

Ron Sandison

With Spectrum Inclusion does is I go to schools. I go to colleges. I go to churches and I do autism workshops on employment. And I teach young adults with autism how to gain those skills, how to be able to develop their special interest in the employment opportunities. What I also do with Spectrum Inclusion is I write articles that are young adults who are gainfully employed and share ways that people on the spectrum can learn from those people and develop those same skills.

Eileen Lamb

Welcome to "Adulthood on the Spectrum". In this podcast, we want to highlight the real voices of autistic adults, not just inspirational stories, but people like us talking about their day to day life. Basically, we want to give a voice to a variety of autistic people. I am Eileen Lamb an autistic author and photographer and I co-host this podcast with Andrew Komarow.
. Hey Andrew.

Andrew Komarow

And I'm Andrew Komarow, autistic entrepreneur, software engineer, co-host of this podcast and a better swing dancer between me and Eileen. Today our guest is Ron Sandison. Ron works full time in the medical field and as a professor of theology at Destiny School. He is an advisory board member of Art of Autism and the Center of Excellence. Sandison has a Master of Divinity from Oral Roberts University and is the author of A Parent's Guide to Autism A Practical Advice. He is founder of Spectrum Inclusion, which empowers young adults with autism for employment. Ron and his wife, Kristin, reside in Rochester Hills, Michigan. Fun fact they have the most expensive car insurance in the country with their daughter, Mikayla. Welcome.

Ron Sandison

Oh, thanks so much for having me on your show today.

Andrew Komarow

And I know you've said that you have listened to our show before, which means that you probably remember that we like to ask each guest how they prefer to identify so person with autism on the spectrum, autistic Asperger's. Do you have a preference? And if so, what is it?

Ron Sandison

I use both. I use them for them. So I'm not especially in my writing because it gets monotonous. If you say a person with autism or autistic person too many times. So I like to switch just to keep the kind of the foil going, especially with writing, because if you use just one all the time that

people sometimes get tired of just seeing the one. But I think both are equally important.

Eileen Lamb

As such a good reason. Yeah, I love that I write a lot and in my captions I'm always switching like on the spectrum. Autistic person with autism. And yeah, you're right. It's just, you know, it's very repetitive if you use the same terminology all the time, so.

Andrew Komarow

Well, wait, wait. So both of you are autistic and don't like the same thing and being repetitive and prefer variety.

Eileen Lamb

Well, it's just that, you know, it's the writing rule. I know. It's just that we like to follow rule. That's why the repetitive thing doesn't apply.

Ron Sandison

I can see I have editors, too, with my books because they're traditionally published. So I hear from them and I don't use a variety, so I get used to that. It becomes a new pattern, especially after publishing three books and then with a fourth book that I've written, it's going to get published hopefully soon.

Eileen Lamb

Can you tell us about your diagnosis journey?

Ron Sandison

So my diagnosis was in 1982 when I got diagnosed with autism. It was one in every 10,000 children. Now it's one in every 36 children. What led up to my diagnosis is that when I was entering kindergarten, my speech was so delayed that my brother Chuck would introduce me to people saying, You need meet my brother Ron. I think he's from Norway.

Ron Sandison

He had me talk. No one knew what I was saying. So he became an expert on Norwegian languages. And also when I was in kindergarten, my ability to interact with other children was very limited. So the school specialists want to label me emotionally impaired and my mom's. It's not emotional, it's neurological. And during that time, when I was seven years old, she took me to Henry Ford Hospital and they diagnosed with autism.

Eileen Lamb

Can you tell us a little bit more about I know you talk a lot about employment here, so we're just jumping from you know, 7 to 17. Can you tell us a little bit more about spectrum inclusion, what that is and how it helps with autism, employment?

Ron Sandison

Yeah. So Spectrum Inclusion is a website and also an organization that helps people with autism get gainfully employment. Currently in the United States, only 3% of people with autism are gainfully employed. Only 20% have a job. And with spectrum exclusion does, I go to schools. I go to colleges, I go to churches, and I do autism workshops on employment.

And I teach young adults with autism how to gain those skills, how to be able to develop their special interest in the employment opportunities. What I also do with spectrum inclusion is I write articles that of young adults who are gainfully employed and share ways that people on the spectrum can learn from those people and develop those same skills.

Ron Sandison

And one of the other things I do is I mentor and coach many young adults with autism. After I do my presentations, I give my email out there and I get emails from people with questions related to their employment, related to their advocacy, and I send them articles that I've written on those topics. And I also send them advice and help them kind of life coach with those.

And then I have once a year I give out to Honey Badger Awards to young adults on the autism spectrum who are gainfully employed and have a unique entrepreneurship to them and are encompassing amazing things. While on the spectrum, people like Dylan was one of the winners this year, and Grant McNair, who's an artist. So I share their story once I give them the award, and then it helps some young adults see that there's other people on the spectrum who are gainfully employed and have developed those skills in their own life.

