



Introduction: Thirty Years Too Late — and Right on Time

This is a book that should have existed thirty years ago. When I stepped into the professional world, I carried with me a quiet, persistent sense of difference. I wasn't worse than the people around me. I wasn't better. But I was other. Meetings drained me. Office chatter baffled me. Job reviews felt like riddles with missing clues. I learned to mask. I learned to survive. And for a long time, that was the only vocabulary I had.

Because back then, there was no conversation around neurodivergence — and certainly no recognition of Asperger's in the workplace. The word itself wasn't something people understood, much less respected. There was no literature for managers. No guidance for colleagues. No internal language even for me to understand myself. What I now know to be sensory overload, executive function strain, social processing fatigue — all of it was chalked up to being “difficult,” “too intense,” “bad with people,” “smart but strange.” And so I adapted. At great cost.

For the first ten years of my career, I struggled to find footing. Every job felt like a test I hadn't been taught how to take — not because I didn't know the work, but because I didn't understand the rules behind the rules. After nearly a decade of trying to make sense of the professional world, I made a calculated decision: I would go to law school. Not because I dreamed of practicing law, but because it seemed, finally, like a place where the rules were knowable. Where right and wrong were not matters of social interpretation but codified, tested, upheld. I believed I would find safety there — not in the work itself, but in the clarity.

I was wrong.

What I found instead was that even in the most rule-bound professions, ambiguity reigns. Fairness bends under pressure. Ethics waver. The human factor — that unpredictable, unstructured variable — remains. Law school didn't solve my discomfort with the world. It

showed me how deeply embedded that discomfort is in the systems I once thought were built to prevent it.

That realization didn't just disillusion me. It taught me something I carry into every chapter of this book: neurodivergent people aren't searching for control. We're searching for coherence. For systems where what is said and what is done line up. For work environments that reward clarity, consistency, and truth — not just charisma. For two decades, I worked in environments that were never built with people like me in mind — and I succeeded *despite* that. But I often wonder what I might have built, contributed, or led if I had been able to work not in spite of who I was, but *because* of it.

Only in the last ten years has a broader awareness of neurodivergence begun to take hold in the public sphere. And only in the last two or three years has that awareness turned into something more powerful: **understanding**. We're finally starting to move past awareness posters and bullet-pointed HR webinars. We are beginning to develop the language and frameworks that allow neurodivergent people to be seen clearly, valued fairly, and supported meaningfully — not as a risk to manage, but as talent to unlock.

That is the purpose of this book. Not just to speak to those of us who are autistic, but more importantly to those who employ us, manage us, sit beside us, and often misunderstand us. It's a book for leaders. For HR teams. For anyone who's ever struggled to know why the "brilliant employee" can't seem to manage small talk, or why the "awkward one" turns in flawless work but breaks down in meetings. It's for workplaces that want to become more inclusive — not through slogans, but through *insight*.

And this book is also, deeply, for my son. He was diagnosed earlier and more clearly than I ever was. I've tried to raise him with the self-understanding I never had, to equip him with language and tools I had to build the hard way. But even with that foundation, he will walk into rooms that aren't ready for him — yet. My hope is that this book helps change that. That he, and others like him, will have a shorter, kinder road than I did.

So yes, this book is thirty years late. But it's also, perhaps, right on time. We are in a cultural moment where listening is possible, where curiosity is finally overtaking judgment, where neurodivergence is beginning to be seen not as pathology but as difference — rich, complex, and deeply human.

If you're holding this book, you're already part of that shift. And that gives me hope.

Let's begin.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE:

This book is written in the first person because I believe personal story is the clearest way to frame, define, and illuminate the challenges faced by neurodivergent employees. Speaking directly allows for nuance. It allows you to hear not just what I've experienced — but how it feels.

That said, not every "I" in these pages is autobiographical. I haven't faced every challenge in this book, nor have I solved every puzzle. This is not a memoir. It's a guide — one that draws on the lived experiences, frustrations, insights, and triumphs of many people on the spectrum, including my own.

Likewise, this book does not suggest that all neurodivergent individuals are the same. We're not. Autism, Asperger's, and other forms of neurodivergence show up differently in different people. What we share is often less about specific traits and more about a shared friction with systems not built with us in mind.

I have often brought to bear the stories, frustrations, journeys, and triumphs of other neurodivergent employees in order to make this book as complete and as accessible as possible for employers of all types...for the benefit of employees of all types as well.

I've written this book to help employers better understand their neurodivergent employees — not by generalizing them, but by approaching them with openness, curiosity, and care. If it also helps neurodivergent individuals feel seen, understood, or better equipped to advocate for themselves, then that too is a gift.

For all of us navigating workplaces that weren't designed for our minds: you're not alone, and your value is real.

