



AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN PRESENTS

MiNavigator

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Help. Hope. Answers. Today.

Happy Work Anniversary: A Formula for Retention

Contributed by Tammy Morris, Chief Program Officer

As we scroll through work anniversary notifications on our LinkedIn feed, nonchalant thoughts run through our minds..."Wow, time flies." It feels like they only just started at that company.

For others, time does not fly. There is anxiety working toward each and every milestone; surviving interviewing, onboarding, training, getting past the 90 day mark, first meetings, new team members, first performance appraisal, and getting to that elusive one year mark.

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In January, Ian reached his one year work anniversary at General Motors. Ian's background is in technology and he conducts analyses of large quantities of data for GM in his role. He is a brilliant coder, detail-oriented, efficient and comprehensive in his approach to work tasks. He is an integral part of his team and a 'go to' data resource for other departments. Ian participates in many social outings, participates in mentoring and training programs offered by the company, volunteer opportunities and is a committee member for two of the company's employee resource groups (ERGs).

The unfortunate piece of Ian's success story is that people have a tendency to think that he got 'lucky' in getting through the door and landing his great job. Considering Ian 'lucky' undermines all of the steps, hard work, and diligence that Ian, and those like him, have demonstrated to earn and retain his position through a year full of new challenges. 'Lucky' suggests that Ian just waited around for the opportunity, perhaps even with the added generalization of avoiding social opportunities and hiding in his basement watching television or gaming until the job fell into his lap.

How Ian Prepared:

- Pursued post-secondary education, incurring student loans along the way, to earn two Master's degrees of Information Systems and Cybersecurity
- When not able to obtain a job in his field post-graduation, Ian continued to hone his coding skills, taking advantage of free online resources
- Held several part-time jobs both related to his field and unrelated; grateful for his job stocking shelves at Kohl's, substitute teaching, and making friends
- Volunteered with multiple nonprofits using his technical skills and also those requiring physical labor including to help build community gardens
- Networked in the technology field, in the online community, and at face to face events like 'IT in the D' in the metro Detroit area
- Developed a game called 'Home Sweet Homelessness' to teach people about the experiences of homelessness through social entrepreneurship
- Worked with several vocational rehabilitation agencies prior to coming to AAoM to find the best job fit

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- Participated in an annual conference including a public speaking debut in front of a tough crowd
- Independently managed finances with a strict budget to pay back student loans
- Maintained an older car in working order to have reliable transportation for work
- Kept in contact with natural supports on the job and mentors to make sure that he was on track and meeting work expectations
- Arrived on time for work every day and staying late to complete work or ask coworkers if they need help
- Spent time on the employer's intranet and reading internal news announcements to learn as much as possible about the company, its programs and core values

When the Student Becomes the Coach:

Ian still has autism and communication barriers. He prefers the office environment because the carpeted floors are easier on his sensory system than hardwood floors. He still experiences anxiety regarding performance expectations and requires feedback and reassurance from mentors and supports. He still looks for advice managing time and commitments, and making major life decisions. Ian is a very active participant in organized groups and social activities, yet can struggle with more casual relationships and verbal fluency during conversation.

So as we wish a very well-deserving friend Ian a Happy Work Anniversary, we reflect not on how lucky he is to have his job, or that 2017 flew by, but rather, how lucky the company is to have uncovered this tremendous asset to their business. We thank him for his concerted efforts to perform for the employer, knowing it will advance the cause of other neurodiverse job seekers in the future.





Advice for Job Seekers During that Employment Gap

Contributed by Kelly Blakeslee, M.A., CRC, LLPC, Corporate Vocational Counselor

Many job seekers often overlook the work that must be done before employment happens. At times, he/she may overlook not only the need for extensive job searching and networking, but also the value in those efforts. How could one go wrong with additional opportunities to meet new people, practice making the pitch, or making introductions?

Recommend joining a social or professional group that allows for networking with others

Networking involves connecting with other professionals, who have similar skills or interests, to build relationships, and explore potential opportunities within a specific field. Although networking can seem daunting for some, there are a couple tips and tricks to help make it more enjoyable.

Why network?

Networking is for anyone, at any point in their lives/careers. Networking can be used when looking for a job, to learn from others, generate more business, solve social problems and to build upon social interaction skills. There are “unspoken rules” dictated by any social setting; conversations that take place in a coffee shop or after work at a club are distinct from those that may occur in the work site. Tell them: Go out. Practice. It is the best way to unravel those rules.

