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Self-Help

Business for Aspies: 42 Best Practices for Using Asperger Syndrome Traits to Work Successfully

Ashley Stanford
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For many people, the corporate office is a weird extension of high school. It is a setting where social professional norms blend as coworkers politic and backstab their way to the top. Smiles, nods, small talk and handshakes are expected, but must follow the guidelines of an unwritten code. For people living with Asperger Syndrome, self-appellatively known as Aspies, these interactions can be terrifying. Their defensive responses, everything from zoning out to various tics and gestures, make it difficult for bosses, coworkers, and even the Aspies themselves to see the strengths they bring to a job.

Using the DSM-IV's structure as her guide, Ashley Stanford explores each aspect of the syndrome within the contexts of business relationships and job productivity in her new book, *Business for Aspies: 42 Best Practices for Using Asperger Syndrome Traits at Work Successfully* . The result is a well-written resource that shifts the focus of Asperger Syndrome in the office environment from a liability to an asset.

While Stanford does not have Asperger Syndrome herself, she does have an intimate understanding of it. In her 2002 book, *Asperger Syndrome and Long-Term Relationships*, she supplemented her research with her own experiences with her husband. He and two of her sons live with Asperger diagnoses.

The identifying characteristics of Asperger Syndrome cover four basic categories: social interactions; speech and language; restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns; and a catchall of criteria not met for other disorders. In both the DSM-IV and *Business for Aspies*, these categories are methodically broken down to specific behaviors. Social interactions, for example, range from "marked impairment in use of eye-to-eye gaze" to a "lack of social or emotional reciprocity."

The accessibility of *Business for Aspies* is a testament to Stanford's sixteen years as a

technical writer. After each behavior, she offers a series of “best practice.” Ostensibly addressing the Aspie employee, the practices not only manage the specific behavior but also identify its inherent strengths to the employer. In the aforementioned “lack of social or emotional reciprocity,” Stanford empowers the Aspie worker as she shifts the focus from office friendships to professional deportment. By maintaining a professional distance from colleagues, the employee limits stressful interactions while the employer has found a potential management candidate.

That is the big takeaway of *Business for Aspies*. Rather than suggesting ways to fit in, Stanford cuts through the social trappings to find the best employees: ones who get the job done.

Joseph Thompson