

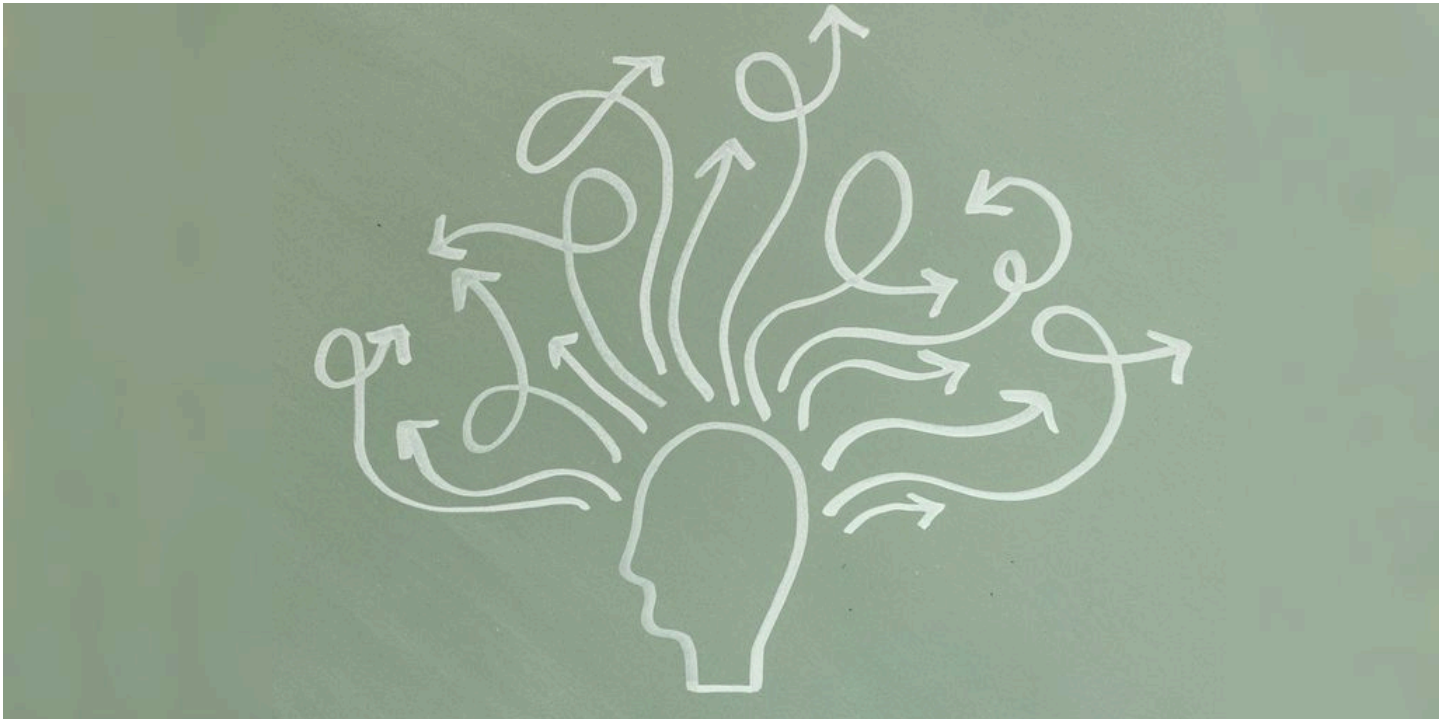
**REGISTER TODAY**

Big challenges await Detroit's next mayor. Hear from the candidates directly at a special Crain's event.

Crain's Forum: Neurodivergent workers

## **Opinion: Embracing neurodiversity is a win-win for companies, workers**

By Marisa Fisher



 Reprints    Share

February 20, 2025 09:02 AM

The modern workplace is evolving, highlighting the immense value diverse perspectives and talents bring to innovation and success. Disability, and specifically neurodiversity, is often overlooked. Neurodivergence is recognized as variations in human experience, often accompanied by unique strengths and abilities that can greatly benefit businesses.



Marisa Fisher is the executive director of the STRIDE Center at Michigan State University.

Many neurodivergent employees possess exceptional skills and unique talents. When hired into roles that match their abilities and interests, neurodivergent employees are often cited as being more productive than their neurotypical counterparts. They often bring niche skills that can fill critical roles within a business or help to optimize systems or processes.

