



Chapter 1: I'm Not Broken — I'm Wired Differently

This chapter reframes autistic difference as depth rather than deficiency, challenging employers to see past performance styles and recognize the integrity, focus, and clarity that neurodivergent employees bring when allowed to work as they are.

Section 1.1: The Mask I Didn't Know I Was Wearing

When I started my career, I didn't have a diagnosis. I didn't have a name for what I was experiencing — only the steady, low-grade hum of alienation. I was competent, even exceptional in some areas. But there was always friction. Things that came easily to others felt like uphill climbs to me: the idle pre-meeting chatter, the ability to read the room, the casual blending in. I could hold my own in a presentation but would unravel under an unexpected hallway interaction. I could deliver detailed, elegant solutions to complex problems, but miss that someone had asked how my weekend went. I wasn't oblivious. I was overwhelmed.

The unspoken rules of the workplace were never given to me directly, but I was punished just the same for not knowing them. I began to watch others more carefully. I mirrored their expressions, learned to nod at the right time, to keep my hands still, to smile — not when I felt something, but when I saw that others did. Slowly, I constructed a version of myself that could survive the office. I wore that version like armor. I didn't know it was a mask. I only knew that it got me through the day. The problem was that no one — including me — understood how I was wired.

...

Looking back, I wasn't broken. I was just speaking a different language — one I had to abandon daily to be heard at all. And in doing so, I lost parts of myself I wouldn't even realize were missing until decades later.. The problem was that no one — including me — understood how I was wired.

Section 1.2: Key Concept: Difference ≠ Deficiency

For much of my life, I assumed something was wrong with me because I didn't operate like other people. I wasn't coached to see my traits as differences — I was encouraged, subtly and overtly, to correct them. I was told I was too rigid, too intense, too quiet, too blunt. I took those messages in, and for a long time, I believed them. I didn't know that what I was experiencing had a name — or that it was shared by millions of others. I only knew that I was out of step.

Asperger's — or autism, as it's more broadly categorized now — is not a flaw in reasoning, intelligence, or capability. It's a different neurological framework. I process information deeply. I notice patterns most people skim past. I'm energized by structure, devoted to precision, and often think in systems rather than stories. And — something we'll talk about later — I carry a Euclidean sense of fairness and ethics, with a blaring radar for infringement on right versus wrong. This can be a gift and a burden, especially in workplaces that reward ambiguity and unspoken hierarchies. But none of this is a malfunction. It's just not how the majority of people are wired.

Yet the modern workplace still treats “different” as a problem to fix. If someone doesn't participate in office banter, they're labeled antisocial. If someone asks a lot of questions, they're seen as challenging authority. If someone avoids eye contact, they're assumed to be hiding something. These judgments are not based on malice — they're based on misunderstanding.

...

When you assume neurotypical behavior is the baseline for competence, everything else starts to look like a deviation. But when you understand that diversity in cognition is real, necessary, and valuable — you stop trying to fix, and start learning to see.

Section 1.3: Personal Insight: How Misunderstanding Manifests

In almost every early performance review I've received, a familiar phrase appeared: “We'd like to see more engagement.” At first, I assumed this meant I needed to work harder — but my work was already ahead of schedule, meticulously reviewed, and often well-received by clients or end users. What “engagement” turned out to mean was something else entirely: smiling more, participating in casual chatter, asking how people's weekends were. In other words: perform relational warmth, even when I was mentally drained, emotionally flooded, or deeply focused on the task at hand.

What employers didn't see was how engaged I already was — internally. I was listening to every word in a meeting, mapping consequences three steps ahead, catching contradictions no one else noticed. But because I didn't perform engagement the way others did, it was often assumed I wasn't fully present. I was present. I was just processing.

Misunderstanding doesn't always come in the form of outright rejection. Sometimes, it's in the slow erosion of credibility — when people start interpreting your style as a signal of your substance. I've lost promotions, been passed over for leadership roles, and even been socially iced out for not meeting invisible expectations.

The hardest part? When I did try to “act the part,” it didn't feel like growth. It felt like camouflage. I wasn't being invited to bring my best self to the table. I was being told, quietly but clearly: be someone else if you want to stay.

...

