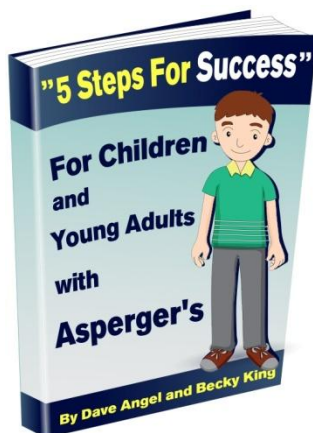


Employment



By Becky King
& Dave Angel

*"An Exclusive Extract From The Brand New Resource "5 Steps For Success For Children and Young Adults with Asperger's" which is released on **Tuesday 13th November** (for a limited time period only) "*



Becky - In this section I am going to talk about getting a job after high school. Some of you may be facing this transition right now with your son or daughter; and feeling like there are not very many options to choose from in your area. This is where our constant living "out of the box" with our child is important, because you might have to help them think out of the box to get into college or find a job.

Here are a few suggestions for employment of a young person with Asperger's:

1. Their special interest could be the gateway to a job.

Know all those hours of talking about trains, vacuums, or building Lego's that you've sat through; well, that could be a ticket to a career. According to Dr. Grandin, it was her passion for building and love of animals that lead to her now famous career as a designer of more humane cattle corrals for meat packaging facilities.

As parents/advocates you want to encourage your child to learn as much as possible about their interest. However, do understand that some of our son or daughter's special interests are so abstract that there is no possible job that could come from it. But a love of Lego's and building could one day lead to a degree in architecture, engineering, or any other number of professions that have a building/design background.

**** Dave Angel** - *And don't forget the world online offers so many more opportunities these days. I was approached by a parent a little while ago whose special interest was batteries. Not a very main stream interest by any stretch of the imagination! But I was quickly able to find a thriving battery "forum" online where others with the same interest were gathering to discuss the topic on a daily basis.*

*And from a career/business angle it would be quite easy to build such a website (with a little bit of help) and then feature paid adverts on the forum - or sell batteries and other electrical products as a 3rd party affiliate for other companies. This then takes the special interest into the realms of a profit-earning small online business. And this is true of many special interest areas. ***

2. Find a mentor or someone who can help focus their special interest.

Dr. Grandin is not shy about thanking those people who helped her get to where she is today. One person in particular was a high school science teacher that took her under his wing and helped guide her through school. Her science teacher was even capable of getting her to see that just because she did not do well in other subjects, this did not mean she should just give up. He got her to realize that you had to study all subjects to gain the real benefits of school.

Mentors come in all forms and can be found almost anywhere. A mentor can be a neighbor, family friend, teacher, or any other professional that you know. It is simply a matter of asking them if they would be willing to share their expertise in a particular field with your son or daughter for a few hours a week. During this time every week, the mentor will share the different aspects of how your son or daughters special interest is part of an actual job.

3. If their special interest is not something that you could turn into a job; help develop other areas of interest and goals.

The best way I can think to describe this would be is to make your child a well-rounded individual. For instance, my son is crazy for any items that he can build things with. We have Lego's, Kinects, and several kinds of building type blocks. But at the same time he has a real talent for drawing, painting, and art. He painted me the most beautiful painting at school for Mother's Day. His classes had done a study of Georgia O'Keeffe and were to plant their version of "posies." Plus he had already taken one painting class at Christmas, where they painted a nutcracker. His eye for details and symmetry are pretty good. So I am trying very hard to get him to take another or more art classes.

Yes, his art could aid in his building talents, but I want him to know about many different things. I do not want him to feel like he has to choose something because that is all there is to choose. I want him to have some moments of feeling like everyone else.

Another way to look at this would be ways to help your son or daughter learn who they really are or what makes them tick. You could use a journal as a reflective tool for thoughts and ideas as a starting point. This journal will be used as a type of identification tool. One place that your son/daughter can write down whatever they may be thinking. If there are issues with handwriting, then they can use a computer or any other form of "written" communication (drawing pictures, cutting out pictures from books or magazines, etc.).

