**Andrew M. Komarow** 09:58:25

Welcome to "Adulting on the Spectrum." I'm Andrew, an autistic certified financial planner. I co run adulting on the spectrum with Eileen Lamb. Hey Eileen!

**Eileen Lamb** 09:58:34

Hey, everyone! 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 people like us.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 09:58:48

Today, our guest, well guests we have two guests today, Andrew and Tom D'Eri. The French way is pronounced. Andrew D'Eri is the inspiration for Rising Tide Carwash and works as an Aftercare Associate at both Rising Tide Carwash, Parkland and Margate. He enjoys movies, vintage video games and Universal Studios.

**Eileen Lamb** 09:59:12

And Tom is dedicated his career to unleashing human potential by creating organic organizational systems and culture that empower people to grow. Tom is the co-founder and COO of Rising Tide, Carwash, an organization that employs over 90 individuals with autism in a successful carwash business. Tom is a Forbes '30 Under 30' social entrepreneur, and is the forthcoming author of "The Power of Potential: How Nontraditional Workforce Can Lead You to Run Your Business Better." Hey, Tom, and Hi, Andrew, we're very happy to have you today. We start by asking our guests, how they like to identify? And by that we mean like, would you like to be called autistic? Person with autism? Or do you have no preference?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:00:04

We like to be autism.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:00:07

Perfect. Thank you, Andrew.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:00:09

So for most of the episode after so the first question, I'm actually asking the same question to Andrew and Tom, but then we'll we'll kind of rotate a little bit for question for one of you. Question for another. And so can, so I'm going to that's the question, Andrew first. So when were you diagnosed with autism? If you remember, what was that experience like?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:00:35

I was diagnosed since, when I was three.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:00:39

So probably not much of memory of that then. So,

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:00:44

Yeah, probably not much of a memory.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:00:47

So you remember anything about when he was diagnosed? Are you the older brother or the younger brother?

**Tom D'Eri** 10:00:52

Older by about 20 months. So I don't remember, don't remember much about the actual diagnosis. But I certainly remember Andrew, working super hard as a kid, going to school and then doing all this is after school therapy and tutoring and was really always quite inspiring.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:01:10

That's awesome. And Andrew, can you tell us a bit about your experience at work?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:01:16

My true experience at work is by helping customers clean their cars.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:01:22

Do you enjoy it?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:01:23

I really enjoy it.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:01:25

What do you like about it?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:01:27

I like helping customers out and cleaning their cars. And earning some money.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:01:35

Yeah. My one of my my best friends loves washing cars. He, He's a lawyer. It's his hobby to do on the weekend. So we actually wash my wife's car that's white and he got like a rainbow unicorn soap. And so my five year old daughter loved it. It was like all the colors. He just spends all day on it like a hobby. It's, you know, crazy. Nothing you'd rather do. Yeah. So Tom, I, you said again, you have a book coming out? Can you tell us what is the value of neurodivergent employees?

**Tom D'Eri** 10:01:54

That's awesome. Yeah, I mean. So, I think that neurodivergent employees have the ability to to really transform organizations. I think, you know, people with autism and neurodivergence more broadly, bring just a ton of skills to the workforce.Which I mean, we can certainly talk about specific skills, but, but what the book is centered around and what we have learned kind of through Rising Tide Carwashes, that this, what's most transformative is designing things that within an organization that really work for neurodivergent individuals, because when we do that, when we design systems and processes that effectively empower people like Andrew and the rest of our staff, we build better systems for everyone. There's simply stronger, more clear and more concrete, more results oriented, and create better service outcomes for our customers, and really empower our team, but also create the type of culture that I think most organizations look for a culture where people are excited to be at work, really try their hardest and are doing everything they can to satisfy our customers. And I think when you come to our stores, you can really see that so the book is really centered around what we've learned as an organization that can be replicated, I think any organization that struggles to find and retian really good talent and differentiate themselves in the market. So, oh sorry Eileen.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:03:39

Thank you so much. I have a two children on the on the spectrum, and one of them is a lot more severe than the other. And I'm wondering, you know, it is a broad spectrum, who on the spectrum, is the carwash designed for?

