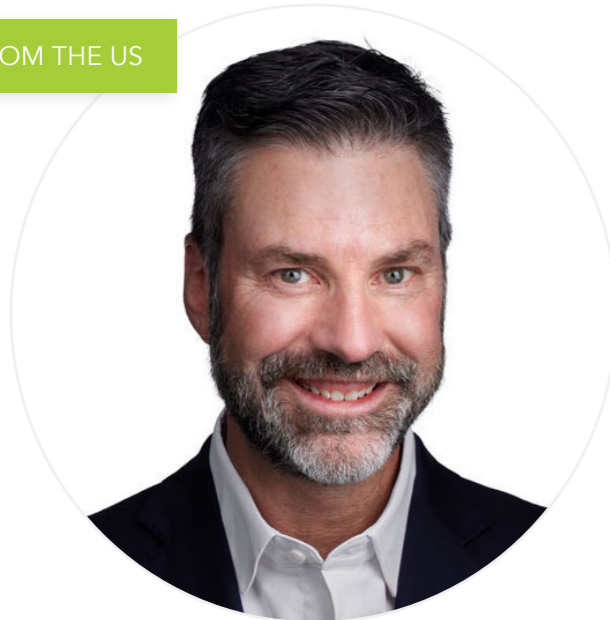


Create an **INCLUSIVE, NEURODIVERSE** workplace

Follow this advice to create opportunities for neurodiverse talent.

FROM THE US



BY CHRIS SULLENS

Chief Executive Officer of Florida based CentralReach

As the Great Resignation continues and quiet quitting becomes the new trend, the war for talent has become one of the most competitive battlegrounds in recent talent market history. Even as some tech companies pause hiring, there are still a record number of openings to be filled across industries. As a result, companies are putting more credence into workplace culture as a differentiator and long-term hiring strategy. Yet, too often, we see employers talk the talk only to struggle to walk the walk.

In my experience, there are a couple of ingredients needed to become an employer of choice in today's environment including, but not limited to, providing a mission that empowers and motivates, a comprehensive benefits stack that includes much more than competitive pay, and a culture that embraces and acts upon diversity, equity and inclusion. I could talk for

hours on the first two but for now I'll focus on the third because it deserves much more attention than what one sees in the news.

In the United States alone, one out of 45 adults is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and is often overlooked in the hiring process. As of 2021, 85% of the 5.6 million adults diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder were still unemployed or underemployed. The neurodiverse talent pool is expansive and largely untapped, making it a prime way for organizations to win the war for talent. It is time employers embrace neurodiverse hiring like they would any other type of hiring: as an organizational investment.

When a business provides an inclusive work environment that attracts and supports a wide variety of talent, including neurodiverse talent, everyone wins. Innovation and productivity thrive. Empathy pulses throughout the organization. Collaboration becomes contagious. Outcomes improve.

There are several ways an organization can attract neurodiverse talent and support them throughout their tenure with your company.

1. TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT THE JOB POSTING

A job posting is one of the first ways a potential employee can learn about a company and determine if the position may be a good fit. This is also the first opportunity for a company to promote inclusivity and attract neurodiverse talent.

Consider the language you are using in your job posting. Are you listing every skill needed under the sun? Try shrinking that list down to only the skills truly needed so candidates aren't deterred from applying. Consider using language that emphasizes your commitment back to supporting the candidate in their employment. Remember it's a two-way street and it may

be time to experiment how you frame your job posting to both attract more talent and show them your commitment to diversity and inclusion.

2. BE FLEXIBLE DURING THE HIRING PROCESS

Most organizations have an array of tools they use to evaluate a candidate that go beyond the traditional resume: assessments, video applications, you name it. We use many of these tools at CentralReach. However, as a hiring manager, it's important to remember that every candidate is unique, has different strengths and abilities, and has different ways of learning and communicating. Be sure to consider all aspects of the evaluation process so one evaluation doesn't improperly skew the picture of the candidate's true potential.

Consider providing applicants with a list of questions ahead of the interview. This will give them more time to prepare and perhaps, that's not such a bad thing. There are plenty of times where I ask my direct reports questions that they have to get back to me on. Is it so outrageous to offer that same consideration to a candidate?

The HR team should work with job candidates to decide the best interview structure for them. An interview provides an opportunity for the employer to get to know the candidate, as well as an opportunity for the job candidate to learn about the company. By demonstrating a supportive environment during the hiring process, the candidate will understand the company's dedication to inclusivity.

3. CUSTOMIZE WORKPLACE ONBOARDING

Once hired, starting a new job is overwhelming for anyone and guess what, we all learn differently. Personalizing the onboarding process to your new employees is a great way to ensure a successful onboarding and productive learning. Offer your employees a few ways they can learn, which could include 1-on-1 trainings, pre-recorded training videos, or group sessions.

Now more than ever, employees want to feel valued, wanted, and supported. Creating this type of environment breeds positivity and provides an opportunity for employees to flourish. By taking steps to accommodate the different ways people work, a company can get one step closer to creating a positive and inclusive work environment.

4. PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE

Once an employee is hired and the onboarding process is complete, organizations need to continue to provide additional support. As I said before, everyone learns differently and a great way to support employees in their career at your company is to provide the tools and resources to help them succeed. Take a look at your tech stack and ask yourself, "Is it supporting ALL my employees or just some?" Consider looking for solutions that could help neurodiverse learners succeed in their day to day.

Communication is key. Ask your employees what would work best for them and check in with them frequently to make sure they have the support they need. It is not enough to just set an employee up in the onboarding process. Ongoing care and support needs to be ingrained in your workplace culture.

Companies need to demonstrate their commitment to neurodiverse employees by creating flexible, supportive work environments from hiring to long-term employment. By setting all employees up with the tools they need for success, a business can fill roles, retain employees, improve company culture and continue to grow as an organization. ■

CHRIS SULLENS is the Chief Executive Officer of Florida based CentralReach, the leading provider of Autism and IDD Care software, providing the only complete, end-to-end software and services platform that helps children and adults diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and related intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) - and those who serve them - unlock potential, achieve better outcomes, and live more independent lives.