Having a list of dreams or goals is something every person does; it should be no different for our children with Asperger's. Their journal can be a spot that they write down the things that they would like to achieve in life. There are no limits or boundaries on their dreams; because if there is one thing we, parents of a child with Asperger's should know it's they will do whatever it takes to finish something. So maybe every now and then it would be a good thing to set the bar a bit higher.

I realize that some of you out there may not have as high functioning of a son or daughter as I; but that does not mean that there are not opportunities to develop interests. The way you develop their interest may have to be different. For example, reading out loud to your child about different things. I have read a couple stories of parents with non-verbal children reading them many different kinds of books; i.e. poetry, art, biographies of famous persons, etc. Dr. Grandin said that her mother always read aloud to her and it helped her in many ways.

As the parent of a non-verbal child with Asperger's, you have already found ways to help them become more independent. Helping them be more independent comes from knowing what their interests in different areas already are and developing them on another level. If your son/daughter sees a therapist, you could even ask them about developing interests.

**** Dave Angel** - Hi just me butting in again ☺ I wanted to share another great little tip from the world of online commerce. There is a website called www.fiverr.com where people will do all kinds of tasks for \$5. One parent has set up his 9 year old son with Asperger's Syndrome (who has a special interest in art) to draw pictures for \$5 a time. Very innovative and a great pocket money source! You can see his web page:

<http://fiverr.com/finkartstudio/commission-my-autistic-child-to-create-a-work-of-art-any-subject-in-his-style>

Is there anything your child could do for \$5 a time?

Maybe art, graphics, researching topics, creating spreadsheets, providing simple technical help on computers etc? **

4. Use a portfolio.

There it is again....a portfolio. Some of you may be thinking, "What is it with this woman and portfolios?", if you've read my previous articles on the topic. But honestly, they are truly an amazing tool.

However I'm going to assume that none of you saw my previous article about using a portfolio to get into college; and go over the concept again here.

A portfolio is a collection of whatever it needs to be; i.e. artwork, classroom work in schools, designs that someone has drawn for a house, etc. That is what makes using a portfolio such a wonderful tool. They can be changed to fit the growing needs of the individual that is creating it. It is to show how someone progresses from doing something OK to doing something great. Plus there is no age that is too young or old to start using a portfolio of someone's "work."

When choosing things to put in a portfolio; parents you need to come up with a list of questions. The list of questions should help your son/daughter and yourself choose the best items to put in the portfolio. When you're choosing things for in the portfolio they can be photographs, computer copies, or other forms of media.

Always keep the hard copy (actual paper originals) of your work! That does not mean that you cannot create a multi-media presentation of your portfolio by using PowerPoint or other media creation programs. But you should always be prepared for those people that you would want to see your portfolio that do not have access to the necessary computer programs.

Let your son or daughter get creative! This is another way to showcase their talents to a potential college or employer. Because a portfolio does not have to serve only one purpose, it can serve two-getting into college and obtaining a job.

5. Get work experience.

I for one can say that I heard that line too many times when I was first interviewing for teaching jobs. "You've had how much work experience?" or "you don't have any work experience;" those were two regular lines from principals. But all I could think while they said that was "How do I get experience teaching if no one will give me a chance to teach?"

That is all going to change for our son or daughter because we are going to help them start early. For example: say your daughter loves animals. Take her to a shelter a couple times a week to help work with the animals. Most shelters are in need of people to play with the animals, walk them, or do any number of other things that a high functioning 11, 12, or 13 year old can do. This way when your child goes to get into college to become a veterinarian, they will have some experience to list on their application and put in their portfolio.

Job experience does not always have to be in the field that our son or daughter with Asperger's is intending to go into; but it does help. If you can find places for your child to volunteer time at or get a possible internship at, those are good things to include in their portfolio. For potential employers, they like to see that your child was able to work at other places successfully.

6. Introduce things slowly.

How do we get our children to change? That is like a bad word for those of us who are affected by Asperger's. Our son or daughter thrives on things being the same from day to day. They like their schedule/routine and do not want anyone or anything

to mess it up. So if you have to introduce new interests, for instance, then it needs to be done at a slow pace.

There is one phrase that I've come to live by these last several weeks and that's, "I'm his Mother and I really do know what is best." I don't think that we hear that enough parents, we do know how to help our children. Because so many "professionals" seem to make us doubt our abilities, but no child with Asperger's is alike. Therefore stand confident when making decisions for your child, because you do know them.

