**Episode 10: More companies are recruiting adults with autism**

**HOST**: This is Autism Points of View by Autism Speaks. I’m Felipe Maya. People with autism have a wide variety of talents and skill sets that make them valuable employees with the right supports and accommodations. For this episode, we spoke with Jared Flor and John Knapp, both are on the autism spectrum and work at a Staples’ Warehouse in London, Ohio.

**JARED**: Hi I am Jared Flor. I am a, I ship soda packaging. I put soda in a box and make sure it’s the right type. I have these little tickets that have a certain label and a certain soda, put them in a box, tape them and then they go on the conveyor belt and I think they’re shipped to certain trucks and shipped out.

It’s been going great here. When we got this job, started to learn a few things, made a few mistakes, but I’ve been learning over the past year.

**DIRK**: So, let me start off, first, I guess. My son is 11-years-old and he’s autistic. So this is where, I wanted to be involved with this from the get-go.

**HOST**: Dirk Beckett, Jared’s manager.

**DIRK**: When he started it was kind of a slower process, it was more of a socialization kind of standpoint first, getting comfortable with everybody, getting comfortable, you know with the associates and the management team. Once he hit that point, he just took off.

The other part that they have is that they’re inclusive as far as when we do associate recognition days whether it be meals, lunches. Somebody’s always looking out for him. You know, somebody’s always gonna tell him, “Hey, look, it’s time to come up front,” or “Why don’t you come up with us and grab a bite, sit with us.” And then from an actual safety standpoint you know they’ve really gathered around him, as far as, when we do our fire drills, our safety drills, things like that. Making sure that anytime something like that comes up, they’ve taken the ownership to say, “Hey I’ve got Jared,” or “Hey, I’ve got John with me,” can you call on the radio and let ‘em know we’re all good back in the back?

You’re much, much more apt to want to be successful and to want to be a part if you feel included, or if you feel inclusive to the group.

**HOST**: Both Jared and John prep packages of soda to be shipped out to Staples locations across the country.

**JOHN**: I make boxes and when I have the ticket, uh, I read the tick--, I mean I don’t read them but Pat reads them for me and then I put the 12-pack of Diet Coke into the box then I get the label for which one it is and then I put it on the box, tape the box and ship it out.

**ERIN**: I actually have a nephew that has been diagnosed autistic. And then we have a good family friend that has an autistic child.

**HOST**: Erin Kareen, John’s manager.

**ERIN**: We were excited to bring them in and give them a chance to work. And they actually will outperform a lot of our other associates because the drive is there to be a functioning member of society. I know from my department as a whole, everybody has been extremely welcoming. And if other people don’t necessarily know who John or Jared are, if the guys here, kind of… I don’t want to say poke fun, but if they say, “Hey, who’s that guy?” everybody’s quick to defend them. John and Jared, they’re everybody’s friend. The guys, they really look out for them. So I think it just, it brings everybody together.

I think the thing that I have found the most inspiring in working with John and Jared is how hard they work to overcome an obstacle that they don’t let it get in their way.

**HOST**: John and Jared are both on the spectrum and they do the same job. But their challenges and strengths are different so it’s important that the supports they receive at work are personalized. One example, is that unlike Jared, John has limited literacy skills.

**JOHN**: Well we found out that he doesn’t read very well, but he memorizes better than I do. So the pop that he loads, he gets a ticket, and it has code on it, so I showed him how to compare the code to what the pop was—each brand of pop has its own code to it—and he learned to memorize every single one of them, there's more than 40, I think, and he remembered all of them. He remembers all of them. He makes no mistakes. I think he’s had one this whole entire year, in shipping out the wrong product. He does better than people that read. So I just had to come up with way to show him how to compare the codes, make sure that they’re the right ones and now he can do them without even hardly looking. He sees the ticket, knows exactly what it is, loads the pop up and takes it.

