

2023 AUCD Autism Acceptance Month Webinar Series

Autistic Mentorship and Leadership

Tuesday, April 18, 2023

4:00 PM-5:00 PM

Sponsored by AUCD's Interdisciplinary Technical Assistance Center (ITAC) on Autism and Developmental Disabilities and Autism Special Interest Group (SIG)



- Ensure your name is displayed correctly in the participant list. You may also include program name and state and preferred pronouns.
 - Example: Rachel Miller, AUCD, she/her
- Hover over your name in the “Participants” box and select “More” → “Rename”
- Remain muted unless speaking
- State your name prior to speaking
- Captioning is available
- Use chat box to introduce yourself!



A project of AUCD to support Autism CARES programs

Autism SIG Co-Chairs

Anjali Rao, M.D.



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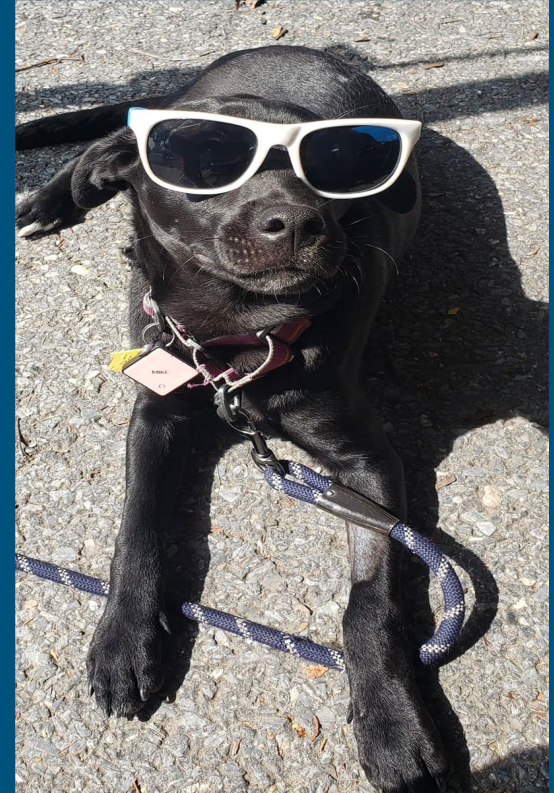
Autistic Mentorship and Leadership

Steven Isaacson



Agenda

- Leadership qualities
- Common autistic strengths
- Autistic people in leadership positions
- Why autistic mentors are effective
- How to mentor autistic people
- The lost generations
- Q&A



A couple notes...



- While the autism community is split on person-first vs. identity first language, I will primarily be using identity-first language in this talk.
- I do not speak for all autistic people. The experiences I share are my own. The experience of being autistic varies widely based on access to services, support needs, race, gender identity, and other factors.
- This presentation focuses on the benefits of autistic mentorship. However, there are plenty of amazing allistic support staff.

Hi, I'm Steven. And I'm autistic.

- Diagnosed at age 2 with PDD-NOS
- Received OT, Speech, Social skills therapy
- Went through school with an IEP
- Currently working on federal autism policy, Autism at Work, and EAP social work



What qualities do good leaders have?

Slido.com

What are some common autistic strengths?