Eileen Lamb

That's awesome. And before that, you got a degree in divinity. I mean, I had never heard of it before. Like, can you tell us about what it is and if it does anything to do with your work in the employment industry.

Ron Sandison

So my I have a master divinity. It's the highest theological degree that you can get from a university before a Ph.D. and a master of divinity is 90 credit hours. You have to do a practicum, an internship with a church. And it took me three years to get it, and I got mine from Oral Roberts University, and I use my master divinity to speak at churches.

Ron Sandison

And I'm in the process. Tomorrow I'll be Wednesday. I mean, I'm going to be meeting with the Assemblies of God to get ordained. And almost every major denomination there, pastors have to have a master divinity to get ordained in there. So it's a religious degree, but it's the highest religious degree you can get for a Ph.D..

Andrew Komarow

Has faith played a role with your autism? I mean, I'm assuming given autism's a part of you, I would say whether it's a stereotype or not, that most people I run into on the autism spectrum are not very religious. Can you tell me? But that's not always the case. So we've talked to quite a few, but can you talk more about that?

Ron Sandison

Yeah. So Faith is a big part of my life and also ministry. I have a unique gift. I have over 15,000 Bible verse and memorized word Perfect. The only person I ever met in my whole life with more verses memorized was Dr. Jack Van MP. And in 2000 I mentored under Dr. Jack Van MP while I was working on my Master's Divinity summer before, and I speak at about 25 churches a year.

I'm going to be the first Assemblies of God minister who will be licensed under their denomination. Right now, there's never been in some ways a God minister who was on license or they're ordained in almost all the denominations. There's very few people on the spectrum working as ministers. The main person on autistic ministers, Dr. Omari Hardwick out of Georgia.

Ron Sandison

And then for Priest, it's Matthew Snyder, who's the most famous for the autistics, who's on the priesthood, and both of them and their books. If you open up their books, there's endorsement for me in there. So it's very rare. An autistic minister, there's a few out there I can fit on two hands. How many ministers there are who are on the autism spectrum that I know of?

There's probably bonds who are undiagnosed, but who are actually diagnosed and actually share their diagnosis with being on the autism spectrum. You could fit them on two hands. So for the amount 5% of the population being on the autism spectrum, there should be more autistic people in ministry. But it's very rare, as you mentioned.

Andrew Komarow

I appreciate the the additional clarification. I was actually got a quick question you about that when you said yes, the ones who I know or who are public are. Quick follow up to that question. Can you recite for us a number? And remember, this is an adult podcast, too, so can you recite to us numbers 2221, please?

Ron Sandison

2221 that when I actually I don't have it memorized yet.

Andrew Komarow

Oh, it's it's the hour saw the Angel of the Lord so you know blog. Okay so yes so I.

Ron Sandison

Could quote another one on the angel Psalms 34 seven angel or two camps around those who care and those who trust is on failing of Psalms 9111 412 He commands angels concern you to guide you all the way as they lift you up in your hands. So strike your foot against the stone. So I have my verses not memorized by reference, but by subject.

So if I get a subject, I can tell you everything on that subject. So that's how it's kind of unique, how I have the verse memorized. And there's 36,000 verses in the Bible. I only have 15,000 memorized. I have two whole New Testament memorized.

Eileen Lamb

That's it.

Andrew Komarow

I'm background Jewish, so definitely familiar with the Old Testament, and I definitely like looking at the most inappropriate and strange Bible verses. So hence I happen to know. Yeah. Yep. Alarms us anyway. Yes.

Ron Sandison

And you know so one of the most inappropriate says Ezekiel 2317 in his genitals or like that of a donkey.

Andrew Komarow

I won't even recite the story of what happened to Lot's wife before and after she turned us all on this podcast. But I think that one might win.

Ron Sandison

Yeah.

Andrew Komarow

Yeah, let's get that one.

Eileen Lamb

So to go back to things that I do know about.

Andrew Komarow

Which isn't much.

Eileen Lamb

I know about Stage fright, so I'm wondering if you ever get stage fright because you say you talk about you talk at like 25 conferences a year, which seems like a lot. How do you handle stage fright if you do get it?

Ron Sandison

So the reason I don't get it is my main message is I have about ten main messages and I could do them in my sleep and I actually picture myself before I do my presentation. I see myself up there doing the presentation. So spoken enough places where that stage fright goes away. The only time I felt nervous was 2017.

Temple Grandin was sitting right front row when I was presenting it. Metro Parent at Troy Marriott. So I felt nervous about having her be in the front row. But I wasn't afraid of the crowd because I was used to having 200 people in the crowd. The biggest crowd I ever spoke to was or 6500 people at World Harvest Church.

