

*neurodiversity*



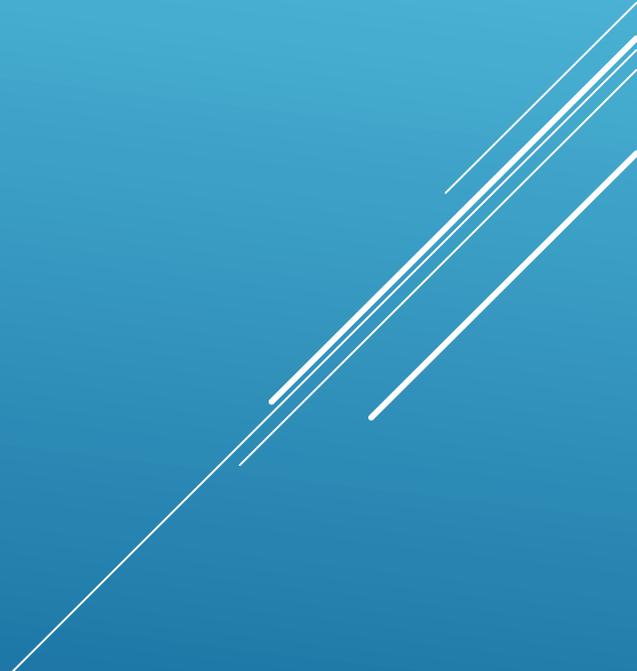
**IN THE  
WORKPLACE**

**MIND**  **SHIFT**

JoLynn Larson



Susan Williams



# OBJECTIVES & APPROACH

- ▶ Learn about the continuum of neurodiversity and appropriate language around it
- ▶ Identify the variety of skill sets neurodiverse employees bring to the team
- ▶ See how they can capitalize on the value of diverse views and approaches
- ▶ Brief overview with general information
- ▶ Conversational Q & A, started by Susan and JoLynn—added to by participants
- ▶ Contact info shared at end of presentation



# DEFINITIONS

## **neurodiverse**

The range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of a normal variation in the human population.

## **autism spectrum disorder/condition**

A developmental disorder of variable severity that is characterized by difficulty in social interaction and communication and by restricted or repetitive patterns of thought and behavior.



# AUTISM IS NOT...

- ▶ a mental illness
- ▶ a learning disability
- ▶ low intelligence
- ▶ a guarantee of extraordinary superpowers outside of normal human capacity
- ▶ an indicator of tech excellence over other abilities, such as creativity



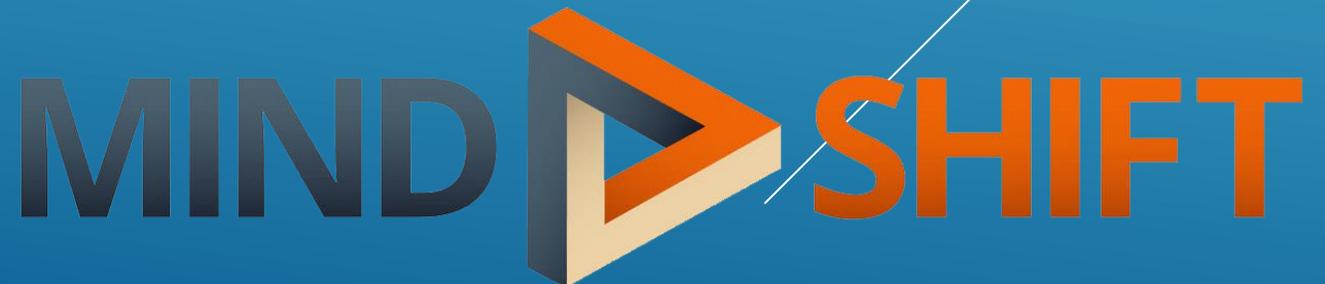
# AUTISM IS ...

