



EAP SUPERVISOR ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

January 2024



DEER OAKS PRESENTS

Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series

The Keys to Creating a Thriving Team Culture

Date: Monday, January 29, 2024
Time: 1:00 PM-2:00 PM CST

REGISTER

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MANAGING A NEURODIVERSE TEAM

What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the wide range of ways people experience and interact with the world and the differences in the way people think, learn, and process information:

- Neurodivergent people include autistic people and those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia (which affects word and symbol recognition), dyspraxia (which affects coordination and movement), and other differences in brain and nervous-system functions.
- Neurotypical people, by contrast, are those with what are considered "typical" brain and nervous system functions.
- Neurodiversity in the workplace is the inclusion and engagement of neurodivergent employees.

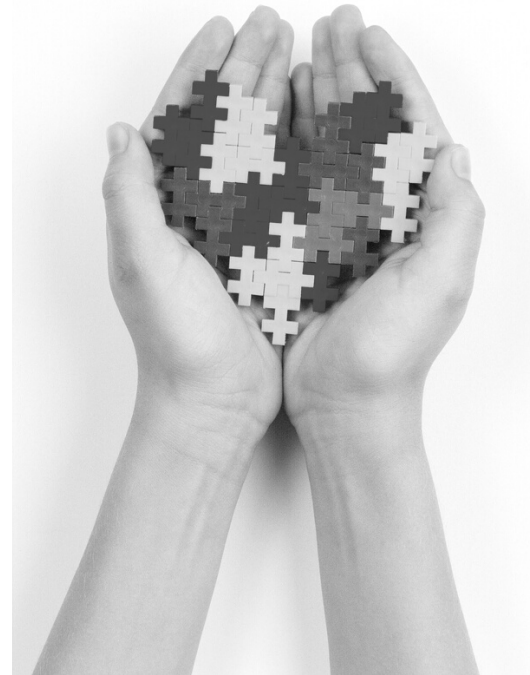
It is important to note that many neurodivergent people choose not to disclose their condition to their manager or colleagues. Also, many neurodivergent people do not have a medical diagnosis, which can be costly to obtain.

The Benefits of Neurodiversity at Work

As with other aspects of diversity, increasing neurodiversity at work brings new perspectives, insights, ideas, and skills to the work environment. Many neurodivergent people have unique strengths and abilities in areas such as pattern recognition, memory, mathematics, creativity, problem-solving, and focus. Yet traditional hiring and management practices have tended to overlook these assets and undervalue or exclude those who don't fit a neurotypical profile.

Neurodiversity at work harnesses the benefits of different ways of observing and thinking. Well-managed, teams with neurodivergent members can be more productive and better able to identify product and process improvement opportunities than teams made up solely of neurotypical employees.

The focus on the individual strengths and abilities required to manage a neurodiverse workforce can have benefits for neurotypical employees as well. Everyone gains when managers pay closer attention to what's unique about their employees and better align coaching, task assignments, and growth opportunities with individual differences.



Your Role as a Manager

Neurodivergent workers need support from their managers and colleagues to thrive. As a manager, and with your organization's backing, you are in a position to:

- Adapt the hiring process and your selection criteria to open the door to more neurodivergent employees.
- Place neurodivergent employees in roles that align with their strengths and abilities.
- Provide appropriate coaching and support to neurodivergent employees.
- Foster supportive and collaborative relationships among neurodivergent and neurotypical team members.

