

USEFUL LINKS:



<https://www.dol.gov/odep/>



<https://www.dol.gov/odep/wrp/>



<https://www.dol.gov/odep/resources/jan.htm>

To Our Community,

I'm proud to close out **Disability Employment Awareness Month** with some insight into "getting Autism to work" at Nicholas Center, along with our partner agency, Spectrum Designs Foundation.

As the Director of Workforce Development at the Nicholas Center, I'm tasked with overseeing the educational and behavioral supports for the production staff and trainees at Spectrum Designs Foundation. I'm always looking for new opportunities for both staff and trainees. Three years ago, I was able to secure a meeting with the head of inclusive hiring from Microsoft, Neil Barnett, about their Autism hiring initiative. When we got on the call, I told him I felt so lucky to be speaking with him. "Are you kidding?" he said, "I should be thanking you!" I was shocked.

He explained that while hiring computer programmers was exciting work, what Nicholas Center and Spectrum Designs Foundation was doing – that was incredible; that most people affected by Autism have challenges that make work designing software and engineering new technologies extremely challenging. In fact, most people – whether neurodivergent or not, *just don't have those jobs*. He expressed their desire to employ others, from food services to facilities management personnel with ASD. **He wanted to know how WE did it.**

This month I attended the **Autism@Work** summit in Jupiter, FL. Nicholas Center and Spectrum Designs were invited to attend the three-day event where representatives from huge companies, like DELL and JP



Randy Lewis is an Autism dad and the former head of supply chain and logistics for Walgreens. He created a program in its distribution centers to integrate large numbers of people with disabilities as equals into its workforce, and Nicholas Center has taken influence from their employee support model. He now runs a nonprofit called NOGWOG - No Greatness Without Goodness.

<http://www.nogwog.org/>



Dave meets Haley Moss, a new lawyer from Florida who is affected by Autism.

LINKS OF INTEREST:



Check out Dave Thompson and Josh Mirsky's TED Talk!

Click on the picture above to learn more.



Spectrum Designs is expanding!

Click on the picture above to learn more.



Check out The Nicholas Center on Facebook and Instagram!

Morgan Chase, discuss best practices for hiring, training, supporting and retaining employees with Autism. Neil's remarks were echoed throughout the week by countless others, who, while munching on [Spectrum Bakes](#) granola, remarked on the fact that our employees remind them of their kids. One attendee has since already traveled from the West Coast to see how it is that we do what we do.

As we traded training strategies with Rising Tides Car Wash from Florida, assessment tools with Mercyhurst University from Virginia, and ideas for innovative solutions with DXC Technologies from Australia, we were reminded that our mission – *though focused on those we serve* – transcends the confines of Port Washington, and even New York. I left feeling even more lucky than I felt when I arrived, to be returning to the production floor to the most dedicated, capable, kind group of people I've ever worked with. Meeting with others who share our *"why,"* and being asked *"how?"* was reinforcing and energizing.

More than ever, people ask us, *"How do we do it?"* The practical answer to that question is that we are creating the Managing a Mission Manual, due out at the end of 2019. This manual will provide insight into the inner workings of our model and what "gets Autism to work" for us. Another answer I'm often tempted to mention is our partner agency model, our ongoing training program, high staff retention, the tireless dedication of our direct support personnel, or our clinical team. The truth is that I usually just respond with something like *"We make it work."* We're a group that cares deeply about what we do, strives to innovate, and doesn't accept when we're told something is too hard, too much, too late, or the worst – impossible. At the ribbon cutting of Spectrum's flagship location, our co-founder, Stella Spanakos closed her remarks with a quote that I think sums it up: *"Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly, you are doing the impossible."* -Francis of Assisi



Dave Thompson
Director of Workforce Development,
Nicholas Center at Spectrum Designs
Foundation