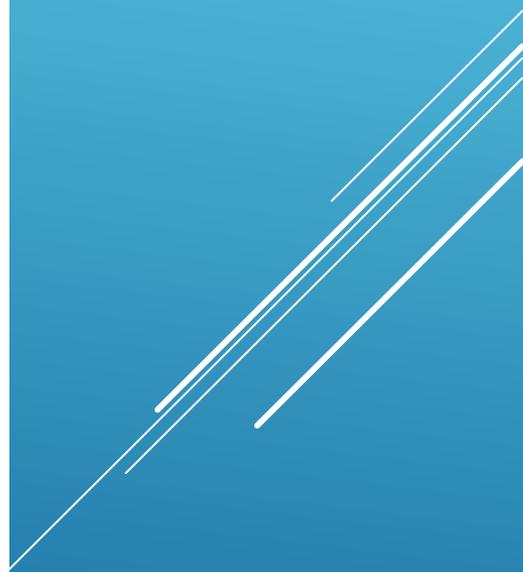
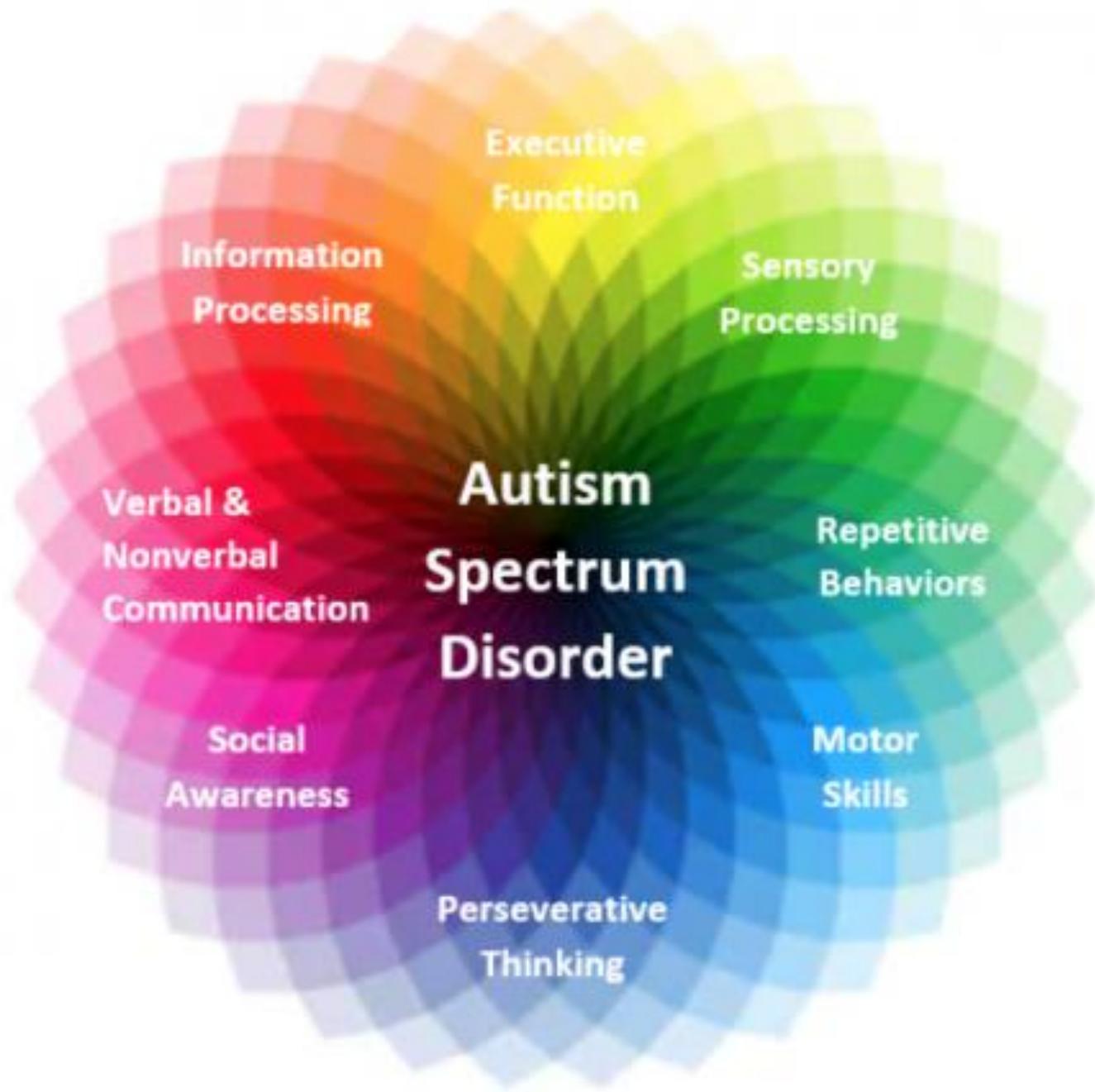
Impaired social communication and interaction



