTISTIC EMPLOYEE PREFERS TO WORK IN THE ICT SECTOR.

Yes, there are autistic ICT professionals, but autistic people are (widely) represented in every sector.



Chelsy (28 years old, secretary): 'I don't think that's for me. Numbers are not my thing. Give me something creative instead. I like to keep myself busy with the internal and external communication within our organization.'

Myth 4:

AN AUTISTIC EMPLOYEE IS NOT FLEXIBLE.

There are autistic individuals who are good with change or just love change. For some, switch time, announcement of or some clarification on change is helpful.

Dirk (61 years old, government): 'I have surprised several employers with my flexibility, my willingness to step out of my comfort zone or go the extra mile. But I do sometimes need some time to adjust to transitions.'

Steven (32 years old, bioinformatics): 'Just because someone may have a higher perception of change because of autism, does not mean that someone also has a higher aversion to change. For example, I just allow myself the time to deal with change. I even love change: it makes my life interesting'

Evi (45 years old, government): 'Depending on the situation my degree of flexibility will change. My manager's experience is that she can easily give me ad hoc assignments and assume that they will then be carried out qualitatively. However, if I am under a lot of stress or not having my day, I tend to be less flexible.'



Chelsy (28 years, secretary): 'Sometimes I just like a bit of a challenge: as a secretarial assistant, no day is the same. There's always a last minute task or a phone call. I've learned to deal with this in practice.'

Marcia (41 years old, social work): 'In my home environment I am less flexible and I have various routines. At work, on the other hand, I have to be very flexible. Every day is different. I sometimes have fewer prejudices and am just more open to new initiatives, because throughout my life I have trained myself to be flexible in different situations.'

Dirk (61 years old, government): 'You invest a bit more in the beginning, but in the long run you save a lot because the work is done qualitatively and according to the rules.'

Ann (47 years old, laboratory): 'Sometimes you need a little more time to grow, but on the other hand you have a much more loyal employee who is not likely to leave quickly. So, less time and energy is needed for the training of new employees'

Marcia (41 years old, social work): 'Appreciation and respect ensure that I can handle a lot. It is very important for me to be allowed to 'be'. That they see me as a person and not as disabled. When they use my strengths, I flourish and go for it 200% and I need less support.'

Evi (45 years old, government): 'My career coach takes on some of the support. As much as possible, I try not to burden my colleagues with problems that are not work-related. I mainly talk about that with my psychologist. I think I save my employer time and energy, because I understand and tackle certain tasks, which many people have difficulty with, more easily and quickly.'



Chelsy (28 years old, secretary): 'I don't think an autistic individual should necessarily take up more time or energy, because we tend to be very driven employees. I enjoy my job immensely and as a result I have already taught myself many things, often outside of the employer's time.'

Myth 5:
AN AUTISTIC EMPLOYEE COSTS THE EMPLOYER A LOT OF TIME AND ENERGY.

Every employee requires time and energy from an employer in different ways. When the strengths of an autistic employee are utilised, the employer will gain a lot in return.

Everyone is different.
 Try to keep an open mind and try not to reason or act based on certain prejudices.
 It is important to talk to and listen to each other.
 Ask your colleagues what they need to feel good within their working environment.

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