



# TalentScout™

Unlocking the Talents of Employees  
with Autism Spectrum Disorders



*“TalentScout is a tremendous aid to employers... [It] has valuable input in best practices for hiring people on the spectrum. ...very digestible and full of golden nuggets...”*

José Velasco, Head, Autism at Work Program  
SAP

*“TalentScout is a phenomenal document, very thorough. The personal stories and insights took this document to another level.”*

Kristie King, Manager, Diversity Recruitment  
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# TalentScout™

## Unlocking the Talents of Employees with Autism Spectrum Disorders

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *TalentScout™: Unlocking the Talents of Employees with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. You have probably come to this toolkit because your company already employs or is considering hiring a person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). While there are tens of thousands of employees with ASDs working in the U.S., there is relatively little information about the strategies that companies and human resource professionals have to use to create a welcoming environment that supports employers and employees to achieve their highest potential. The Autism Now Center is pleased to bring *TalentScout: Unlocking the Talents of Employees with Autism Spectrum Disorders* to you, your company, and coworkers, to contribute to your company's learning, and to supplement what you already know about employees on the spectrum.

The most distinguishing feature of *TalentScout* is that every single word has been written and vetted by either a person with an ASD or a coworker or supervisor of a person on the spectrum. Therefore, we can guarantee that the information in the *TalentScout: Unlocking the Talents of Employees with Autism Spectrum Disorders* is accurate, relevant, and promotes recommendations that have already been successfully used by countless employees and companies.

*TalentScout* is also unique because it centers on the sensitive questions that coworkers and employees want to ask, but just don't have the words, wherewithal, or courage to ask. We are very pleased to serve as a conduit to an open, honest dialogue and walk you through the door of employment and the autism community.

# INTRODUCTION

## How to Use the *TalentScout: Unlocking the Talents of Employees with Autism Spectrum Disorders Toolkit*

This toolkit has 8 sections relevant to the employment process:

1. Inclusive Job Descriptions and Announcements
2. Constructive Job Interviewing Techniques
3. Disclosing Disabilities: Considerations that Employees with ASDs Think About
4. The Importance of Confidentiality
5. Winning Orientation and Job Training Strategies
6. Successful Job and Workplace Accommodations
7. Positive Coworker Relationships
8. Confirmed Feedback and Evaluation Strategies

Each section contains information that describes how many people with autism think and feel about their employment positions. This critical information is brought to you through:



Personal Stories by people on the spectrum and a few of their supervisors



Make your Company Stronger: Tips for a Positive Work Environment



Exercises, Quizzes and Answers



Tools



Resources

*TalentScout* includes a plethora of recommendations that companies and employees with ASD can consider to stave off or address challenges, should they arise. And while every company, coworker, and employee is different, *TalentScout* provides the opportunity for you to become familiar with trends and commonalities experienced by the many people who live with autism.

## Terminology

There are several terms used throughout this toolkit:

- **The company** refers to the employer, whether it's a for-profit business, governmental or nongovernmental organization, school, etc.
  - **Coworkers** refer to the people, with or without supervisory responsibilities, paid or unpaid
  - **Candidates** refers to person(s) with Autism Spectrum Disorders applying for employment positions
  - **Employee** refers to the person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - The terms Autism Spectrum Disorder, ASD, and on the spectrum are used throughout the toolkit
- For more about ASD: <http://www.thearc.org/what-we-do/resources/fact-sheets/autism?>

As you use these materials we invite you to contact The Arc with any questions about your particular situation. We welcome the opportunity to support your company so that employees with Autism Spectrum Disorders can be leading and contributing team members.

A woman with short brown hair and glasses is smiling and standing in a retail store. She is wearing a white short-sleeved polo shirt under a red vest. She has her hands on her hips. A name tag and keys are hanging from her neck. The background shows a checkout counter with a red and white striped top, a green shopping bag, and other store fixtures.