Pattern recognition

Technical skills

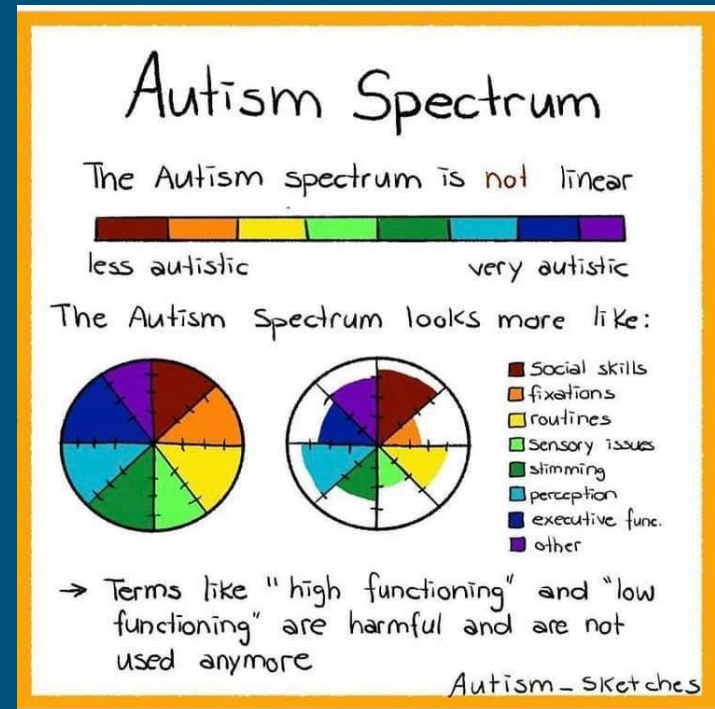
Direct communicators

Attention to detail

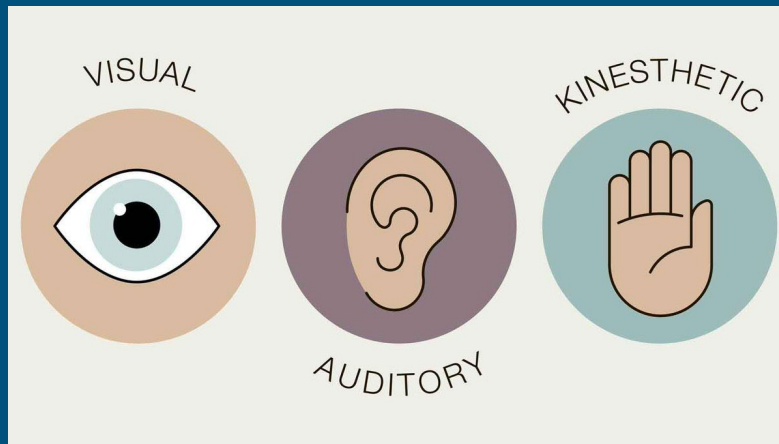
Punctuality/Professionalism

Empathy

Creativity



Autistic leaders understand there are differences in learning styles



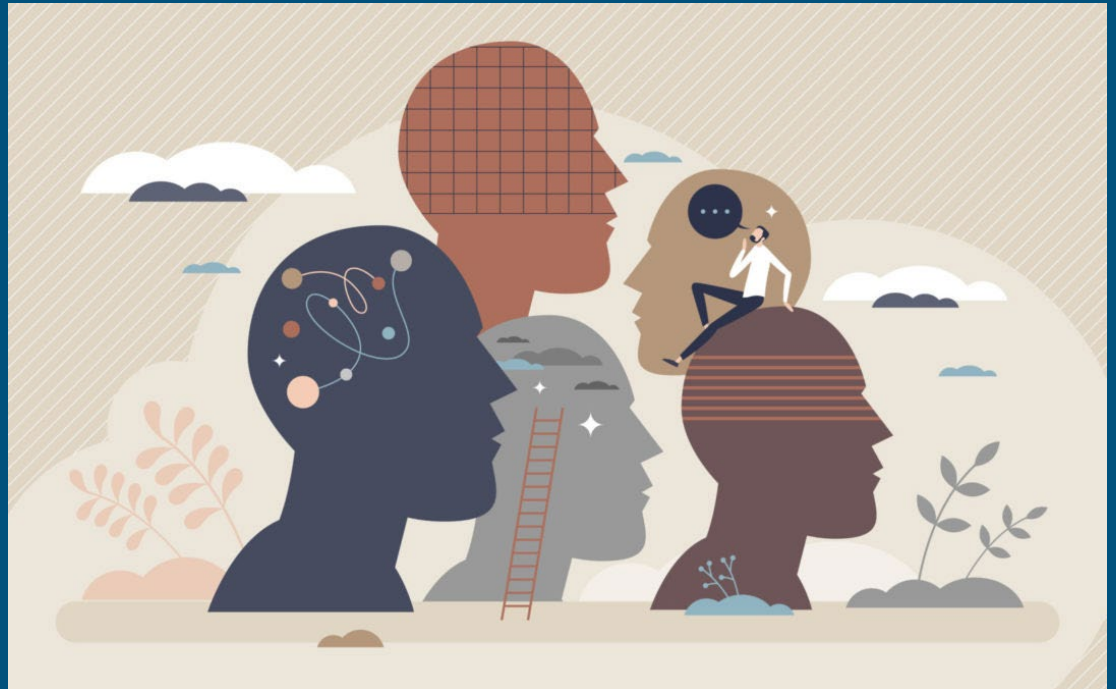
- Visual, **seeing**
- Verbal/Auditory, **listening**
- Pattern, **repetition**
- Kinesthetic, **by doing**

What is your learning style?

