

Are You a Neurodiverse-friendly Business?



If you've recently picked up a write up on Most Loved Workplaces or Best Places to Work, you may be surprised to see that good benefits and higher than average salaries aren't contributing to those titles anymore, but then neither is having a Foosball table. Employees (and customers) want more.

While many businesses are launching diversity initiatives, there's one area of diversity you may not have considered—neurodiversity. There are several ways to be designated a neurodiverse-friendly business, whether that's creating a more inviting atmosphere for neurodiverse customers or creating a workplace where all employees are comfortable and valued.

Over the past two decades, identification as a neurodiverse individual has increased 600% so ensuring your business embraces this aspect of diversity is growing in importance.

Neurodiversity in the Workplace

If you want to make your business more diverse from this perspective, you'll want to consider:

- Your hiring and recruitment process. Neurodiverse candidates may have a difficult time interviewing in a traditional setting.
- A mentor program. Helping neurodiverse employees see others who have succeeded before them can improve retention rate. [SAP's Autism at Work](#) Program is a model for many companies.

- Your onboarding program. What is a typical first day on the job and what ways can you design a program that helps neurodiverse candidates thrive? With Dell's program "neurodiverse applicants are guided through a series of projects and interactions with leaders, drawing upon a wide array of skills. There are multiple career avenues offered to neurodiverse people, ranging from direct hire to paid internships."

For smaller businesses, these programs may seem out of your reach. However, you can still incorporate aspects of them on a smaller scale. For instance, be cognizant of the interview process and inquiries you receive from potential employees. You may need to alter your expectations on things like eye contact from every interviewee. Understanding the neurodiverse job candidate can help you create a more diverse employee base.

Welcoming the Neurodiverse Customer

In addition to creating a more diverse work culture, think about how you can improve the experience of your customers. The Autism Society is challenging businesses to create more friendly experiences for everyone. You can [fill out their form](#) to become listed as an Autism-friendly business. They're looking for businesses that do things like:

- **Train employees to create positive environments.** Breeze Airways partnered with Autism Double-Checked and trains its flight attendants to help alleviate the stresses of air travel for its passengers with an autism diagnosis.
- **Create appealing spaces.** According to the Autism Society, "individuals with an autism diagnosis are impacted by sensory issues such as lighting, noise, and crowds; and because a business's customer service staff might not otherwise understand autism and how best to address the customer who has an autism diagnosis, becoming autism friendly helps the business understand how to adapt to best serve their customers with autism and allows the customer who is impacted by autism to utilize and benefit from the services of a business." In 2019, Pittsburgh International Airport opened a space dedicated to ensuring travelers with sensory sensitivities can decompress and get acclimated to a real aircraft cabin, to help alleviate anxiety.

Over 3.5 million people are estimated to be diagnosed with autism in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the rate of autism among children is 1 out of 59, and that does not span all neurodiverse diagnosis, only autism and its spectrum. If you are considering a commitment to diversity in your business, you may want to consider neurodiversity as well.

[Christina Metcalf](#) is a writer/ghostwriter who believes in the power of story. She works with small businesses, chambers of commerce, and business professionals who want to make an impression and grow a loyal customer/member base. She loves road trips, hates exclamation points, and believes the world would be a better place if we all had our own theme song that played when we entered the room. What would yours be?

Twitter: @christinagsmith

Facebook: @tellyourstorygetemtalking
LinkedIn: @christinagsmith