Where to network?

Anywhere! A formal event, career fair, or even the supermarket can provide opportunities. Here are some examples of where to find places to network:

- Meetup
- Facebook
- Eventbrite
- Community Boards, Event Listings
- LinkedIn
- Volunteering

cont.





In addition to the sites listed above, finding other places to network is as easy as turning on the computer, going to a favorite search engine, and typing in the words "networking events [city]" or "business networking events [city]". Scan through the results and one will be sure to find many local meetings and events to attend.

How to network?

1. Find an event to attend

One has to want to be there. Networking events are focused around similar interests. We are at our best when we are interested in something and will find it easier to participate in conversations and contribute.

2. Determine what is wanted from the event

There are many benefits from attending a networking event, whether or not the goal is to connect to a potential job. Spend some time preparing conversation topics, or determining how to introduce oneself and share their personal story.

3. What is the attire for this event?

A job fair will always require business professional dress (a suit) ; whereas, a business social event at a restaurant will be more relaxed with business casual clothes (dress pants, dress shirt, no tie). A purely social event (often found on Facebook or MeetUp) will be okay with regular clothing (Jeans and T-shirt).

4. Arriving at the event

Once arrived at the event, scan the room to see either familiar faces or people who might have an interest in talking. Bringing a friend, co-worker, or same-age caregiver the first time, can help to ease the anxiety.

5. Walk up to someone to start a conversation, be open to those approaching, staying on top of the signals being sent

If the main reason for the event is to network, there is a good chance that someone will come over and introduce themselves. If nobody has introduced themselves after a few minutes, one can ask to be pointed to the organizer of the group. This person will have a good idea of who may be a good match and is typically responsible and passionate about making those connections.





FEBRUARY AT A GLANCE

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Building Early Emotional Skills for Parents (Saginaw)	2 Special Olympics State Winter Games (Traverse City)	3 Finding Hope - A Seminar for Parents and Caregivers (A. Hills)
4 Super Spark: All Access (Detroit)	5 Understanding IEPs (Marshall) Art & Autism (Burton)	6 CMHAM 2018 Annual Winter Conference (Kalamazoo)	7 U of M Department of Psychiatry Grand Rounds - Enola Proctor, PhD (Ann Arbor)	8 OUCARES Evening Enrichment (Rochester)	9 Cupid's capers (Pinconning) Night to Shine (Novi) Be My Valentine AAIM Event (Birmingham)	10 Leisure Club Fun with Foods Valentine's Yum (Canton)
11 Sensory Friendly Sunday at the U of M Museum of Art (Ann Arbor)	12 Michigan IDEA Law (Port Huron) Nurturing Families Series (Grand Rapids)	13 Disability Network Oakland & Macomb Lunch & Learn (Troy) Wildcat Wellness Health Fair (Marquette)	14 PEERS program for teens with ASD (Ann Arbor)	15 Central Michigan Autism Parent Support Meeting (Mt. Pleasant) Arts for All Sweetheart Dance (Traverse City)	16 HEART to Heart Family Dance (Adrian) BAAM Convention (Ypsilanti)	17 Camp Zip Winter Cooking (Ann Arbor)
18 Abrams Planetarium Sensory friendly show (East Lansing)	19 MiWorks Outreach (Ypsilanti)	20 BWCIL Cooking Class (Port Huron)	21 Workshop on Person Centered Planning (Grand Rapids)	22 AAoM Professional Development: Difficult Conversations (Detroit) Maureen Durkin RAIND Distinguished Speaker (East Lansing)	23 UP Special Ed. Conference (Marquette) Stress Less with Mindfulness for parents and caregivers (Negaunee)	24 SAIL Chocolate Festival (Marquette) Sibshops (Escanaba)
25 Rejoicing Spirits - no-shush worship service (Birmingham)	26 The Early Start Denver Model Advanced Training (Ann Arbor)	27 Special Needs Planning (East Lansing)	28 Hands-on-Learning: Minor Home Improvements (Troy)			

** For more information on any of these events please contact MiNavigator line at 877-463-AAOM or Navigator@aaomi.org

Save the Date!

2018 Navigating Autism Today
FREE Parent Conference

Parents, please join us March 8th for a special evening of networking with other parents and expert presenters.

www.AAoMconference.org

March 9th, 2018 - Wayne County
Community College - Belleville Campus