Restrictive or repetitive behaviors or interests

*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders –Fifth Edition DSM-5, 2013*





# STATISTICS

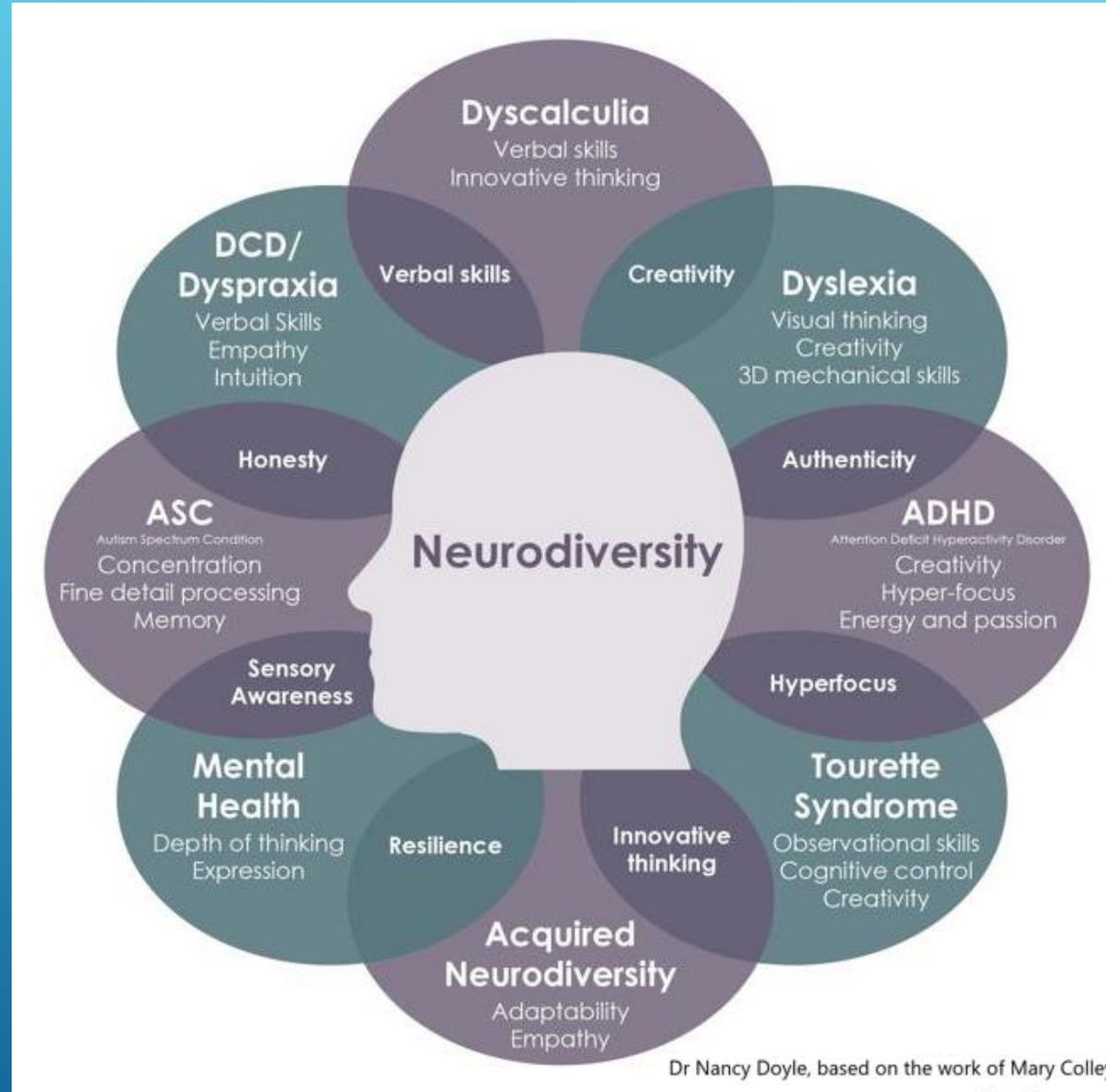
- ▶ 85% of autistic adults are unemployed or underemployed
- ▶ research shows that only 1/3 of people with Autism work in paid jobs for more than 15 hours per week. *Politico, October 2021*
- ▶ Today, 1 in 30 newborns are on the autism spectrum