Ways to Build Engagement

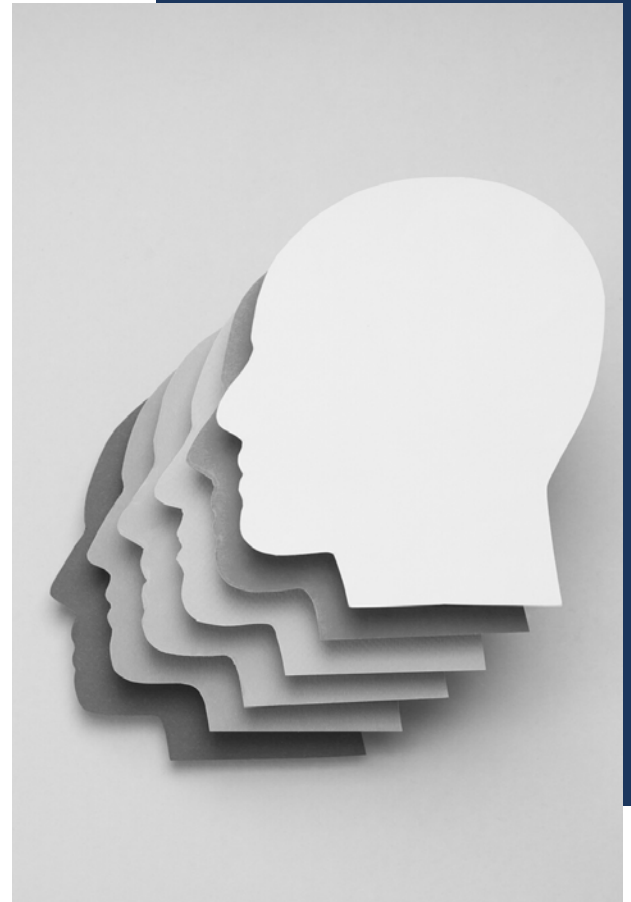
Here are some ways to build engagement and foster high performance when managing a neurodiverse team:

- **Seek help in learning about neurodiversity.** Don't assume that you understand the needs and abilities of your neurodivergent staff or potential hires. Find out if your organization can put you in touch with experts who can give you a better understanding of how your neurodivergent employees might perceive the world and think differently from you. Find out what other managers have learned in working with neurodiverse teams. Read about relevant neurodivergent conditions.
- **Adapt your hiring process to be more inclusive.** While neurodivergent people may have remarkable skills that could be valuable to your team, they may not have the typical range of assets you're used to looking for in the hiring process. They may not be team players or have strong communication skills, for example. They may not interview well. With the help of your organization, think of ways you might adapt the hiring process to identify people with valuable skills, abilities, and perspectives who don't fit the standard profile of a desirable hire.
- **Ask neurodivergent people what they need to thrive at work.** Every individual is unique, and people with the same neurodivergent label can have vastly different talents and needs:
 - Ask in the hiring process what a candidate will need in order to contribute to their full ability. Ask what work they would be good at.
 - Ask neurodivergent employees on your team what they need from you, the organization, and their colleagues to do their best work. Ask how the team and the organization might use their skills more fully.
 - Ask whether the ways you and others communicate fit with the ways they process information.
 - Ask what you can do to help them feel included, respected, and valued.
- **Place people in roles that align with their strengths and abilities.** The adage about not trying to fit a square peg in a round hole applies to managing both neurodivergent and neurotypical employees. Work to understand each employee's skills and abilities as well as their potential for learning and growth. Help them find their most valuable strengths. Match people to job assignments in ways that will further the team's objectives and bring out the best in people while distributing work fairly and helping everyone feel that their contributions are important.
- **Be flexible.** Neurodivergent people may not fit comfortably into established work processes or environments designed for the neurotypical. Work with your organization to provide appropriate accommodations. Those might include providing access to a work buddy or mentor, allowing the use of noise-canceling headphones to reduce distraction, accepting that some employees choose not to participate in team activities, and enabling employees to work from home.
- **Pay attention to communication.** People have different preferences for how they get information, and neurodivergent people may have needs related to communication that are new to you. Ask employees where communications from you or among team members might be clearer, simpler, or provided in different ways. In general, be direct in your communication. Don't assume you have been understood. Avoid hints, sarcasm, idioms, and other habits of neurotypical communication that may be missed or misunderstood by neurodivergent employees.
- **Encourage neurotypical team members to welcome and appreciate their neurodivergent colleagues.** Help them see the value their neurodivergent colleagues bring to the organization. Help them understand their neurodivergent colleagues' strengths and needs. Talk about ways in which their neurodivergent colleagues' behavior and conversation might seem unusual but is normal and expected, given their condition. Explain why certain accommodations are being made that might be perceived as unfair. Encourage them to ask their neurodivergent colleagues how they might be supportive and what they might do to make the work environment more comfortable and welcoming.