**Tom D'Eri** 10:03:53

Yeah, well, it was initially designed for Andrew. But I would say our group, our employees kind of fall into two broader buckets, there's a group of employees that will be with us for pretty much their whole careers, they may have some other limitations that makes it would make it difficult for them to move up in another organizational structure. And then we have team members who this is very much their first job, that they'll they'll go on to college after they're with us, they'll go on to other other jobs, many, in fact, do go to other jobs in our community. And we're really a first job opportunity where they can learn how to take feedback, how to get to work on time, how to deal with challenging situations, probably experience some failure, but also be able to work through that and then have something on their resume that they can go look for jobs that are maybe more closely aligned with what they want to do with their careers.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:04:50

So like does a everyone who work at the carwash have like a mentor type of person is that how it works?

**Tom D'Eri** 10:04:58

Um, so our supervisory level staff and our management staff serve as coaches for the whole team. That's a mix of neurodivergent neurotypical individuals in those roles. And then there's a lot of organic mentoring that goes on. So when Andrew went in and he's working, he's got a teammate. So there's two people in a team, one of those does driver side of the car, one does passenger side of the car. They work together all day they go on breaks together, when we have new employees start, we always pair that new employee up with a more senior employee and kind of show him the ropes. So I'd say there's there's a lot of organic peer mentoring, and then there's a lot of coaching kind of baked into the way that we operate on a daily basis. Oh, Tom, I, I think we are both on it was the "Autism at Work," round table. Both our companies are, on a neurodiversity at work round table. And I founded the "Neurodiversity Index," because companies that are more inclusive are more profitable. And, you know, that extends to neurodiversity as well. Right? So we highlight the top 79 publicly listed companies, you guys aren't there yet. But have you found that you're definitely a more profitable carwash? You are not a charity? Correct. And so that means it's good for business. Right? Can you tell us more about that? Yeah, absolutely. And I think that was kind of one of the key things we were trying to get across with with a book that we wrote is that these aren't just like nice stories. These are just better business practices. These are like legitimately, better strategies. And in our business, the way that those things play out, are a turnover rate. That's roughly five times lower than another any other carwashes. We haven't had a workers compensation or safety issue with our employees with autism ever in over 10 years of operating.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:06:54

Have you had a workers compensation issue with employees who are not autism?

**Tom D'Eri** 10:07:01

That was good. That was good. Yes, we did. You, good catch.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:07:02

I'm asking not in my capacity as a licensed property and casualty insurance agent. Just asing as the podcast, host,

**Tom D'Eri** 10:07:14

Yeah, no, no, for sure. I mean, we have had a couple, one worker's comp claim but but then,

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:07:20

But that's to be expected right? That's a better answer. You're saying it's not that we haven't had any at all. It's that the employees with autism are lower. That's great.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:07:32

For sure, and you look at our business just like from a bird's eye view. We when we bought our first store, it was a struggling existing carwash in Parkland, Florida, that was watching about 35,000 cars a year. Today that store washes over 170,000 cars a year. And the this allowed us to open to more car washes that didn't just as successful as this first one. And that's a testament to our team. 80% of our team is on the autism spectrum, even more are neurodivergent and simply would not there's no way we could be successful without all of our team members really doing a killer job. Our successes truly because of our neurodivergent employees and not in spite of it.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:08:17

That's a, that's beautiful. It's making me want to like visit your car wash and I have nothing no interest in car washes.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:08:23

Yeah, come on down.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:08:24

Yeah, it's a good thing. So, Andrew, what are some of your special interests like things you'd like to do?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:08:31

My special interest was playing video games and having money.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:08:40

I like both of those things too. Money is self-explanatory. What video games do you like? What have you been playing?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:08:49

I've been playing Nintendo 64. PS4 and Playstation 2. And GameCube.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:08:54

Okay, what games in particular are some of your favorite one for like on N64?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:08:59

Well, Star Wars and Mario.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:09:03

Okay. Which, which? Which Mario? Like, Mario Party? Yeah. Nice.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:09:11

Classic.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:09:12

Yep, definitely. Mario Party is fun. So, so how many? So this one's for for Tom. And either one can answer. How many hours per week does your average employee work? Is it you know, full time? And on average, you know, how much how much do they make, especially for the people who are there for life?

