

## **Interview for Autism Opportunities - Ms. Shannon Pena (Autism Society of NC)**

### **In your opinion, what is a resource that could be offered to adults with autism to help them secure jobs?**

Every person with autism is unique and has their own unique strengths, abilities and talents. It is really important, in my opinion, that you look at each person's individual strengths and needs because everyone is so very different.

The best place a person can start to build work skills is with learning skills such as being on time and completing assigned tasks before ever even entering the job market. These skills can be learned through assigned tasks at home such as chores, through school and/or through volunteer opportunities. Once an individual is ready to look for a job, generally a good place to start is to figure out what they want to do. It is important to look at individual skills to figure out what kind of job they can do that utilizes those skills. When looking for jobs the individual needs to look at the description and needs of the job and determine if they have the skills necessary for the job, Find out which jobs are going to play up their skills and include less of the tasks that would fall into the "weaknesses" category.

I definitely recommend job coaching. Job coaching is a really good resource to help add structure and support to jobs. Individuals with autism typically do very well with structured environments. A job coach can provide structure as for what needs to be done first, second, and so on. A job coach can also help with identifying what the expectations of the job are so individuals can be really clear about everything they are supposed to be doing. Job coaches can also help with soft skills, training, job retention and more.

Participating in mock interviewing is also very helpful because a lot of people (with and without autism) have difficulty interviewing, and practice makes perfect! The more you practice the better you get!

### **How could companies make themselves more accessible to the workforce of adults with autism?**

There are some companies now that are marketing towards hiring people with autism. Sometimes the companies will use the term 'neurodiverse', and they are reaching out to recruit individuals with autism. So that's one of the new ways companies are doing it.

LiNC-IT, a program based out of the Mayor's office in Raleigh, also helps link employers with talent. Employers interested in making themselves more accessible to the workforce of adults with autism can become a part of the LiNC-It program. These employers would be able to send job descriptions to Autism Professionals who would link them to a candidate who is a good job match for the posted position. These Autism professionals will also become an active partner in helping to ensure both the employer and employee feel supported and successful.

### **What would help adults with autism make themselves more marketable to possible employers?**

Recognizing their strengths, knowing what they are good at, and working on ways to express those strengths to others. Individuals with autism have many skills and talents. It is important individuals recognize their skills as skills. Just knowing what they are good at and knowing the value of that. Recognizing the value they can bring to the employer is extremely helpful in job placement.