**Inclusive Job Descriptions  
and Announcements**

# INCLUSIVE JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The purpose of this section is to assist coworkers in better understanding:

- *the provisions of The Americans with Disabilities Act related to job candidates with disabilities*
- *ideas for creating job descriptions that are easier for candidates with autism to comprehend*

As companies know, job descriptions serve many useful purposes throughout the employee's tenure. A comprehensive job description is especially helpful to job seekers with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Candidates that fully understand the job's responsibilities will be able to better assess if they meet the qualifications, and presumably, companies will stave off high numbers of unqualified applications. Individuals with ASDs often look for clues as to how welcoming a company might be for employees with disabilities. In addition to reviewing the company's website and photographs, employees with ASDs also assess documents for language and tone. The resource section includes a list of disability-inclusive language for your review and consideration.

## What Does the Americans with Disabilities Act Say About Job Descriptions?

A job description is especially vital when it comes to hiring and employing individuals with disabilities, as it provides managers with the necessary information about an employee's essential and non-essential (also known as marginal) job functions. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not require an employer to create or maintain job descriptions, it seeks to ensure that an individual with a disability's qualifications for a job are evaluated in relation to its essential functions. According to Title I of the American with Disabilities Act, if you are an employer of a company or organization with 15 or more employees, you are responsible for ensuring that your employment practices do not discriminate against qualified persons with disabilities. This law prohibits employers from denying employment based on a person's disability if s/he:

- meets the employer's requirements for the job (such as education, employment experience, skills, and certification)
- is able to perform essential functions of the job, with or without reasonable accommodations

The candidate cannot be disqualified solely on the basis of being unable to perform marginal job functions or the "Additional Responsibilities", as it is often referred to on job descriptions, due to their disability.

*Job descriptions with results-oriented versus process-oriented language eliminates the potential for discriminating against individuals with disabilities capable of completing tasks in different ways. For example use communicates with visitors and not talks with visitors.*

*Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply: this or a similar statement welcomes candidates with ASD and other disabilities, as well as demonstrates your commitment to fair and equal employment practices.*

## What are essential job functions?

Essential functions are duties that are necessary and integral to the job. Generally, job duties are considered “essential” when they meet at least one of the following criteria:

- *Central to the purpose for which the job was created.* For example, an individual is hired to answer the telephone and assist callers at a local call center. The ability to answer phone calls is considered an essential function because it is important to the operation of the call center.
- *Highly specialized.* A common example would be a position that calls for bi-lingual candidates. Many companies seek Spanish-speaking employees in order to better accommodate their clients. In these cases, the ability to speak English and Spanish is considered an essential job function.
- *Unable to be performed by most (if any) of the other employees because of the limited staff available.* For instance, in addition to preparing meals, a cook may be required to assist in cleaning the kitchen area. This may be considered an essential function if it is a task that cannot be distributed to other staff because they are busy performing other tasks.

Differentiating between essential job functions and marginal job functions can be critical to a supervisor’s appropriate management of employees with disabilities. It is important for employers and supervisors to thoroughly examine each job or position after it has been created to determine which tasks are essential to perform and clearly identify these tasks on job descriptions. Under the ADA, an employer is responsible for providing a reasonable accommodation for an employee with disabilities, if the accommodation will enable them to perform the essential functions associated with the job. By pinpointing essential tasks from the very beginning, less confusion will be present if and when a need for an accommodation arises, employers and employees can more quickly and effectively work together to identify appropriate solutions.

In addition, job descriptions are also often used by The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the agency that is responsible for enforcing anti-discriminatory regulations under the ADA, as key evidence in determining whether an employer has legally complied with federal employment laws.