**Tom D'Eri** 10:09:41

Yeah, so most of our employees are part time. There's a split, we've certainly a bunch of team members that are full time as well. But I would say I don't know the exact number of hours off the top of my head. But over half of the team is part time for sure. Everybody starts at $11 an hour plus tips, and then they work their way up from there. Our supervisors are making like $15 an hour plus tips about. So and then our managers are getting to a salary range from there. So we've got a few of our team members that have moved from or a lot of our team members actually that have moved from, like an entry level, associate role into a supervisory role and into management positions. And that's really the goal is either to help them or team members move up in the organization move into other other jobs, or you know, if they want to stay they're happy as associates as Andrew. Andrew likes to be an associate it's cool too.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:10:45

Do they get benefits too?

**Tom D'Eri** 10:10:47

Yes. So anybody who's been with us for a year or longer is eligible for medical benefits. There's paid time off as well for everyone who's been with us a year or longer. As,as we get bigger and more robust as an organization will certainly continue to add to our benefits package too.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:11:05

So you clearly see the value and neurodivergent employees given that you pay you know assuming that's above minimum wage in Florida and also pay no income tax there, or taxes. I'm jealous, I'm in Connecticut. Or you know, sorry. So again, you pay above minimum wage in Florida you obviously see the value of neurodivergent employees there's been a lot of talks to about the the sub-minimum wage, it's also called 14 (c). Although you have individuals who might need more support, you didn't see the need to do that. Can you tell us why and what are your thoughts on that if you have any you want to share?

**Tom D'Eri** 10:11:47

Yeah, yeah, for sure. Plainly stated it's not necessary that our team members carry their weight just like any other employee would at any other car wash. We've built the organization that way and you know, never it was never really a thought that we would pay sub minimum wage you know, we're either at or above minimum wage and then we you know, plus tips so everybody's above minimum wage with with with the tips,

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:12:15

And it's probably above what the average car wash in Florida I doubt the average car wash in Florida pays above minimum wage as a general rule either, right?

**Tom D'Eri** 10:12:23

Yeah, I mean, you know, there's not a ton of great like data out there as far as what people are paying but like there are definitely some car washes that will like keep the tips and then deduct the tips from the the rate that they pay people so they still end up making minimum wage but like the tips are not factored in, like kind of deducting what the company has to pay. And we don't do anything like that. I think I think that kind of depends.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:12:51

So, Andrew, we noticed that you're not listed as a co-founder, rather as an inspiration for the car wash. So whose idea was it to start the car wash? Was it Tom's? Was it Andrew's?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:13:04

Well, it was dad's idea because he wants to help me.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:13:08

That's so sweet.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:13:10

What did you think of the idea when you first heard about it? Did you already like washing cars? Is that why your dad thought of it? Or was it just like, you know how did it start?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:13:22

Well, it was dad's idea. Because he wants to help me and I wanted to clean cars.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:13:29

Did you actually want to clean cars before, before we did the car wash?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:13:34

I didn't want to but Dad wanted to help me.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:13:40

Are you, are you glad he helped you? Do you like cleaning cars now?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:13:44

I'm glad he helps me.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:13:47

What's your favorite part about work?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:13:47

My favorite part of work, was when my shift was done.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:13:59

That's right. (all laugh)

**Eileen Lamb** 10:14:03

That's the best answer we've ever gotten in this podcast.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:14:09

That's the truth right? You like to earn money, but

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:14:12

I like to earn money.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:14:13

But the work itself is just work.

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:14:15

Work itself is just work.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:14:18

What are your so again, an Aftercare Associate, so what does that mean? What What? What does a typical day look like for you, Andrew? And Tom, you can answer afterwards, too. But what is what does a typical day look like for you at the carwash?

**Tom D'Eri** 10:14:35

What do you do every day?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:14:36

I clean cars every day.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:14:39

What do you do? How do you think cars?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:14:41

I first, I do do dry down with an air gun and windows. And then vacuuming and tire shine.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:14:50

Oh, you do inside too?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:14:53

Where there are no cars to wash, I do side work.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:14:56

Like what?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:14:56

I roll up with vacuums. Check trash bins.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:15:02

Nice. So there's always something to do?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:15:05

Um huh.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:15:07

Can you tell us about a time where I don't know something didn't go right at work or bad experience? And and how that was handled? Cuz I'm sure you don't always have happy customers. So

**Tom D'Eri** 10:15:20

Have you ever had to help a customer that wasn't happy?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:15:22

No. I help a customer when when he was happy,

**Tom D'Eri** 10:15:25

When if a customer needs help, what do you do?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:15:26

If a customer needs help, I asked him what the help is. And I help them out. Help him or her out.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:15:37

Well, there are certainly customers that come by sometimes that aren't happy. That's okay. Right? We do the best that we can.

