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10 rules for being a bad employer for someone on the autistic spectrum

.... and maybe what to do about it
Rule 1

Make interviews compulsory

• As unstructured as possible
• Have a panel fire random questions at me
• Interrupt me if I’m thinking about something
• Make questions vague and open-ended
• Have as many distractions as possible- Talk among yourselves when I am trying to think or answer
Rule 1. Make interviews compulsory

......and maybe what to do about it

Find an alternative

- 1-1 discussion or work experience
- Let me show you my work and discuss it
- Relaxed setting with no distractions
- If you **must** interview - provide questions in writing 20 minutes in advance - this will allow me to think and process
Rule 2.

Make learning the job as stressful as possible

• Provide vague oral instructions only

• Expect me to remember everything I’ve been told

• Expect me to read your mind

• Do not provide written a schedule or guidance

• In new situations tell me to ‘get on with it’ – or ‘figure it out’ - ensure I don’t know where or how to get help
Rule 2. Make learning the job as stressful as possible

......and maybe what to do about it

Reduce stress

• Provide a written schedule of work – instructions- and where to get help

• Check how well I have understood instruction and offer guidance, support and clarification
Rule 3.

Destroy my confidence and self esteem

• No constructive feedback, guidance or criticism

• Allow me to make mistakes—‘to learn from them’

• Nag me or shout at me if I misunderstand or make mistakes

• Be so afraid of offending me that you avoid any discussion of my mistakes—until you fire me
Rule 3. Destroy my confidence and self esteem

....and maybe what to do about it

Build me up buttercup

• Give structured feedback. Tell me where I’m doing well, where I need to develop – be specific – if I did a good job let me know

• Ask me if I need help - and what kind of help

• Consider a mentor
Rule 4.

Set me up to fail

• Never give guidance on workplace culture, boundaries, customs or hierarchy - I will find out soon enough if I break them

• Force me to take part in social events
Rule 4- set me up to fail

......and maybe what to do about it

Be clear and supportive

- Provide clarity. Who’s who - and what they do
- Give proactive guidance on policy on relationships and boundaries and conduct
- Tell me where to get help
- Provide guidance on social events – i.e. they are not compulsory – (or e.g. length of time to be spent in pub. Saying no (to that last drink) - Develop my skills in engagement / disengagement
Rule 5.

Patronise me

• Don’t pay me the rate for the job
• ‘Detail’ someone to ‘look after me’ - such as sit with me at lunch - or spend breaks with me –or take me to the pub
• Ignore any grievance or complaint
Rule 5. Patronise me

and maybe what to do about it

Accept me for who I am

- Include me but do not force me to get involved in social events if it doesn’t suit me
- Breaks are quiet times – I will tell you if I need company and help to make friends. I might need this to de-stress
- Shared interests/ topics better ways of making friends
- Pay me the rate for the job
Rule 6.

• Give no help or guidance on expectations of any ‘dress code’ or feedback on hygiene or grooming
Rule 6. ‘dress code’, grooming and hygiene

......and maybe what to do about it

Show me the way

• Make sure I know about any culture or expectations on any ‘dress code’, grooming or hygiene

• Even if there is no ‘dress code’. I am likely to stress not knowing.

• Please give guidance as part of a schedule

• Maybe a mentor can address these issues sensitively?
Rule 7.

Burn me out

• Expect me to know when to take a break
• Overload me
• Allow me to work until exhausted
• Give me extra work late in the day
• Bully me
Rule 7. Burn me out

......and maybe what to do about it

Look after me

• Ensure my schedule includes regular breaks
• Monitor how well I am dealing with work/life
• Ask if I am managing and how many hours I am working
• Monitor my tendency to take work home or take on too much - I’m likely to
• Allocate new work in the morning
Rule 8.

Make the workplace unbearable—for example

• Bright overhead lights

• Brightly distracting colour schemes or patterns

• Annoying or intrusive background sound

• Odours—especially air-fresheners or perfumes

• Fabrics and textures aversive to touch

• Loud hand dryers in loos

• Constant distractions and interruptions
Rule 8. Make workplace unbearable

......and maybe what to do about it

Make me comfortable

- Up-lighting /adapted workspaces/quiet space
- Audit for sensory issues
- Train workforce on inclusive practice
  - Workplace code e.g. air-freshening devices, perfume etc
- Universal design
Rule 9.

Make unreasonable demands

• Do not allow me to finish a job

• Change the instruction or request without notice

• Random requests for information

• Give me jobs I can’t do or a timescale I can’t achieve
Rule 9. unreasonable demands

......and maybe what to do about it

Provide me with structure

• Allow me to finish a job

• Let me work to an agreed schedule on agreed jobs –play to my strengths. Concrete feedback

• If there are changes give me as much warning as possible

• Reassure me if the work expectation or schedule or daily events are changing
Rule 10

Have low expectations of me

- Do not review my job or grade
- Expect me to continue in the same job for ever
- Overlook me for promotion or advancement
- Do not pay me equally
Rule 10- and maybe what to do about it

Have high expectations of me

- Take a positive ‘can do’ attitude. Mentor me
- Pay me equally
- Encourage me – be nice – be kind – be a role model
- Consider me for extra training and advancement
- Support me through anxieties and change through practice and by talking them through
Rule 11

Have rules but break them!
Rule 11. Broken rules

...and maybe what to do about it

Be fair and consistent

Reasonable adjustment
Remember

Reasonable adjustments and inclusive employment practice for autistic people will be beneficial for everyone.
In appreciation

Sandra Robilliard and past Prospects clients, autistic colleagues and those employers who make such a difference
Thank you!

Damian Milton and Richard Mills

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