## When it comes to hiring individuals with ASDs, what makes up a good job description?

- *Up to date information.* Outdated job descriptions may contain essential functions that are no longer applicable to the position, which may in turn exclude a person with a disability as a qualified candidate for that job. It is important to keep descriptions of job duties current so that you are working to ensure equal access to jobs.
- *Clear, concise, non-technical language for non-technical jobs.* While reading and comprehension levels for employees on the spectrum vary, using simple terms and phrases, that most people are familiar with, will be most accessible for people with ASDs too.
- *The use of words with single meanings.* Many employees with ASDs are literal, concrete thinkers, so words and phrases with multiple meanings may create confusion. Choosing words with single meanings or including detailed explanations is most useful.

Most likely, your company has established processes for advertising vacancies, connecting job seekers to applications, and making job offers. Are these processes friendly to job seekers with ASD? The resource section includes a list of questions that can assist you in examining your procedures and determining their level of disability-friendliness.

## Recruitment

Companies interested in recruiting candidates with autism or other disabilities can consider reaching out to disability advocacy organizations to learn how they can advertise job openings to applicants, including people

with ASDs. The following national organizations can connect you with their local member organizations that provide employment services for people with disabilities:

- The Arc of the United States: <http://www.thearc.org/>
- The Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living: <http://www.april-rural.org/>
- Easter Seals, Inc.: <http://www.easterseals.com>
- Goodwill Industries International Inc.: <http://www.goodwill.org/>
- The National Council on Independent Living: <http://www.ncil.org/>
- Source America: <http://www.sourceamerica.org/>

We trust that this information on job descriptions and announcements supports your current and future employees with autism spectrum and other disabilities. The following stories provide glimpses into the real world of people with ASDs related to this topic.



### Advertising by *Brigid Rankowski*

Any job search begins with looking at what job opportunities are available within an appropriate distance. The search involves searching both print and online resources, as well as, looking in store windows of local businesses. Navigating the job market is difficult for anyone and being on the autism spectrum adds a different level of challenges. Understanding job postings involves a certain amount of understanding of what exactly is being asked of each candidate.

I've found a few jobs from online job postings and from filling out applications to stores advertising "Help Wanted". My first job was at the mall where I went from store to store getting applications from lots of different places. The biggest problem with the simple window sign is that there is very limited information as to what type of employee the company is looking for. I've had people not even give me an application because the staff they needed had to be willing to work shifts I could not handle. The last few jobs I have had, including the ones I currently have, were the result of online job listings.

I, as well as many employers, prefer this format because people can list jobs instantaneously and remove them once the position has been filled. It also provides more room to detail what the job requires, and sometimes the ability to directly E-mail a resume to an employer without the anxiety of walking into an unfamiliar store in order to apply for a job. Once the online job search begins, it is very easy to find similar job ads. The jobs that I have now clearly outlined the

hours needed, what the job entailed, the company the job was for, and the pay rate. The more details a job posting has, the easier it is to find out if the job might be a good fit. Of course, there were some jobs that were properly advertised which were not a good fit for me and this was not found out until I started the job.

I have applied to scam jobs before because the advertisements looked legitimate. Having the company listed on the advertisement, instead of just an anonymous posting where a person finds out the company after applying, helps protect people from walking into bad or stressful situations. Advertisements can also be more disability friendly by mentioning the nondiscrimination policy in their advertisement. It can also be helpful to mention if the job requires standing for long periods of time, handwriting, fast paced work, organizational skills, or other aspects of the job which are important for someone to know when making an informed decision to apply to a job position.

People in the disability community are losing out on employment opportunities because their strengths are not being properly utilized in the workforce. Every individual has strengths and when job advertisements mention what strengths an employee should have for a specific position; it can draw the right people to the ad. When a company has a diverse team of people with all ability levels, it prepares them to be competitive in the current job market and attracts other hard working individuals. ■



## Applications by Brigid Rankowski

Completing the job application is one of the most difficult parts of the job seeking process because it is a way to get your foot in the door, in order to show that you are the best candidate for the position. Some jobs have a unique or specific application to fill out and others only ask for your resume. I feel it is always a good idea to submit a resume when filling out applications because it allows you to present yourself in the format you want.

