[THEME MUSIC]

**THIS IS AUTISM POINTS OF VIEW…**

**I’M FELIPE MAYA**

[THEME MUSIC]

**October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month and national data indicates that the vast majority of adults with autism are either unemployed or underemployed, with estimates ranging to as high as 90%. This should not be the case, and it won’t be for long.**

**At Autism Speaks, we know that these poor outcomes are not due to an inability of autistic people to perform job tasks. We know of many autistic adults who are demonstrating their competence in a wide variety of industries and at all ranks within businesses around the world. But for too many, these job opportunities are just not being made available to them.**

**Autism Speaks works with many companies in both formal and informal capacities to educate them about the benefits of hiring autistic adults, and to help them learn how to best support employees with autism.**

**Comcast is one of a growing number of companies that recognize that hiring autistic adults is good for business. In this episode, you’ll meet 21-year-old Comcast employee Matthew Brennan. Matthew is a full-time Data Analyst who in 2018 was named the Engineering, Information Technology, and Scientific Sector All-Star by the American Staffing Association. You’ll also meet Philip Batalia, Comcast senior director of service policy assurance – he hired Matthew.**

**I called them up to get a sense of how hiring autistic employees has impacted their department.**

 “Hey Matt, hey Phil…hey, how are ya. Matt, why don’t you start by telling me your name and your job title.”

**Matthew**: My name is Matthew Brennan. I am a data analyst at Comcast. It basically entails building reports on the applications that our team owns and just sending them to higher ups so they’ll make business recommendations based on the data provided.”

**Matthew started out at Comcast as a contractor through a company called Rangam Consultants. Rangam is a minority, woman, and disability-owned workforce solutions company. Rangam partnered with Autism Speaks in 2015 to launch The Spectrum Careers dot com: an employment platform for autistic job-seekers and employers. That’s where Matthew got connected with Comcast. So Matthew’s employer knew that he was autistic from the start, whereas oftentimes to disclosure one’s diagnosis can be a tricky decision for autistic job-seekers.**

**Matthew**: There was immediate disclosure at the point that comcast was involved. From what I understand, Phil can probably clarify on this point but Comcast had started an initiative to reach to people on the spectrum to try and employ them…really make use of the more rigid infrastructure, analytical mindset that autism tends to lean towards. They set up the interview with Phil and I guess the interview went well because I am here today.”

**Philip:** Matt was one of the best interviews I have ever conducted and it was just shocking to me - what I had come to find out through research is that these guys were looking to fill up time over the course of the week working for pay or without even getting paid just for a sense of purpose and for whatever reason they can’t do it. The stigma or otherwise, it’s what motivated me to select Matt.

**Before Comcast, Matthew worked in a variety of jobs from working at a paint store, to McDonalds to being an assistant mechanic. But he says, with his autism, being a data analyst is the perfect fit for him.**

**Matthew**: Some of my biggest troubles with autism mainly revolve around social interaction and conversations. It’s difficult to interact with people who maybe aren’t so aware of the challenges, so I might say something that is really off-color or it might be taken as something completely different and I won’t quite pick up on that, that I’ve soured the mood or conversation. But on the other side it has helped me become very analytical when it comes to things that are more defined. Data analysis ended up being a perfect fit for me where maybe analyzing person-first interactions is not one of my strong suits.

**Before hiring Matthew and others on the spectrum, Comcast’s service policy assurance team was outsourcing data analysts with poor results. Philip Battalia says he was inspired to look into an autistic talent pool after reading an article about the lack of employment opportunities.**

**Philip:** I came across this article about people on the spectrum not being gainfully employed and some areas they had been given a shot to work in, one of them was the banking industry. Here is stack of checks or transactions or something but I remember it was a stack of paper and folks on the spectrum were hired to go through them and spot any anomalies and I said, that is software testing. It’s the same thing as software testing. Then I saw something about the spectrum careers which is what Rangam was and they were aligned with Autism Speaks which is a brand I had at least known of. I had no exposure to autism or people on the spectrum but I was kind of touched by what I had read. The working life of some of these people and what they go through. I thought that maybe I could give this a shot.

**Matthew says this job gives him a steady paycheck with a sense of purpose.**

**Matthew:** One, I like getting paid. That’s a big one. I love the work. It fills me with a sense of purpose, I feel like the work I’m doing is meaningful. I can look at the numbers after I submit a report on something and I can see a decrease in spam. I know, I can see the data myself that what I’m doing is having a direct and immediate impact on helping our customers, making people lives easier and more convenient.

**Matthew got his job at Comcast right after high school, but he still plans to finish his education.**

**Matthew:** I guess I would have tried to go to college if Comcast hadn’t picked me up or I would have tried to go to college and tried to get job through more official means, beating down doors to get interviews wherever I can. But Comcast really helped me jump forward on that. I have the luxury of going back to school without so much of the stress of, I need to do this within a certain amount of time, I need to finish this degree in two years to make my money back as soon as possible.

**Now that Philip’s team has had experience with employees on the spectrum, I asked him what he would say to an employer who’s perhaps hesitant to** **seek out autistic employees.**

**Philip:** This was so much easier than I thought it was going to be – hiring people on the spectrum. They integrated so easily that it was almost effortless for me to get them into our world. So the fear that someone might have about employing folks on the spectrum - I get it, not everyone can do it. But see what’s out there, look around, try to be bold in this area. Because I was shocked in the folks on the spectrum out there, that were technical, that filled needs for us.

**I also asked Matthew what advice he has for autistic job-seekers.**

**Matthew:** Go forward and don’t be afraid to make mistakes because you may be turned down by 100 employers but you only need to find one. You only need one or two successes to really kick things into gear for yourself. You only need one opportunity to really change your life and get everything on track to set yourself up for the future. Don’t be afraid of failing in the meantime

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**This episode was written and produced by me and edited by Dax Schaffer with original theme music by Dustin Gledhill. I’m Felipe Maya, thanks for listening.**