So you can design a way to bring new elements into their life without causing a bunch of problems. By having confidence in your own abilities, you can do this.

7. Have the proper transitioning from high school to college or world of employment.

Generally I do not like to write about the down side to helping our children, but I feel that it's important that you know about transitioning and high school special education.

Several different Vocational Rehab groups have found that high schools do not prepare students with any disability for life after high school. In fact last week there was an article that talked about 1 in 3 adults with Asperger's did not have a job or any type of secondary education after high school. Part of that was because the high schools had not properly prepared these students to enter the world.

That leaves it up to us, parents, to make sure that our child is getting the necessary transitioning skills to leave high school. These transition skills are not like the ones that are used from moving from elementary school to middle/junior high school. It is a process that starts teaching skills on how to be independent to go to college or get a job.

One article said,

"It is important as a parent that you realize that the period of time your child is in high school or in a transition program is the last time you as a parent can count on any mandated supports from the system in place. After they leave, they may be eligible for services, but the wait lists are long and there are no guarantees they will have supports. Thus, it's necessary to ensure that whatever life skills your teen needs to learn are included in his ITP and IEP."

This same article stresses the importance of teaching our children how to be self-advocates. That by the time they are not covered under the IEP or ITP that it makes it even harder to get the necessary help; but it is not impossible.

The next thing we have to do is focus on the people we know that possibly help our son or daughter obtain a job. We also have to decide on if you are going to tell your potential employer that you have Asperger's. There are two sides to every story, even when it comes to disclosure. Both sides have very convincing arguments for their reasoning, but in the end it has to be an individual decision. I think that the most important thing to remember is that if you do not tell the potential employer, then you cannot ask for any kind of assistance.

I personally feel that honesty is the best policy. Because there are so many things that can or would happen that would need an explanation; but how would you explain them if you had not disclosed your disability. I guess what I should say to those applying for the job, remember how you felt when your parents had not told you about your autism. Remember how that made you feel and think about the things that changed once you knew what was really going on.

**** Dave Angel** - Here's my views on the subject of disclosure:

"There are definite pros and cons when it comes to sharing your diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome with others. Hearing about the characteristics and symptoms that can come with this diagnosis will be enough to cause some potential employers to deny you a position. Legally, employers are supposed to base hiring strictly on the candidate's skill set and ability to do the posted job. However, everyone knows that a potential employer can and will allow personal prejudices to interfere in the hiring process.

If a potential employer asks up front about medical conditions (which is not legal, by the way) you must be forthright with information. Openly lying about your condition can create mistrust later. In addition, would you really want to work for an employer that prejudged you because of a medical condition? At any rate, here are some possible pros and cons for disclosure of your Asperger's Syndrome diagnosis.

Pros

* *Keeping your condition to yourself can cause additional stress and anxiety and that is something that you do not need when starting a new job.*

* *Neurological and psychological conditions are on the rise. It is likely that you are not the only person in the company or the department with a diagnosis.*

* *Asperger's Syndrome is nothing to be ashamed of, especially if your attitude towards it is 'different ability' rather than disability.*

* *Openly talking about Asperger's Syndrome will educate your co-workers on this condition. Many people have the wrong perception about Autism in general.*

* Some people are able to embrace and assist others with this type of diagnosis. They cannot help you overcome problems and issues on the job if they do not know you are having them.

Cons

* Conditions such as Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, and other neuropsychological conditions still carry a negative stigma. Telling a potential employer may cost you the job. If hired, your coworkers may think you are unable to perform the duties of the job. They may antagonize you, discriminate against you, and basically make your time at work miserable.

* If hired, disclosure could cost you future advancement. When promotion time comes around, you may be overlooked because of your Asperger's Syndrome characteristics.

* Sadly, job discrimination is common among people with Asperger's Syndrome. Even though the laws are clear, a case of discrimination is hard to win.

* Once you tell, everyone will know and you cannot change that.

In some instances, it will be necessary to disclose that you have Asperger's Syndrome to a potential employer. Weigh the pros and cons and decide what is best for your situation."