



Corporate America must invest in neurodiversity

Workers who learn differently can excel at problem-solving and be creative

By Peter Eden

When the nation's next jobs report is released, we'll likely see the continuation of a trend that's been underway for the past several years: historically low unemployment, with talk of ample opportunities for anyone, at any level, who needs a job. That may be fairly accurate, except for many neurodivergent individuals.

Do you know what the employment rate—not the *unemployment* rate—is for adults with autism? It is about 20 percent. Obviously, that means the unemployment rate is roughly 80 percent for these citizens. That's a staggering number.

Neurodiversity gains traction

Neurodiversity is a pillar of diversity, plain and simple. It should not suggest a weakness or a deficit. Neurodivergent people may manifest neurological-based strengths, weaknesses and behaviors that can affect learning and productivity. Typically intelligent, these individuals may have dyslexia, ADHD, autism or an executive functioning disorder, and they often view problems in different ways and come up with unique solutions. In fact, studies show that if you provide the same problem to neurotypical workers and neurodivergent workers, the latter group tends to solve the problem faster and in a more effective and more creative way.

What these individuals want is acceptance and recognition for the gifts and skills they often bring.

Getting society to understand this has been a decadeslong battle, and a battle that will continue. However, there are signs that societal change may be accelerating.

There is an increasingly coordinated and resourced autism-at-work phenomenon underway that involves more than simply finding and retaining a certain demographic of skilled workers. It has a social justice element to it and a growing connection to higher education.

Fortune 500 companies, such as SAP, Microsoft, Hasbro, DXC Technology and others, are recognizing that neurodivergent individuals are often incredible workers with tremendous skills and strengths. These employers are opening their doors to neurodivergent individuals, offering them jobs, internships and environments in which they can learn, contribute and feel good about themselves.

Acceptance accelerating

For truly broad and lasting effects, stigma and social justice elements must be understood and addressed early, through stronger educational and corporate partnerships that begin nurturing and supporting students well before they reach college. What these

individuals want is acceptance and recognition for the gifts and skills they often bring. Neurodivergent individuals can have a difficult time realizing that challenges they've faced growing up can, in the right environment, become strengths.

That's where institutions like **Landmark College** are leading the way. Our motto is "Nosce Te Ipsum," a Latin phrase meaning "know thyself." Understanding strengths and weaknesses is an important key to success for our students, all of whom have learning differences such as dyslexia, attention challenges or autism.

Landmark recently became the first Neurodiversity Hub in the United States through a partnership with DXC Technology, and is actively working with Hasbro, Ernst & Young and others. These partnerships strengthen the commitment of industry and education to provide internships, career opportunities and a recognition of the strengths neurodivergent individuals have to offer. As this commitment grows, the more we should see larger, complex corporations investing in neurodivergent individuals before they reach college.

It's time for more of corporate America to embrace what neurodiversity can bring to the workforce, and to experience how those who learn differently can benefit their organizations. **UB**

Peter Eden is the president of Landmark College, one of the only accredited colleges in the U.S. designed for students who learn and achieve differently.

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