Slido.com

How are teams stronger with different minds?

- Out-of-the-box, creative thinking
- Accurate decision-making
- Detail-oriented
- Productive
- Balanced

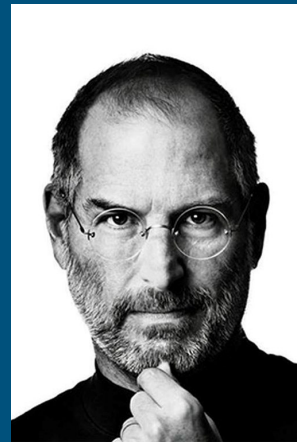


Are all autistic leaders good leaders?

Everyone has blind spots, and getting people to be socially engaged might be hard for some autistic people.

While technical skills are important, so is social organization. The point here is not to say all autistic people are good leaders.

But all autistic people should be given the chance to lead, be heard, and respected.



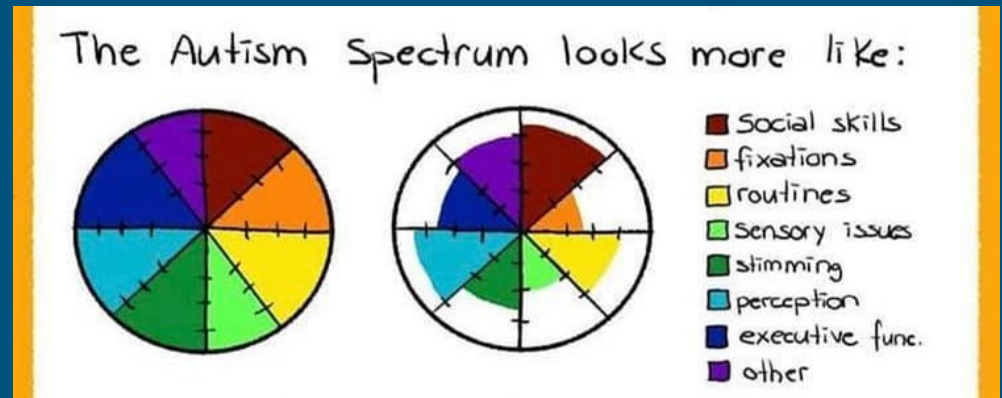
Why do autistic people need autistic mentors?

Autistic mentors can help break down deficit messaging that may be internalized from childhood (trauma).

Some diagnostic criteria don't match lived experience.

Assisting with:

- sensory integration
- social/romantic relationships
- communication
- executive functioning
- weaving interests into daily activities



Extra notes on autistic mentorship

- Most people see behavior. But what's often seen is an outward manifestation of inner conflicts and friction.
- People who have lived experience can predict the triggers and respond proactively.
- Autistic support staff should support the individual, but also interact respectfully with parents and family.



Applying Social Work (SW) principles to Autism

- Traditional autism services focus on behavior. While these services have modernized somewhat, they still largely ignore autistic agency and can produce long-term negative effects throughout the lifespan.
- As a social work student, I see the clear application of SW to autism:
 - Person in environment
 - Stages of change theory
 - Psycho-education
 - Driving instructor model
 - Family as a unit



How to help autistic people grow



- Allow us to fail based on the same standards as neurotypicals.
- Normalize not knowing, but teach how to find the answer.
- Help us explore our feelings and thoughts. Act more as a partner than an authority.
- Be aware of the person's sensory environment and potential triggers.

The lost generations

There are entire generations of autistic people who live among us and have never received a diagnosis.

For one reason or another, whether:

- they were institutionalized
- did well academically
- or received a misdiagnosis

Donald T.



This means there are **potentially millions** of people who have learned to mask their autism and survive in a world not built for them. We need to find that expertise.

My vision: Autistics mentoring autistics

We know one of the main barriers to autistic success are unwritten rules.

We know society has forced us to conform to neurotypical behaviors.

We know what it feels like to have sensory needs.

Mentorship does not replace therapy



Questions, Comments, Answers?

Contact:

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2023 Autism Acceptance Month

- **A First Look at the 2023 IACC Strategic Plan**

Wednesday, April 26, 2023, 2:00 PM EST – 3:00 PM EST

- **Autism SIG: Roundtable on Leadership and Mentorship**

Monday, May 8, 2023, 4:00 PM EST – 5:00 PM EST

- https://www.aucd.org/template/event.cfm?event_id=9480&id=379&parent=379



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