I have always had the best experiences when filling out applications if there is an online format. Handwriting is a challenge for me because of the muscle tone in my hand, but it does not make me any less of a valued employee. Online applications are easier because I can double check what I've written without the fear of making the paper application messy. There is so much stress when it comes to filling out a paper application that it will usually take me more than twice the time to fill out, compared to an electronic one.

Having the ability to pick up an application and take it home to fill out is also a huge benefit. It is really stressful to arrive at a place to pick up an application and hear there is someone who can interview you that day, if you fill out the application right away. Those times have always led to half-filled out applications and stressful interviews. It takes time to figure out

what skills I should write on the application and who my references should be. Being caught off guard while applying for jobs, can ruin my self-esteem.

One of the most difficult parts of any application process is the wait. I've seen applications collected by employers only to be placed in drawers and never looked at. When employees collect applications, it is extremely helpful to give a time frame as to when a person might hear back about the job. That way, the person applying can touch base on Friday if they were expecting a call by Thursday.

Although it may not be appropriate in every situation, providing the option for candidates to submit portfolios as a supplement to their application can help people who may not be able to best express themselves in written applications. Written expression is not everyone's strength, but that does not mean they may not be the perfect match for a customer service position. The blank pages of an application scare everyone, and for people in the disability community there is also a fear of being judged by just handing in our application. Unfortunately, people do make assumptions of competence based on first impressions. Having a candidate also showcase their strengths in a portfolio, or something similar, is a way to find out more about how the person can make a positive contribution to a company or organization. ■



### Make your Company Stronger: Tips for a Positive Work Environment

Job description and announcement components that work for employees on the spectrum may be useful for employees with other disabilities, as well as, employees without disabilities.

Job descriptions are often written in general terms, especially if the position is new, or when a company is considering which direction to take with a position. The degree to which a company uses clear and concise language affects the likelihood of attracting the most qualified candidates from which to choose.

If the use of technology is not a required job duty, companies can consider making paper job applications available. This will meet the needs of candidates that do not have regular access to computers or the internet.



## Exercise and Answer Key: *Inclusive Job Descriptions and Announcements*

Employers using these exercises will be able to test their knowledge and take the opportunity to think more deeply about the concepts presented. Whether your company uses this for individual employees or at a staff meeting, or in-service training, be sure to rely on your employee(s) with Autism Spectrum Disorder to support your learning.

### Quiz Questions

1. Job Descriptions that are most welcoming and helpful to people with ASD include:
  - a. words with single meanings
  - b. information presented on a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading level
  - c. clear language
  - d. a and c
2. True or False. Does the ADA require an employer to create or maintain job descriptions?
3. The type of applications that work best for people on the spectrum are:
  - a. online
  - b. paper
  - c. neither
  - d. both
4. What statement is welcoming to people with disabilities?
5. True or False. Under the ADA an employer is responsible for providing a reasonable accommodation for an employee with disabilities if the accommodation will enable them to perform the essential functions associated with the job.

### Study Question 1

You are interested in hiring a receptionist and have asked your Human Resources manager to develop a job description for this position. You want to ensure that it is welcoming of candidates with ASD and other developmental disabilities. Take a look at the job description below and use what you have learned in this section to answer the questions. It is recommended that you work on this activity with your organization's HR professional(s).

**Job Title:** Receptionist

**Job Summary:** Serves as the initial point of contact for visitors by greeting, welcoming, and directing them appropriately; notifies company personnel of visitor arrival; monitors and responds to phone and email inquiries.

### Quiz Answers

1. Job Descriptions that are most welcoming and helpful to people with ASD include:  
**d. a and c**
2. **False.** The Americans with Disabilities Act does not require an employer to create or maintain job descriptions, it seeks to ensure that an individual with a disability's qualifications for a job are evaluated in relations to its essential functions.
3. The type of applications that work best for people on the spectrum are: **d. both**
4. What statement is welcoming to people with disabilities?  
**Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply**
5. **True.** Under the ADA, an employer is responsible for providing a reasonable accommodation for an employee with disabilities if the accommodation will enable them to perform the essential functions associated with the job.

