

Applying Hiring Interview Adjustments to Benefit Autistic and Non-Autistic Job Candidates in Meteorology

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Each year, people on the autism spectrum and their allies recognize April as Autism Awareness/Acceptance Month in the United States; World Autism Awareness Day is April 2. Recent population estimates indicate approximately 1 in 45 adults in the United States has an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC; Dietz et al. 2020). Autistic people able to complete post-secondary education seem to prefer careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, including meteorology (Bolton et al. 2018). We likely work and collaborate with autistic people every day without knowing it.

However, autistic people report lower job selection rates than their prevalence in the population would indicate, and those who are selected through interviews often experience difficulties navigating the workplace's interpersonal landscape. Perhaps the biggest obstacle for autistic people is that job interviews often involve unwritten rules and implied questions by the interviewer which may not be completely understood by candidates. The interviewee must also engage "impression management," social, and executive functioning skills with which autistic people tend to struggle. Common remedies tend to focus on the autistic person learning strategies for optimal interview outcomes. We propose that hiring officials meet them halfway. Here, we provide two simple, empirically-derived tips (see Maras et al. 2020) meteorological hiring officials can apply to reduce the burden on autistic people in the interview process.

Tip #1 addresses both challenge areas. Rather than ask broad questions which require inference by the candidate (e.g., "tell me about any work, volunteer, or academic experience you have had"), interviewers introduce a discrete topic they want the interviewee to talk about and then ask specific, targeted questions to draw out information. For example, "First, I'm going to ask you about your

work/volunteer/academic experience. What roles have you held previously? What responsibilities have you held previously?” The candidate is asked to answer each individual element, in turn, without skipping ahead. The presentation differences above may appear small, but effects are demonstrably positive. By asking more targeted and, importantly, concrete, questions, the candidate doesn’t have to infer what the interviewer wants to know. That simple change makes it easier to provide information the interviewer desires, and to be more concise in presenting it.

Tip #2 is to provide candidates with questions ahead of time, which they can keep printed-out in front of them while being interviewed. This allows the candidate to develop a sense of where the interview is going and helps ease anxiety about the process. The candidate is also able to reference the question at hand while responding, which helps focus their answers and attention.

These two examples represent minor yet significant changes to the common interview structure which can benefit all applicants. Maras et al (2020) provide several additional suggestions beyond the two referenced here. We hope the meteorological hiring process can evolve toward a model which is more equitable for all applicants, regardless of neurological disposition.

References:

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