What wasn't seen — or valued — was the internal architecture of how I work. The nuance. The calibration. The quiet brilliance, buried under noise.

Section 1.4: Employer Perspective: What's Often Misread

To many employers, a neurodivergent employee can look like a problem that doesn't quite rise to the level of needing to be solved. A little off, a little cold, a little too much or not enough. A good worker — but. That “but” has followed me through most of my professional life.

But he's not very social.

But he's too blunt in meetings.

But he's not a cultural fit.

But he takes things too seriously.

That last one — the suggestion that we are “too sensitive” or “too reactive” — may be the most deeply misunderstood of all. From the outside, our emotional responses can seem disproportionate. A raised concern might sound like confrontation. A moment of silence might look like disengagement. A quiet departure might be mistaken for pettiness or drama. But what employers are often seeing is not a fragile ego — it's a system failure. It's the internal rupture that

happens when someone with a Euclidean sense of fairness and logic is asked to participate in, or remain silent about, something that violates it.

We are not easily triggered. We are precisely triggered — by violations of process, of stated values, of truth. And when no one else seems disturbed by what to us is a glaring injustice or factual inconsistency, we begin to feel unmoored. The emotional expression may be visible — but the cause is buried under layers of unspoken compromise. We are not creating drama. We are registering impact.

I've worked in roles where I saw problems long before anyone else did, voiced concerns others were afraid to raise, and operated with unwavering integrity. And in several of those roles, I left — not because I couldn't handle the work, but because I couldn't tolerate the ethical dissonance. In three separate instances, I resigned from well-paid positions due to legal or moral impropriety I couldn't ignore. These weren't dramatic exits. They were quiet acts of principle — and they came at a cost. My career didn't climb in the usual arc. But I can live with the choices I made. I'm not driven by optics. I'm driven by what's right.

And that, too, often gets misread.

...

If you're reading behavior without understanding neurodivergence, you're not actually seeing your employee — you're seeing your expectations refracted through a narrow lens. That gap — between appearance and reality — is where most misunderstandings are born.

Section 1.5: Reframing: What Seeing Clearly Looks Like

When an employer encounters an autistic employee, the instinct is often to diagnose the gap: What's off here? What's not connecting? What's missing?

But that's the wrong question. The question is not what's lacking — it's what's misread.

When I don't speak up in a meeting, it's often because I'm processing. When I sound abrupt in an email, it's because I'm striving for precision. When I push back on a decision, it's not defiance — it's my internal compass sounding an alarm. I'm not trying to disrupt the team. I'm trying to protect something — accuracy, fairness, structure — often the very things that hold the business together.

Seeing clearly means letting go of the assumption that neurotypical behavior is the only valid form of professionalism. It means recognizing that the person who skips the office birthday party may be the one who's been carrying the weight of your quality control. It means learning to value performance over performance style.

We don't need you to speak our language perfectly. But we do need you to stop mistaking unfamiliar signals for weakness. Different does not mean deficient. It often means deliberate, precise, and deeply committed.

...

Seeing clearly starts with slowing down your assumptions. Replace "that's strange" with "that's interesting." Replace "why are they like that?" with "what might I not understand yet?" That small shift is the doorway to everything else in this book — and to seeing the value that's been there all along..

Section 1.6: What You Can Do

- ✓ Assume intelligence, even if the delivery is atypical

If I pause before answering or speak with intensity, it's not because I'm confused — it's because I'm being exact.

- ✓ Avoid comments that frame difference as deficit ("just be more outgoing")

Pushing someone to perform neurotypical behavior can erode confidence and mask their actual strengths.

- ✓ Ask for clarification rather than assigning intent ("can you walk me through how you got there?")

What seems abrupt or contrarian may actually be a deeply reasoned position — but you won't know unless you ask.

- ✓ Recognize that communication is happening — even when it looks different

I might express myself best in writing, diagrams, or systems — not in spontaneous conversation or social cues.

- ✓ Value results and insight, not just optics and tone

A quiet employee who delivers clear, consistent work should not be overlooked in favor of someone who speaks easily but contributes less depth.

...

Closing Thought:

You don't need to fix me. You just need to understand me. Once you stop looking for brokenness, you'll begin to see depth, loyalty, and capability that can't always be taught — only trusted.