**HOST**: Another support that Jared and John utilize, is an onsite job coach.

**LENISA**: Yes. My name is Lenisa Cooper. I am a job coach for Capabilities, Inc. Jared can read so we have to make sure he stays focused and not jump ahead and pick the wrong item that might be adjacent to the one that he's supposed to pick. Um, make sure that when he sees Coke that he’s picking up Coke and not 7-Up. And just stay focused on his job because he can, if you start talking to him, he can forget that he’s working. And he’s very social. We like to have discussions, long discussions on Marvel Comics, going to co-sign And things like that. So just keeping him focused on his job was the hardest thing.

We had to set alarms on his cell phone so that he takes medication at 4’o clock, he has to… um, his alarm will go off for that. And then it goes off for his break. And then it goes off for his time to go home because he doesn't tell time on an analog clock that well. So digital clocks aren’t available out where he’s working so we had to do that on his phone.

**HOST**: While Lenisa helps Jared stay focused on his daily tasks. She helps John develop the skills he needs to achieve his career goals.

**JOHN**: Um, I want to move up. But I have to learn to read first. The people at Staples helped me find it easy to do the pop but I want to do the trucks but I have to read first to move up.

**LENISA**: I also sent a letter to his support counselor about reaching out to try to find somebody, a tutor, or somebody that could help him learn how to read because he wants to go into shipping. He really likes helping out over there but it’s limited to what he can do. If he could learn how to read he could do the whole entire shipping department but right now he’s limited to UPS and FedEx because he’s memorized what those letters look like. Like I said, he doesn’t make any errors so he doesn’t need me here on a consistent basis. I have some people that I check on several times a week but John does so well that I’m only here twice a month with him.

**HOST**: For people with autism and other disabilities there’s also the complicated decision whether or not to disclose their diagnosis early on in the employment process like on their resume or in their first interview. Here’s Jared.

**JARED**: I think it’s on my resume. I think I let people know that I have a disability many times. I think it’s probably something I should do because I might not know certain things or do things that I should and I’m always still learning. If I’m not understanding something I just let them know that I have autism and I have trouble understanding certain things.

**HOST**: Staples isn’t the only company recognizing the benefits of hiring adults with autism. Walgreens, Microsoft, and Dell, just to name a few, also have similar initiatives. But this is what Staples told us about why they are investing in an inclusive hiring program. “At Staples we fundamentally believe in the value of inclusion. Being inclusive allows us to benefit from all our associates whose unique abilities make us better as a company and culture. From the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2018 the Labor Force participation rate for working-age people with disabilities is 32% compared to nearly 77% for people without disabilities. Being inclusive when hiring and partnering with the autism community brings an opportunity to explore an un-tapped pool of talent and find the right people to meet the needs of our customers and ultimately strengthen our teams. Here’s Durk.

**DIRK**: It really blows my mind that there’s not more out there because I think there’s a lot of services that can be provided through folks that possibly are on the spectrum. It’s just a matter of giving them the opportunity to do so. One of the reasons why I wanted to be involved with it is because obviously somewhere down the line that may be a feasible option for my son.

**HOST**: For Jared this job gives him the opportunity to do things on his own.

**JARED**: It’s that I feel independent, that’s the thing I like the most. It means I can pay for my own things. And, um, you know, it gives me something to do, like not just sit at home or do something. And I just say, you know, just because someone has a disability, doesn’t mean they can’t do it. There's been a lot of people there as well as myself accomplishing many things that are hard-working employees.

**HOST**: For John, this job is just the beginning. He now has career goals to work towards which help him achieve his life goals.

**JOHN**: My mom was happy. She said, “I don’t know,” ‘cause she worked before and, she said I’d never find a job like that. She says she’s proud of me, what I’m doing. It changed my life. I can buy things more and save more money. I’m saving money, I’m saving up to try get my license and then probably a truck. It makes me happy, too.

**HOST**: Thank you for listening to this episode of Autism Points of View. Make sure to subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts to get future episodes as soon as they’re released. This episode was produced and written by me, co-written by Elena Feretti and edited by Dax Schaffer. If you have a topic you’d like us to cover, we want to hear from you. Email us at connectwithus@autismspeaks.org and write ‘podcast’ in the subject line. I’m Felipe Maya, thanks for listening.