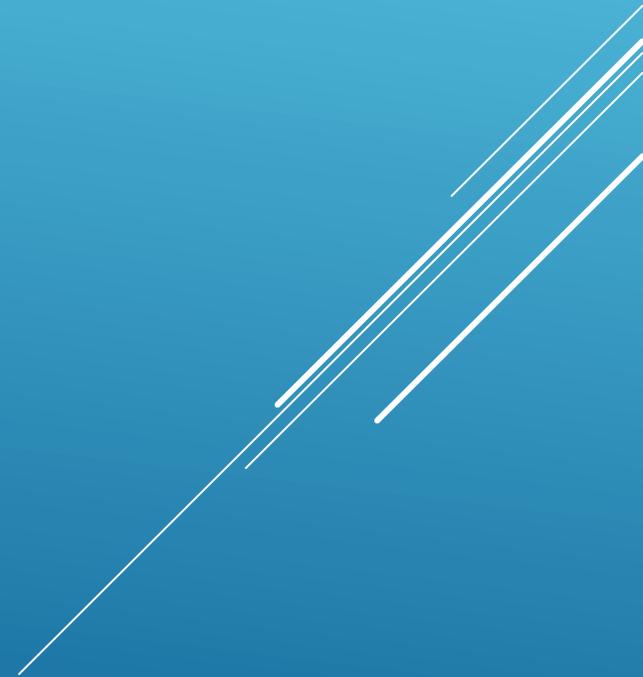
# NEURODIVERSE

The **range** of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as **part of a normal variation** in the human population.

Thanks to Crystal T. for reminding us that autism is not the only form of neurodiversity



Q & A



# What is the difference between *neurodiverse* and *neurodivergent*? And why do we need the labels?

How does the word “spectrum” play into an Autism diagnosis, or even the name, Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Neurodiverse	refers to a community/group. <i>Differing from one another</i> We are all unique with our own way of thinking/processing—as a group we are <i>diverse</i>
Neurodivergent	refers to a person. <i>Tending to be different.</i>
Spectrum	a range of characteristics
Disorder	an illness that disrupts normal physical or mental functions

we are learning that forms of neurodiversity are not illnesses, simply differences, so language is changing to *condition* to better reflect reality.

Labels can be helpful in understanding how a person is different from others—hopefully we will get to a place where we don’t need a label and we simply offer people what they need to be successful.

# What are some of the SOCIAL challenges neurodivergent people face in the the workplace?

- ▶ Adjusting to regular work hours
- ▶ Small talk and pleasantries
- ▶ Conversations versus Lectures
- ▶ Joining in activities
- ▶ Body language, such as minimal eye contact
- ▶ Speaking their truth
- ▶ Sensory issues
- ▶ Policing literal translation of rules and policies

Do not expect a person who is on the autism spectrum to become neurotypical.