## Job Duties:

- Welcomes visitors by greeting them, in person or on the telephone; answering or referring inquiries.
- Directs visitors by maintaining employee and department directories; giving instructions.
- Maintains a safe and clean reception area
- Maintains telecommunication system, DisplayPort, HDMI connections, and other office essentials
- Walks two blocks to pick up coffee for office staff occasionally

## Skills/Qualifications:

Telephone Skills, Microsoft Office Skills, Listening, Professionalism, Customer Focus, Informing Others, Handles Pressure, Self-starter

## Questions:

1. What components are missing from this job description?
2. What is wrong with the following description:  
*Maintains telecommunication system, DisplayPort, HDMI connections and other office essentials?*  
How would you rewrite it to make it more appropriate?
3. How would you use disability-inclusive language to improve the following description:  
*Walks two blocks to pick up coffee for office staff occasionally?*
4. Take a look at the Skills/Qualifications for this position. Why might you ask your HR manager to reconsider using the term self-starter? What are some possible alternatives?

## Study Answer 1

1. Although this job description outlines the duties associated with the job, it does not distinguish between the essential job functions and additional responsibilities. It is important for employers to note the difference, as job descriptions are often used as key evidence by the EEOC to determine compliance with federal employment regulations. *Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply* is a statement that is also missing from this job description. Employers are not required by law to add this to job descriptions; however, it sends a positive message to candidates and demonstrates your commitment to hiring employees with disabilities.
2. The job task is described using very technical language that many employees may not be familiar with. Two examples of possible rewrites are included below:
  - *Maintains telecommunication system by responding to phone and email inquiries and other office equipment including DisplayPort and HDMI connections*
  - *Monitors phone and email system and maintains other office equipment*
3. Replacing the word *walk* with *travel* makes the task more results-oriented. A person in a wheelchair may be able to pick up the coffee and deliver it to office staff without having to *walk*. By using *travel* in place of *walk*, it prevents you from inadvertently excluding qualified candidates with disabilities.
4. The term *self-starter* may mean different things to different people. It is not a word with a clear, single meaning. Employees with ASD tend to be concrete thinkers; therefore, it is important to clearly communicate your expectations. Some alternatives to *self-starter* may include:
  - *Ability to motivate oneself and generate new ideas*
  - *Ability to work independently without close supervision*
  - *Initiates new tasks without being prompted*



## 1. Examples of Disability-Inclusive Language for Job Descriptions

When drafting the “essential job functions” portion of a job description, supervisors and Human Resources professionals are encouraged to use language that describes the outcome of the task, as opposed to describing how the task should be performed. With the appropriate supports, an individual with an ASD can be capable of performing the job’s tasks, although they may use different methods as compared to their non-disabled peers. Therefore, language used in job descriptions should not inadvertently exclude, deter, or disqualify individuals with disabilities from applying.

This table provides examples of results-oriented language and other disability-friendly alternatives to use in job descriptions:

Use...	Instead of...	Example of Disability-Inclusive Language
transport, move, transfer, relocate, install, remove	carry, lift, lug	Frequently <b>transports</b> audio equipment weighing up to 50 pounds
move, travel	walk	Requires <b>travel</b> from door-to-door to deliver products
communicate, discern, convey, express, transmit information	talk, hear	Frequently <b>communicates</b> with clients
positions self (to)	kneel, stoop, crawl	Frequently <b>positions self</b> to install computer wires under desks
ascend	climb	Occasionally <b>ascends</b> stairs to access server room
install, remove, replace, transport, move <i>(words that specifically describe the physical requirements)</i>	must be physically fit	Frequently <b>moves</b> bags weighing up to 60 pounds to vehicle Frequently <b>installs</b> equipment weighing up to 15 pounds
inspect, detect, position, adjust, attach, handle, prepare, operates	reaching, fingering, feeling, use fingers to handle, touch	Frequently <b>operates</b> telephone, fax machine, and computer
stationary position	stand	Must be able to <b>remain in a stationery position</b> during 75% of the shift