- **Don't over-protect.** It may be tempting to shelter neurodivergent employees from challenges and difficulties. Some of this protection may be appropriate if you are enabling them to do their work without unnecessary distraction. But over-protecting employees can be limiting. If you consistently protect or rescue employees from difficulties, you deny them the chance to learn how to handle these situations themselves. You risk overloading yourself while leaving the employee vulnerable if you move to another job and a new and less-protective manager takes your place.
- **Reconsider performance and career management.** It's always important to manage performance so employees know where they stand and to provide timely feedback and coaching, but not every employee should be pushed to perform to the same broad set of standards. Goals like engaging with colleagues in team activities may be beyond the capabilities of some neurodivergent employees, for example. In the same way, not every employee wants to advance in a traditional way through the organization's hierarchy. Opportunities for growth for neurodivergent people might lie in other directions, such as more challenging assignments or the chance to coach other employees. Growth may not even be desirable for some employees. They may simply want to continue doing work that they are good at and that has value to the organization.

Manage everyone well.

Look for opportunities in managing neurodivergent employees to make work more satisfying and productive for everyone. Seek to understand the unique strengths and potentials of all employees—neurodivergent and neurotypical—and offer coaching and opportunities to help each of them be the best they can be. Appreciate every employee for who they are. With this approach, managing neurodivergent employees can help you become a better manager and make the work environment better for all employees.



For More Information

Austin, R., & Pisano, G. (2017, May). Neurodiversity as a competitive advantage. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved November 14, 2023, from <https://hbr.org/2017/05/neurodiversity-as-a-competitive-advantage>

Mahto, M., Hatfield, S., Sniderman, B., & Hogan, S. (2022, January 18). A rising tide lifts all boats: Creating a better work environment for all by embracing neurodiversity. London: Deloitte Insights. Retrieved November 14, 2023, from <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace.html>

Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN). (n.d.). Neurodiversity in the workplace. Retrieved November 14, 2023, from <https://askearn.org/page/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace>

Source: Morgan, H. (2022, October 20). Managing a neurodiverse team (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).

EXPRESSING A COMMITMENT TO DISABILITY INCLUSION

Expressing a commitment to a diverse workplace welcoming of the skills and talents of people with disabilities is one of the easiest ways to foster a disability-inclusive culture and work toward meeting your organization's disability, equality, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) goals. Learn about strategies employers of all sizes and in various industries have used to express a commitment to disability inclusion.

Seven Ways to Express a Commitment to Workplace Disability Inclusion

- Develop and communicate policy statements and other illustrations of the company's commitment to inclusion of workers with disabilities. For example, "Business is becoming increasingly global. As [COMPANY NAME] continues to expand, our differences—from our culture and work habits, communication style, and personal preferences—are becoming even more essential to our business strategy. We are working hard to create an environment in which all employees are valued and respected, including those with disabilities."
- Establish an enterprise-wide team consisting of executives, managers, and employees with disabilities to support and advance the recruiting, hiring, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities. This team may also function as a disability-focused employee resource group (ERG) or affinity group.
- Make (and publicize) the business case (i.e. justification for expected commercial benefit) for hiring people with disabilities. For example, frame the issue in communication with managers, leadership, and so forth in terms of return on investment; direct and indirect benefits to the company and its employees, such as higher productivity, lower absenteeism, and turnover; and increased employee morale.
- Include disability as part of all of the company's diversity policies and activities. This includes using the words disability and people with disabilities in statements defining the company's diversity policies, inviting disability organizations and people with disabilities to the company's diversity events, and recognizing that people with disabilities are part of the company's other diverse communities (including racial and ethnic minorities, veterans, and the LGBTQ+ community).
- Affirm in policy statements the company's commitment to equal employment opportunity for people with disabilities and taking affirmative steps to recruit, hire, retain, and advance workers with disabilities at all levels.
- Encourage employees with disabilities, and their coworkers and managers, to identify barriers and individual and systemic concerns without fear of retribution, and offer mechanisms to allow them to provide this information anonymously or confidentially.
- Establish a universal policy offering workplace flexibility and accommodations for all applicants and employees, with and without disabilities, including the use of telework options if appropriate.