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:15:42

Yep.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:15:43

And if they're not happy, we can give them a refund or refer them to other services. But most of the time the customers are pretty happy.

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:15:50

Yep, they are.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:15:55

So can you guys tell us more about your book? What inspired you to write it? And how much was Andrew involved in the book.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:16:02

Um, so as far as you know, what inspired us to write the book was the you know, we really feel like there's a wonderful opportunity for, for small, small, medium sized businesses to really make their organizations better by employing people with autism. Like we all know, there's much higher unemployment rates among individuals with autism than the standard population, even though there's tremendous talent in that in that group of people, they're often left out, and we wanted to be able to do was tell a story from like a small, medium sized business perspective, our story, right, we experience all of the things that small, medium sized businesses do, and give them, you know, show them that this can be a strategy to really transform their organizations to get better talent to solve some of the problems that might be holding them back from growing as an organization, as well as differentiating themselves against their competitors. And really, the whole goal of that is to help get more people with autism jobs. And, you know, we're hopeful, we're hopeful that people will read this book and want to try the strategies that we talked about in it in their organizations. And as far as Andrews involvement, Andrew, we did some interviews, and read some of the things that were about Andrew in the book, and he was, what do you think about the book?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:17:32

The book was very great.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:17:33

Yeah. Why do you like it?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:17:36

I guess, it's all about autism.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:17:40

Are you in the book?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:17:41

I'm probably in the book

**Tom D'Eri** 10:17:43

(All laugh) You're in the book,

**Eileen Lamb** 10:17:44

And it makes money. (All laugh) Hopefully, for you guys. So Andrew, we're gonna ask you some quickfire questions. Bascially, I'm just going to ask you some of the things you like. I don't know if you guys practice a little bit, but you just tell me the first thing that comes to your mind. Okay.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:18:07

All right.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:18:08

Do you have a favorite quote? And if so, what is it?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:18:12

It's "May the force be with you."

**Eileen Lamb** 10:18:15

Oh, Star Wars.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:18:17

Eileen, you gotta, Eileen has never seen "Star Wars" So she's a poser. (All laugh)

**Eileen Lamb** 10:18:23

What's your favorite movie?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:18:26

Star Wars movies

**Tom D'Eri** 10:18:28

And anything else?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:18:29

And Transformers

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:18:32

Solid.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:18:34

What's your favorite food or your favorite foods to eat?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:18:39

Cheeseburgers and fries.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:18:42

Do you have a favorite place, a favorite fast food restaurant?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:18:46

Well, that's Burger King. And Checkers.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:18:50

Oh, is that a local thing? Never heard of Checkers?

**Tom D'Eri** 10:18:53

At least South East for sure.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:18:57

What's your favorite ride at Universal Studios?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:19:01

My new ride is the VelociCoaster. And it the Transformers ride.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:19:09

What was your dream job as a child? Do you remember?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:19:11

My dream job as a child was a tour guide at the American Museum of Natural History.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:19:17

That's specific. (All laugh) Are you happy that you're washing cars, even though that not it?

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:19:26

Yea.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:19:26

Nice. Well, that's all we had for you guys. Thank you so much for coming. That was actually really fun to have two people in like this.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:19:34

Yeah.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:19:36

Yeah, thank you for having us.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:19:39

Is there a somewhere we can find you guys on social media? Anything you want to, you know, where can people find your book, self promotion? Like tell us

**Tom D'Eri** 10:19:48

Thanks. So you can learn all about us at Rising Tide Carwash.com or on our Facebook page, which is just search Rising Tide Car Wash on Facebook. And those are our that's our main platform. You can learn more about the book, books on the website. You can also order it on Amazon.

**Eileen Lamb** 10:20:04

Awesome. Well, thank you so much, guys.

**Andrew M. Komarow** 10:20:07

Thank you. Thank you so much. Best of luck.

**Tom D'Eri** 10:20:10

Thank you.

**Andrew D'Eri** 10:20:10

You're welcome.