## 2. Reevaluating Your Organization's Recruiting Practices

These sample questions can help guide your organization in developing more inclusive practices:

- Does your organization post job announcements online?
- Does your organization allow job seekers to apply online?
- Does the job announcement or application include enough details about job duties and expectations?
- Do you share announcements regarding job openings with disability organizations so that they can inform the interested job seekers that they serve?
- Have you considered using job boards to post job announcements?
- Do you include a statement in job advertisements and notices that encourages individual with disabilities to apply?
- Do you provide applicants with enough time to fill out a job application?
- Do you notify your applicants in a timely manner about your decision to hire them?

## 3. Celebrating Autism Awareness/Acceptance Month

April is Autism Awareness/Acceptance Month. Many companies engage in activities to spotlight the growing number of people diagnosed with autism and what their company is doing to show respect and support for people with autism. Here is a short list of activities that your company can consider each April.

1. Hold an in-service training for staff on ASDs. If you have an employee that has disclosed his/her disability, invite him/her to speak or lead the training.
2. If you don't have an employee with an ASD, invite a speaker from an organization such as The Arc to speak at your training event.
3. Write an article for your company magazine or newsletter about the connection your company has to autism—an employee with ASD and his/her contributions, a parent with a child on the spectrum—and how the company's benefits support the employee.
4. Invite someone with autism to author a blog or story about how s/he uses your company products or services.
5. Share announcements, blogs, stories, articles, etc. regarding ASDs via social media outlets.
6. Host a webinar sharing what your company has done to recruit, hire, train and support employees with ASDs.
7. Become a local or national corporate sponsor for a program of The Arc that supports people with Autism and other Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities. (<http://www.thearc.org/what-we-do/programs-and-services>).
8. Wear T-shirts with autism related logos on dress down Fridays.
9. Wear badges or pins that say [insert company name] Supports Autism Awareness/Acceptance.
10. Encourage employees to volunteer at organizations that support people with autism and permit them to use a nominal amount of paid leave to do so (e.g. 8 hours each year).



## Inclusive Job Descriptions and Announcements Resources

**Title:** U.S. Department of Labor: Diversifying Your Workforce

**Author:** U.S. Department of Labor

**URL:** <http://autismnow.org/resources/guide-u-s-department-of-labor-diversifying-your-workforce/#sthash.SsZLrgzN.dpuf>

**Retrieved from the Internet:** 7/31/14

**Title:** What Can YOU do? The Campaign for Disability Employment

**Author:** The Campaign for Disability Employment

**URL:** <http://autismnow.org/resources/website-what-can-you-do-the-campaign-for-disability-employment/#sthash.iC8YMF88.dpuf>

**Retrieved from the Internet:** 7/31/14

**Title:** Accommodation and Compliance Series: Job Descriptions

**Author:** Beth Loy

**URL:** <http://askjan.org/media/jobdescriptions.html>

**Retrieved from Internet:** 5/15/14

**Title:** Writing Job Descriptions

**Author:** Employer Assistance & Resource Network

**URL:** [http://askearn.org/refdesk/Recruitment/Writing\\_a\\_Job\\_Description](http://askearn.org/refdesk/Recruitment/Writing_a_Job_Description)

**Retrieved from Internet:** 5/16/14

**Title:** Avoiding Discrimination in Job Postings

**Author:** University of Michigan

**URL:** <http://hr.umich.edu/oie/Avoiding-Discrimination.pdf>

**Retrieved from Internet:** 4/2/14

**Title:** 5 Mistakes Everyone Makes with Job Descriptions and How to Avoid Them

**Author:** Robert L. Brady

**URL:** <http://catalog.blr.com/downloads/30611060.pdf>

**Retrieved from Internet:** 4/2/14