At the same time, inappropriate behaviors can be managed and replaced with more appropriate coping behaviors

# Are there challenges for neurodivergent people related to TASKS that are expected in the workplace?

**Certainly.**

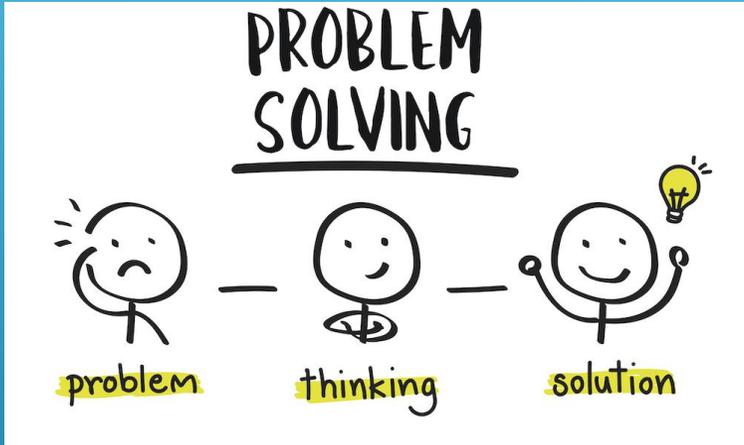
These challenges can be mitigated through coaching, tools and supervisory techniques

- ▶ Deciphering ambiguity
- ▶ Asking for help or clarification
- ▶ Providing status updates
- ▶ Planning, organizing, and prioritizing
- ▶ Receiving instructions on the fly
- ▶ Too many verbal instructions at once
- ▶ Attending and participating in meetings
- ▶ A slow-down in workflow – they like to be busy and “earn” their pay

# What value does a company get by having a neurodiverse culture/neurodivergent or autistic employees?

- ▶ 2 times more likely to meet or exceed financial targets
- ▶ *6 times more likely to be innovative*
- ▶ *6 times more likely to anticipate market changes*
- ▶ *Experiences 140% productivity*
- ▶ *Decrease in turnover*
- ▶ *More appealing place to work for millennials*
- ▶ *Improved morale*

What are the qualities of a person on the autism spectrum that make for great employees and contribute to the success of an organization?



minimal  
**ASSUMPTIONS**  
OR  
**BIASES**

**Attention**  
to **Detail** ✓

**FOCUS**

think

o	side
u	the
t	box



# How might an organization need to change in order for someone who is neurodivergent to be successful

- ▶ Understand that *they* have to change. It shouldn't all fall on the employee to adjust
- ▶ Ask/Be open to accommodations a neurodivergent might need.
  - ▶ People may have needs that are unique to them—don't assume all people with \_\_\_\_\_ will need or want the same accommodations.
  - ▶ Realize neurotypical people also receive accommodations (ie, change of schedule to pick up kids).
- ▶ Educate your workforce

# How might an organization need to change in order for someone who is neurodivergent to be successful

- ▶ Understand that *they* have to change. It shouldn't all fall on the employee to adjust
- ▶ Ask/Be open to accommodations a neurodivergent might need.
  - ▶ People may have needs that are unique to them—don't assume all people with \_\_\_\_\_ will need or want the same accommodations.
  - ▶ Realize neurotypical people also receive accommodations (ie, change of schedule to pick up kids).
- ▶ Educate your workforce

## What are some hiring/interview strategies an organization can use to get the best feel for a candidate who is autistic (or other neurodivergent)?

- ▶ Don't judge gaps in work history negatively.
- ▶ Interview in a quiet space free from distractions
- ▶ Provide interview questions ahead of time
  - ▶ Don't ask yes/no questions
  - ▶ Don't ask candidate to compare themselves to other candidates
  - ▶ Understand that neurodivergent people are typically very literal thinkers and will say what they are thinking—ask for the information you want to gather; be very specific
- ▶ If you sense a candidate is struggling, acknowledge this (be friendly), provide the questions , and offer to reschedule. No judgment.

See many suggestions at

<https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/what-to-do-when-interviewing-an-autistic-person-for-a-job>

(includes a downloadable guide)

I know someone who is *on the spectrum*, is super smart, and would be a great employee, but can't get through the gates because the hiring process is so automated now and you actually talk to anyone. How can I help her?