Companies prioritizing neurodiversity often report higher retention rates, increased productivity, fewer missed workdays and a more supportive workplace culture. Moreover, organizations that actively promote neurodiversity often see improved employee

morale and enhanced reputations, which attract top talent from diverse backgrounds.

With an increasing number of neurodivergent workers entering the workforce, there is a pressing responsibility for businesses to foster inclusive and supportive environments. This commitment to inclusion must be a part of the company culture, embraced by every team member, rather than merely a top-down corporate ideal.

Some concrete actions employers can take to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for neurodivergent employees:



**Rethink hiring practices:** Traditional hiring processes that rely heavily on standardized interviews and assessments tend to prioritize interpersonal skills, potentially overshadowing a job candidate's technical and analytics skills. Giving candidates interview questions in advance helps them prepare and reduces pressure of answering complex questions on the spot. Businesses can also implement alternative assessment methods, such as work samples or practical tests, allowing candidates to demonstrate their skills.

Additionally, educating hiring managers and recruiters on neurodiversity, dispelling common misconceptions, and promoting a more inclusive interview process can be

beneficial.

**Create a supportive work environment:** Employers should provide tailored accommodations to meet individual needs, such as individualized workspaces or assistive technologies.

Simple changes like offering clear, concise instructions, as well as explaining why, can have a significant impact that not only help neurodivergent employees, but can benefit all employees.

Supervisors play a crucial role in supporting neurodivergent workers and should be trained to give clear, concrete guidance, breaking tasks into manageable steps. This approach helps neurodivergent employees understand their responsibilities and reduces anxiety related to ambiguity. Regular check-ins and feedback sessions can provide additional support, facilitating skill development and performance assessment.

**Raise neurodiversity awareness:** Understanding and awareness gaps in the workplace can lead to uncomfortable or even hostile environments, contributing to higher turnover rates.

Employers should consider implementing comprehensive neurodiversity awareness programs for both supervisors and staff. Such training can increase awareness about the unique strengths and challenges associated with neurodivergent conditions, fostering an atmosphere of understanding and respect. It can also help break down stereotypes and create a sense of belonging for neurodiverse individuals, equipping employees with strategies to communicate effectively and collaborate with their neurodivergent colleagues.

**Ongoing support and mentorship:** Pairing neurodivergent employees with mentors who understand their needs and strengths can provide valuable guidance. Regular check-ins with managers trained in neurodiversity can ensure that accommodations are effective and that employees feel valued and supported.

Businesses do not have to implement these solutions on their own. Various organizations, such as Michigan State University's STRIDE Center, provide valuable resources to help companies foster an inclusive and supportive environment for neurodivergent employees. STRIDE offers neurodiversity awareness training and can assist businesses in developing peer mentoring programs.

Additionally, STRIDE helps companies identify accommodations that focus on solutions to enhance job performance and productivity. Job coaching, which can often be supported by state agencies such as Michigan Rehabilitation Services, is another valuable resource for neurodivergent employees.

Another effective strategy for businesses is to partner with schools, universities or vocational programs to establish a school-to-work pipeline. This initiative offers students the opportunity to gain practical experience through pre-employment training, ensuring they are better prepared for the workforce.

Additionally, it provides them with the chance to participate in internships or work-study programs with the business, allowing both the students and the employer to evaluate fit before a full-time hire. By engaging with students early, businesses can help develop a pipeline of qualified talent, while also fostering diversity and inclusion. This collaboration not only supports the growth of the neurodivergent workforce but also strengthens the company's commitment to long-term sustainable hiring practices.

By implementing the outlined solutions, companies can unlock the untapped potential of neurodivergent individuals, fostering a more innovative, productive and inclusive workplace for all. It's time for businesses to recognize the immense value neurodiversity brings — not just for the benefits it can provide to the company, but for the richness it adds to the workplace culture.

Embracing diversity should be about more than just the bottom line; it's about creating an environment where everyone, regardless of background or neurological makeup, has the opportunity to thrive and contribute in meaningful ways.

*Marisa Fisher is the executive director of the STRIDE Center at Michigan State University.*

By Marisa Fisher

---

◆ Politics & Policy, News, Workforce, Commentary, Forum

**More in Crain's Forum: Neurodivergent workers →**

---