Ron Sandison

Pastor Rob pass through his church. He has a son, Austin, on the autism spectrum. So I know my speeches well enough from presentations where I don't really get nervous anymore.

Eileen Lamb

That's really cool. And I wish I was like you because as much as I know my subjects and I know what I'm saying, as soon as I see the people, it's it's over. And I don't know how I'm going to I'm going to do it like sunglasses maybe, you know, But yeah.

Ron Sandison

Yeah. And then sometimes the unexpected becomes the expected. I was doing a sermon. God's got this in front of about a thousand people at a large church. And then right in the middle of my sermon, one of the older ladies is walking down the aisles after using the restroom. We're going to use her cell phone. Then she trips and falls and I end up having to pause for a few seconds while the elders helped her up and got her the help she needed.

So sometimes you'll be speaking in front of a large audience and unexpected things will happen that are beyond your control.

Eileen Lamb

That's like hell for me if I can sit through some of your religious. But like, yeah, thinking about it, it's just like, I know I would laugh, you know, it's like a it's a nervous reaction, you know, seeing someone shrink. Yeah, It's so funny. And I know it's totally inappropriate and it would be like, so difficult to, like, control it on stage.

So now I'm even more terrified. Thank you.

Ron Sandison

Yeah. So it, it's. Sometimes I don't expect it will happen.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, I mean, I mean, what would happen? Like, think about it. Someone folds like an old lady, which is really sad and you start laughing on stage. What would people say about you?

Ron Sandison

You know? Yeah. That's why you don't laugh. You just pause and say, We're going to wait a minute. We'll get on with the message. We have a little emergency or something like that, I think is what I said.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, I mean, that sounds like the right answer, but what if your brain is just can do it and start laughing, you know?

Ron Sandison

Yeah, that could happen with some people. I've seen that happen.

Eileen Lamb

I mean, that would definitely happen. That's what I'm saying.

Ron Sandison

Scary is.

Eileen Lamb

Andrew, what do you think about that?

Andrew Komarow

About I mean I don't so yeah, any time like I like last year when I gave a keynote, I didn't even think about it until beforehand. And that just helped a lot, you know, especially if it's something like you've spoken about. Like Ron said, if you know, ten times or a bunch of times, you know, you're just talking about one of your favorite subjects that's pretty easy for like, you know, an autistic person to do for a short period.

So, yeah, I just I like to just show up completely unprepared and kind of wing it. And then I can't really have anxiety beforehand. So seems to mostly work. Well.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, that's kind of what I was going for. Yeah.

Ron Sandison

What also you can do is this is have your whole presentation on your PowerPoint. So then your PowerPoint photos remind you where you're at. And then there's three things you want in every message you want to hook. That means you want people to look at your message. You have exactly one minute to draw the listeners attention or you're not going to pay attention.

Ron Sandison

So you hook them in with a story or hook them into your topic. Then you got book. You got to have content that's going to they're going to come away learning something. Then you got to took something. They can apply their life. And if you have those three things, your message is going to be great and then add a little humor to it and it's icing on the cake.

So those are things I do. All my messages, the 250,000 people I've spoken to, I've had those three things.

Eileen Lamb

Great tips.

Ron Sandison

If you want to be an even better speaker. Speaker one for an elementary school kids, because if you don't have a hook, you don't have interesting stories, interesting photos, interesting. You're going to have a bunch of us kids. So you speak in front of 800 elementary school students and

do that about 20 times. You'll message all the engaging.

Andrew Komarow

So moving back to employment a little bit, what do you think is one thing employers can do to be more inclusive to those with autism?

Ron Sandison

So I think one thing people can do or employers is they can have people with autism come in, speak to your company and their employees to luncheon words when autistic and neurodiversity in the workplace. And that way people understand it all.

Andrew Komarow

So what does that mean? If you could be a little more specific.

Ron Sandison

Yeah. So this is what it means, is that the number one reason people with autism get fired is not that they're competent for this, not competent for the job it's filtering. They'll say something or do something, and people say that they're being racist or they're being sexist or they're being anti social and that come in that they're prejudiced because of that.

Ron Sandison

We're really they don't mean that at all. It's just their ability to filter or understand what's socially acceptable in a setting. And I think that's what you need with the neurodiversity in the workplace presentation during lunch. And one of the things I bring out is stories of different inappropriate things people have said on the spectrum during work, and they didn't mean it the way people took it.

And they have difficulty actually filtering the truth and just let the truth come out and say what they think. There's a while back I was on a 1 to 1 with an aggressive pace, and when I got up, the next guy who is taking over was kind of feminine. And I said to a coworker, I said, Is feminine, is that guy is that aggressive, is going to probably beat the hell out of him.