Source: U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN). (n.d.). Expressing a commitment to disability inclusion. Retrieved November 14, 2023, from <https://askearn.org>

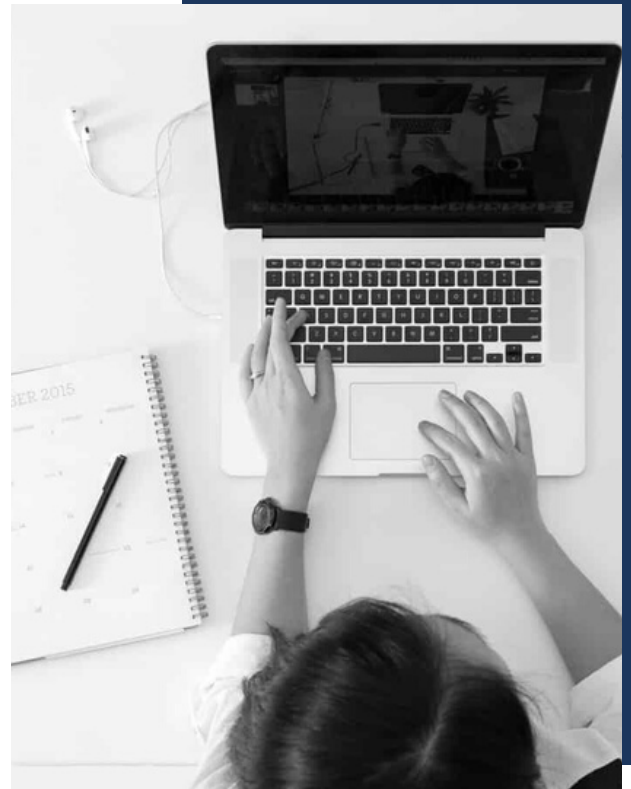
ASK YOUR EAP!

Q. What problems can supervisors anticipate if they ignore or don't confront disrespectful behavior in the workplace?

A. When employees witness a supervisor ignoring serious conduct issues with a coworker, it can have several significant consequences that affect the workplace. Employees may lose trust in the supervisor's ability to enforce workplace standards and maintain a safe and productive environment, which can lead to decreased confidence in leadership overall. Growing discontent can then lead to less engagement, decreased motivation, and diminished commitment to the employer's mission. If employees become preoccupied with the problematic behavior, it can hinder their focus on performance. Also, negative conduct can be contagious, creating more frequent conflicts and even the possibility of workplace violence. Generally, when problems remain unresolved, ripple effects and unpredictable consequences follow. The costliest problem typically is turnover, as employees tire of conflict and tension and leave to find a happier workplace.

Q. What does it mean for a manager or management team to lead with empathy?

A. Leading with empathy means that the supervisor puts a priority on recognizing, understanding, and addressing the emotions, needs, and perspectives of their employees. They create a positive and supportive workplace where employees feel valued and understood. This leads to higher morale and a more engaged workforce. And that translates into lots of other great things, like lower turnover, higher productivity, fewer disciplinary matters, and a happier place to work. To be an empathetic supervisor, take the time to understand how employees feel, whether it's related to work challenges, personal issues, or successes. Empathetic supervisors are also good listeners and feedback givers. And importantly, empathetic leaders involve employees in decision-making processes, valuing their input and diverse perspectives. Learn more from "Leading the Empathic Agile Enterprise" (2021) by Dr. Gail Ferreira.



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