

Successful Work Experience Tips for Employees with Asperger Syndrome and Their Employers

The following tips were generated from the on-the-job experience of Scott Krimer, son of Asperger Society of Michigan president, Eileen Krimer. For the past 2 1/2 years, Scott has worked at Bivouac, Inc., a retail establishment in Ann Arbor, MI and has proven himself to be a much valued and integral member of the staff. Scott was initially hired in part-time to do computer data entry work, but has since progressed to a full-time position where he also troubleshoots the computer system and the business software, and is the liaison with the software company. Additionally, Scott generates various inventory and sales reports, sometimes in a more useful and creative format than had been done previously. His tremendous success at his job can hopefully encourage other adults with AS seeking employment, as well as future employers.

Tips for the Employer

1. It is extremely important for the employer to have a complete and detailed understanding of the Asperger individual's capabilities, limitations and learning style. Interviews with parents, teachers, job coaches and any other relevant support personnel should take place before the employee starts work.
2. Employer and employee expectations and priorities should be clear, specific and realistic to help prevent overload as well as distractions from unrelated details and tasks. A written job description might be helpful. Guidelines and policies should be spelled out and consistent. Goal setting should be ongoing.
3. Attention should be paid to the physical environment of the job site as it relates to the Asperger individual's various and unique sensitivities. Is the temperature okay? Is it noisy? Would headphones be helpful to facilitate focus, block distracting noise and help minimize sensory overload?
4. Providing a mentor is key. The mentor becomes the designated "go to" person for training purposes as well as to run interference in situations and/or conversations that might be misconstrued and personalized.
5. Clear and regular two-way feedback about job performance, especially in the beginning, is very important. Feedback could be written or verbal and should include specific, constructive suggestions on how to improve performance. Employers will likely have to be more sensitive to and tolerant of the Asperger employee's idiosyncrasies and potential need for ongoing positive feedback.
6. Allow for flexibility during the work day to accommodate the Asperger employee's potential need for "breaks" to decompress. "Cues" can be developed to signal the need to physically leave the work environment without causing undue attention or disrupting the work of others.
7. Never reject questions as unimportant or stupid, recognizing that what may seem obvious to the employer might not be obvious to the Asperger employee. Multiple explanations and repetition of a concept or procedure might be necessary before things "click".

Tips for Employees

1. Show up to work every day and be on time. It is important that the employer knows he can count on you.
2. Be honest about how you learn best and what will help make you more comfortable in the work environment.
3. Always ask the employer or mentor if unsure about how to proceed, especially if something you are doing doesn't quite "fit" the rule or guidelines you have been given.
4. Expect the unexpected. Be prepared to shift gears if another project needs to get done first. Realize that the employer might be under pressure and might not have time for immediate feedback or explanation.
5. Since you are not perfect, you are going to make mistakes from time to time which might upset your employer. This doesn't mean that you aren't doing a good job. Try not to be defensive if your employer talks to you about a possible mistake. Be open to correction and improvement. If you are feeling bad or concerned about your job performance, ask the employer how things are going.