- ▶ Go through a hiring agency that has success finding jobs for neurodivergent people. They will have connections to willing and ready organizations and have a strategy or process that is better suited to neurodiversity.
  - ▶ MindShift—[www.mindshift.works](http://www.mindshift.works)
  - ▶ Google “hiring agency neurodiversity”
- ▶ Make a direct connection with the HR or Talent Management department of an organization. May take some tenacity. ;-)
  - ▶ Educate the organization
  - ▶ Help them see how they would benefit

I know someone who is *on the spectrum*, is super smart, and would be a great employee, but can't get through the gates because the hiring process is so automated now and you actually talk to anyone. How can I help her?

- ▶ Go through a hiring agency that has success finding jobs for neurodivergent people. They will have connections to willing and ready organizations and have a strategy or process that is better suited to neurodiversity.
  - ▶ MindShift—[www.mindshift.works](http://www.mindshift.works)
  - ▶ Google “hiring agency neurodiversity”
- ▶ Make a direct connection with the HR or Talent Management department of an organization. May take some tenacity. ;-)
  - ▶ Educate the organization
  - ▶ Help them see how they would benefit

# I am neurodivergent. How do I approach my manager and coworkers regarding how I process/interact and accommodations I need?

- ▶ It's all in how you talk about it:
  - ▶ I identify as being on the autism spectrum and would really be more productive and efficient if the lighting was different in my area—can I talk to you about some accommodations?
  - ▶ ...when I am processing information it really helps me to be moving. Can we hold meetings in a space where I have room to pace?
- ▶ Understand that the language in the law, “reasonable accommodations” may not mean the same thing to your manager or colleagues.
- ▶ Is helpful if your manager knows you are on the spectrum **before** you ask for accommodations.
- ▶ Manager might need to talk to HR. be ok with that. Ask to be included in that conversation – you have a better understanding of what you need than your manager. Follow up

## One of my direct reports is neurodivergent and has done very well for 2 year. Lately he's been struggling. What happened? How can I help?

- ▶ Only he knows what happened, but it probably has something to do with a change. Transitions and change are very disruptive and a neurodiverse person will need time and likely support to navigate to the new status.
  - ▶ Consider if there have been changes at work—colleague left, different work station, new process for something...
  - ▶ Know that the change/cause may be unrelated to work
- ▶ Be honest and share your observation (with kindness and respect)
  - ▶ Ask if there have been any changes at work/outside of work
  - ▶ Ask how you can help
- ▶ If working with an agency like MindShift, connect with them for support

If you know a change is coming at work, give a heads up so people aren't caught off guard and can start to process the change

# HELPFUL TIPS

Be Curious

Question Your  
Assumptions  
and Biases

Actively Listen,  
Internalize, &  
Learn

Step Out of  
Your Comfort  
Zone

# WHEN EVERYONE'S IN, EVERYONE WINS

## The Neurodivergent Employee

We all want to have some independence (including financial), contribute, and be part of something. Most of us take this for granted.

## Our Economy

from dependency to contributors paying taxes and exercising their buying power

## Our Culture

becoming a kinder and more inclusive society

# MIND SHIFT

JoLynn Larson

[jolynn.larson@mindshift.works](mailto:jolynn.larson@mindshift.works)

[www.mindshift.works](http://www.mindshift.works)

612-558-5005



Susan Williams, VBI Trainer

[swilliams@thevillagefamily.org](mailto:swilliams@thevillagefamily.org)

[www.thevillagefamily.org](http://www.thevillagefamily.org)

1-800-627-8220

# Thank You!



Special thanks to JoLynn Larson and the MindShift team for not only the bulk of this content, but also your work in advocating and educating us all on neurodiversity in the workplace.

# THE CHANGING FACE OF *leadership*



THE BUSINESS *bite* 

In this time of divisiveness, relationship-centered leadership is proving to be a cornerstone in successful management strategies. Join us for a discussion on this schema shift and gain strategies for embracing the team's power and moving toward a more emotionally-fulfilling work environment.

**Wednesday, May 10, 2023 Noon**

<https://thevillagefamily.org/events>