



## *an often-misunderstood diagnosis*

STRENGTHS, ALONG WITH CHALLENGES, ARE ALL PART OF THE SPECTRUM

Today autism touches almost all of our lives. People often relate with recognition such as “my brother’s-wife’s-cousin’s-son has autism” if no one in their immediate family has been diagnosed with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). As time goes on and nearly 2% of the children being born in the U.S. are diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum, each one of us will have more direct contact with people with autism.

If you cannot immediately call to mind the strengths of those with autism, you probably don’t know enough about people on the spectrum. You may even harbor old, outdated stereotypes of non-functional children rocking in the corner. Today’s autism encompasses a much wider range of abilities and levels of functionality than the old stereotypes described. The autism community is comprised of as many personality types, talents, and interests as the rest of the world. However, unless you know someone with autism fairly well, when you interact with them the autism usually shows first, and the individual is misunderstood before they have had a chance to demonstrate some of their many abilities, talents or good qualities.

People with autism are often quite bright;

some are able to recite amazing numbers of facts and details about specific topics. I hear it all the time from the parents I speak to about their children. Many people with autism are very creative and have a penchant for math, science, and technology. Temple Grandin, the most well recognized voice of the autism community, has said that “...if you love the laptop you have today, you better hope they don’t cure autism, or you won’t have another one!” Silicon Valley is reported to be teeming with individuals on the autism spectrum successfully creating the new technology the rest of us enjoy!

Although not every individual with autism can work successfully, when given work that interests them and utilizes their strengths, as well as appropriate training, individuals on



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the autism spectrum can be dependable, focused, and thorough with tasks that would cause many of us to glaze over after five minutes. Attention to detail is a strength that many of those on the spectrum exhibit. Today, those with ASD are finding their way to fruitful employment in banks and credit card companies who have discovered that they have a proclivity toward finding anomalies in large sets of data, making them ideal for working in the areas of automation, data analytics and cybersecurity.

People with autism thrive in a routine. Once established and learned, they are usually incredibly consistent and stable employees who are very dependable, and stick to their loyalties like glue. Many people with ASD are considered to be "rule followers," a generally positive attribute that can become annoying if you find yourself on the wrong side of the rules!

It would be an oversight to end this discussion of the strengths of those with autism without discussing their incredible creativity, ability to think outside the box, and artistic talents. So many of history's brightest and most highly recognized creators are thought to have been on the autism spectrum. This includes such historical greats as Albert Einstein, Thomas Jefferson, Sir Isaac Newton, Michelangelo, Mozart, Beethoven and Hans Christian Anderson. Also, contemporary creative masters Jim Henson, Bill Gates, and Tim Burton make the list\*.

The bottom line is that when their functional difficulties can be mitigated or ignored, and their creative talent, stalwart focusing ability, and natural consistency can be nurtured or leveraged, the formula for appreciating the strengths of those with autism in today's world is in place.

*By Jeanne Beard, Founder, National Autism Academy, Parent and Professional Training for Autism Success and author of Autism & The Rest of Us: How to Sustain a Healthy, Functional and Satisfying Relationship with a Person on the Autism Spectrum • [www.nationalautismacademy.com](http://www.nationalautismacademy.com)*

\*<http://www.asperger-syndrome.me.uk> and <http://www.babble.com/entertainment/famous-people-with-autism>