Ron Sandison

And I didn't mean it in a bad way. I just said with everybody else in that room was thinking and was afraid to tell what I was on the spectrum. We just spew it out and with me being openly autistic, I can get away with a lot more. Other people can't because people understand that I have difficulty filtering what I say.

But if it was a new employee and they did that, they could be written up for saying something that was culturally or generally biased.

00:20:17:11 - 00:20:39:21

Eileen Lamb

Yeah, no. And that makes total sense. I mean, I feel like the most inappropriate things I've said in my life was just like lack of understanding and, you know, I didn't mean it in a bad way. And then once it's explained to me like I get it, but it just it's hard for me to, like, control my thoughts and to not say everything that goes through my mind.

And so sometimes, like inappropriate things that most people would keep to themselves come out. Yeah, know.

00:20:46:22 - 00:21:06:21

Ron Sandison

I think even our joking, we do that more openly. Being on the autism spectrum, our jokes are what everyone else is thinking, but wouldn't say because they know they could get in trouble being anti this or anti that by the joke they're saying, but they don't mean it in a hurtful way.

00:21:06:21 - 00:21:24:14

Eileen Lamb

Exactly. Yup. So question for you that's why here did your parents of any different approaches to prepare you for employment do they have the same approach? Like how did your parents prepare you for employment?

00:21:25:04 - 00:22:00:04

Ron Sandison

So my mom prepared me by helping me learn skills. She believed in autism refine, not cured. So she believed that she could help me learn skills like reading, writing. So she got me tutors to help me learn those skills. And my dad's approach was more You're from in the Deep End of the pool. They learned to swim. So my daddy and me mowing the lawn at age ten through 10 hours at age 14, me working as a busboy and dishwasher at Bill Naps and my early employment.

00:22:00:07 - 00:22:33:10

Ron Sandison

It helped me have confidence to go and get a job and know how. And my mom helped me to develop those skills of reading, writing, interpersonal skills, being able to use art. And I think those two approaches, China worked well together and helped me be gainfully employed in my whole life. Basically, I've been employed. I've been gainfully employed now it'll be 16 years in March working at the same hospital haven work, which I've been it in March.

00:22:33:10 - 00:22:53:06

Ron Sandison

You'll be 16 years and I've been Destiny school ministry now for 20 years and speaking live since 2015. And then I published my first book in 2016 and I am my fourth book and hopefully I'll get it published soon.

Eileen Lamb

It's actually time for quick fire questions. So basically, I'm going to ask you some quickfire questions.

Eileen Lamb

Okay.

Eileen Lamb

You're going to tell me the first answer that comes to your mind. Are you ready?

Ron Sandison

Yeah.

Eileen Lamb

What's your favorite animal?

Ron Sandison

Favorite animal is a prairie dog, which is my mascot. And then the honey badger.

Eileen Lamb

Favorite place you've traveled to.

Ron Sandison

Madagascar

Eileen Lamb

Favorite food.

Ron Sandison

Favorite food I ever had was probably something illegal. I shouldn't have eaten. I have a toucan. Kazin In the in the jungle of Cameroon with pygmies.

Eileen Lamb

What is that.

Ron Sandison

Toucan? Can you know the bird to cans?

Eileen Lamb

Oh my God.

Ron Sandison

Like the bird can in the jungle with the pygmies. When I lived with the pygmies for two weeks in Cameroon.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah. Okay. I thought you said two kittens. And I was like, Oh, well, two cans of what? But, yeah, you can. The bird.

Ron Sandison

The bird, too.

Eileen Lamb

Oh, my God. Poor bird. I mean, they're so pretty. I mean, that's a great answer. Oh, favorite singer or band?

Ron Sandison

Prime favorite band. Is that Bon Jovi? I like Tim a lot. When I was growing up in Survivor.

Eileen Lamb

The movie or TV show

Ron Sandison

Goonies.

Eileen Lamb

Oh, well, thank you so much for joining us today. You were great.

Ron Sandison

Oh, thanks so much.

Eileen Lamb

Did you get there?

Eileen Lamb

One last question for you. Where can you find you on social media? And if you want to give the title, all of your books and all of that, it is free advertisement for you.

Ron Sandison

Yeah. So my website is spectrum inclusion dot com. You can find me there. And then my books are Views from the Spectrum A Window on Life and Faith for Your Neurodivergent Child. That's my newest book. And then my first book is Parent's Guide Autism, Practical Advice, Biblical Wisdom. And then my second book is Thought Choice Action Inside Theology and Saint Augustine.

Eileen Lamb

Awesome. Well, thank you so much again and have a good night.

Ron Sandison

Yeah, thanks.