

You have neurodivergent colleagues

(You just don't realize it)

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You have neurodivergent colleagues

About me

I am:

A senior leader in Red Hat

A late diagnosed autistic person

Former chair of Red Hat's neurodiversity employee resource group

I am not:

A scientist, a doctor, an or expert in neurology

You have neurodivergent colleagues

About me

I can be:

Blunt

Honest

Direct

Impatient

Judgmental

You have neurodivergent colleagues

About me

I'm also:

Empathetic

Sensitive

A deep listener

Easily wounded

Compassionate

Often confused

You have neurodivergent colleagues

Masking

But:

I have learned to hide much of my “normal” personality and adapt to something others find easier to work with.

This is common among neurodivergent people.

And it's quite complicated and layered.

Basic terms

Neurodiversity: The diversity of human minds

Neurodiverse: A group of people in which multiple neurocognitive styles are represented (likely any group of people)

Neurodivergent (ND): Having a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of “normal.”

Neurotypical (NT): Having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards of “normal.”

On data

How many people are neurodivergent?

- Example: In the US, official stats are
4.4% of adults have ADHD and 2.2% are autistic
- But we don't really know
 - Many are not diagnosed
 - Diagnostic criteria have changed
 - Diagnostic process is flawed

You have neurodivergent colleagues

On data

Someone is neurodivergent **if they identify that way**

Neurodivergence is only in response to a common sense of “normal”

You have neurodivergent colleagues on your team

Deficits vs assets

Deficit or medical model:

ADHD, autism, and other neurodivergent conditions are a problem to be fixed

Asset or social model:

Neurodivergence is natural variation that can be accepted and accommodated

When you need to plan

People without executive functioning disability can see the path to most everyday things and how to get the brain and body there.



When they need to plan

People with executive functioning disability cannot access the stairs. They do not have the same journey as everyone else. They need help to get over the wall.



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Appendix

What to do?

- Actions to support ND people are helpful to all people
- Every person is different, ND or NT, and there is no list of approaches that work for everyone
- In general:
 - Be curious
 - Be accepting
 - Be flexible

Ideas for managers

- Create a social agreement with your team
- Be curious and seek to learn more when you find yourself judging
- Be accepting of how people are, even if they make you uncomfortable
- Consider the impact of when and how you communicate:
 - Put tasks and expectations in writing, prioritized and with a deadline
 - Check in, but don't interrupt, and don't micromanage
 - Use methods that work for your employee, rather than methods that you prefer
 - Don't schedule meetings on short notice
- When delegating, play to strengths, not convenience
- Give employees some control over their working environment

If someone discloses

- Educate yourself and avoid relying on stereotypes
- Don't assume someone is less capable or that their neurodivergence impacts their ability
- Ask the employee how you can support them and what they need to be successful
- Develop a plan with the employee for avoiding “derailers”
- *Realize that any of the above apply equally well to all people not just ND people*

What they have

They see an insurmountable task with no way to scale the wall.



They feel broken, negative, and insecure because no one else is struggling. Everyone else is excited about the destination, but they don't know how to get there.

Whatever they say can often be translated to, "I just need to know that if I try, I won't make things worse."

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What they need

They need you to provide them with a structure they can mount.



They need you to build grips and footholds in the wall. They need a harness and a rope and leverage.

The first step to being a source of emotional support is to stop seeing yourself as a sparring partner and start seeing yourself as a spotter!

Just that small perceptive switch will be a huge relationship booster.



Ideas for colleagues

- Be accepting of how people are (eye contact, body movement, tone modulation, writing ability, “over sharing”)
- Offer to connect with colleagues 1:1 to talk about specific work items or just to get to know each other
 - Understand that people interpret questions differently - explain your intentions
 - Talk about how you can collaborate (best forms of communication, expectations, responsibilities)
- Politely ask for clarification rather than making assumptions
- Be conscious about when and how you interrupt colleagues

Virtual meetings

- Only have a meeting if there is no alternative way to communicate
- Always put agenda in meeting invite and include slides/materials in advance (and invite people to contribute to the agenda)
- Define/explain meeting etiquette and structure in the first few minutes
- Invite people to have their camera on or off
- Be thoughtful about recording
- Keep it short (give people breaks if meetings can't be short)
- If breakouts are used, make them highly structured and clarify ground rules

Virtual meetings

- Example meeting etiquette and structure - to be agreed on by participants
 - Use a social agreement
 - Use (and respect the use of) the raise hand feature to speak
 - Make comments either by raising your hand, or by entering them in the chat or QA box
 - Assign someone to monitor for raised hands, chat, and QA to bring attention to comments and questions posted
 - Assign a note taker
 - Capture and distribute notes and action items shortly after meeting
 - We will not record in order to ensure everyone is comfortable speaking openly
 - Or, we will record in order to ensure people not present can review as needed

Let's connect

Get in touch

Connect with me: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/samfw/>

Email me: sfolkwil@redhat.com

I would love to answer any questions or share ideas.

Resources

Read: We're Not Broken by Eric Garcia, a new, comprehensive look at the history of autism through today, from an autistic perspective

Refer to: NeuroClastic, an autistic and ND authored site with vast resources on all topics neurodiversity from the perspective of the ND community

Follow: #ActuallyAutistic hashtag on Twitter (and other platforms) to see the latest in thinking and ideas from the autistic community

Do: Social agreements or social contracts

About: <https://hbr.org/2012/04/to-ensure-great-teamwork-start>

How to: <https://openpracticelibrary.com/practice/social-contract/> or

<https://miro.com/miroverse/social-contract-kclzzxgvcq5ibbel/>