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I'm really thrilled today to invite Keith Gellhorn and Michelle Wood to really talk about neuro-inclusive workplaces. And so we want to start, of course, with each of you introducing yourselves. uh Keith, tell us about you and your organization. My name is Keith Gellhorn. I'm a company called Advocacy. So it's advocacy with two Ds. It'll play on word. And what we do is we coach neurodivergent youth and adults who live with ADHD, autism.

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learning disabilities and co-occurring mental health challenges that impact executive functioning. We have kind of like three core areas. So I'm going to stop you right there because there's the, what we try to do in this podcast is make sure that anytime there's a phrase or word like executive function, oh let's break that down. What does that mean? So executive function is anything to do with starting a task and any task and anything in between. let's figure out what you want to do.

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getting everything together to get ready for it, getting started, avoiding distractions, avoiding perfectionism, procrastination, regulating your emotions and getting through the task. That's the very simplistic way. There's uh a much more scientific way, but that's a simplistic I love that definition and actually that's probably the best one I've heard. Oh wow, didn't quite realize perfectionism was part of that. uh Yeah, okay, good to know. oh

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Right. yeah, so sorry I interrupted you. I'll probably do that. And that's just so that we are making sure that anything we're sharing. Yeah. Like I know that these terms might be familiar to you in your work and you use them all the time. Yeah. And then our listeners out there just want to know, oh, what did he just say? Like as opposed to them Googling it, right? Yeah. Great. So keep going. So keep going. Yeah. So our clients are students in high school. We've got a post-secondary transition.

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program. We coach kids in college, university, apprentices, and then we've got another section for employment and another section for entrepreneurs. I also facilitate professional development training for educators, employers on how to foster neuro-inclusive classrooms and workplaces. What makes my company unique is that I've been around for 14 years and we are still

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100 % neurodivergent owned and operated, meaning we're no strangers to the challenges and paradoxical advantages that these diagnoses can have on one's life. Right, that nothing about us without us, right?

Exactly. love that about your business model. So you're really busy. Is this all happening in Nova Scotia? No, we're...

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all over Canada and the US as well. It's stationed, like I started it in Nova Scotia, I moved from British Columbia or Kelowna I guess to here in 2011. went back to school to do this type of work. My goal is to become a clinical social worker, but I ended up getting my first client in my second semester of NSCC.

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I was a student through Dalhousie who demanded a specialist in ADHD. She tried every on-campus resources and threatened a human rights complaint unless they found somebody. I was running ADHD support groups over at the community college and mental health support groups as well. But yeah, I tried her out. had six weeks. She had to get from a 73%. She needed 85 % to get into veterinary school.

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And six weeks later, got her at 87%. She gets into that school next year. had 10 students, and then it just exploded from there. I love that story of sort of the, just the, I don't want to say random, the, ah obviously it's not random, but the way sort of something starts and then snowballs. it's random. I was planning on eight years of school, right? And then going back into it. But yeah, it started with that student, the

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Next year I took 10, but my pitch was essentially, give me all the people, like you're angry, pissed off, people you don't want to deal with, I'll take them all off your hands. And I was also going to school to be a coach as well at the time, so I was worried about, I had massive imposter syndrome. And so was like, ah, they fail, well they're 60 students anyways, right? But what I did instead was put all my effort into them. The lowest mark any of them got was the 75, most were in the 80s and 90s.

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I got him over 10,000 scholarships. I gave him scholarships of my own money. then by my fourth semester at college, I got permission to coach at every post-secondary institution in Nova Scotia. And one entrepreneur of the year for this idea, and then it just took off from there. that's amazing. How many coaches do you have now? ah Currently, I have myself and one other person, which I...

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talk about off camera as to why. you know what, I'll talk about it on camera. Essentially, Post Secondary Accessibility Services brought in a new manager and they wiped my company out. They replaced me with all of our peer coaches with teachers and people that had masters in

special education and wiped us out in 2014 and I am currently concocting a plan to wipe.

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them all out next, but it was just ruthless. it was so taking a learning strategist is there to support people with ADHD, autism learning disabilities, and that executive function piece, but purely focused on a teacher having those skills. That's a learned experience. If you don't put in the lived experience, you're completely cutting that piece out. I'm sure you can speak to that with Autism in Nova Scotia too.

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Like if you don't get it, how can you relate? Yeah, there's a big difference between theory and practice and lived experience. Yeah, but regardless past that is Nova Scotia has the strictest rules in Canada. I can get funding in every other province but Nova Scotia, is the which is my kick in the pants right now. Right. Yeah. So Michelle, over to you. Please introduce yourself and you know where you're coming from in terms of your background.

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Yeah, so Michelle Wood, I am an ADHD-er myself with learning disabilities and recently have wondered if I have autism as well. Just from working with people with autism, I see a lot of similar traits within myself. So it's been a very good growing experience for me. My experience is really all over the place, but I've kind of landed in a place where I feel like I really have a good fit and

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I like I can make a difference in people's lives in a very small way, but at least it's something. So I'm a support worker for neurodivergent individuals. So right now my area of focus is employment, so helping uh individuals find work that's suitable for them and feels right and safe. um Yeah, but my journey to get there was very all over the place.

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Yeah, I think we're all on these life journeys that take us like this, for sure. I have similar stories. em And so thank you for the introductions. We're talking about neurodivergence. And I just want to make sure we take a minute to kind of, again, break that down. So Keith, when you explain that to employers, to even students and people you're coaching, how do you describe neurodivergence? So neurodiversity in itself,

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It originated in 1998 by lady named Judy Singer. people, she's a researcher, but people kept referring to her as being autistic versus speaking to her like a human being. And so she coined the term

neurodiversity. And then over the years, other people on the spectrum of divergence, I guess. And when I think about neurodiversity, neuro means brain, diversity means different, people who think differently, right? And so,

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So a lot of other people have kind of claimed under uh this umbrella. have ADHD, uh dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, uh trauma, uh what else? Like oppositional defined disorder. OCD. Yeah, OCD. There's all kinds of things that kind of fall under that same umbrella. And then another piece of it too is that most of us have co-occurring conditions.

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So you mentioned all yours. have ADHD, dysgraphia, dyscalculia. Tell us what those are, because you mentioned them a couple times. So ADHD, tension, disorder, everybody knows that one. Dysgraphia is if I'm, it's perfectly explained when you're writing. So somebody says write a 2000 word paper. And some people start at the start and end at the beginning.

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But I'll go from the introduction to like body three, to body two, to body one, it's all over the fricking place. I remember in high school, like all my stuff was like just a mess and you hand it in and all the teachers would say, hey, none of your stuff like flows together, right? Rearrange it. So I'd be like, okay, I'll take this body, it there, put it there. Like it didn't make any sense, right? So I've created tools over the year. I call it like a linear mind map to help people.

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do stuff like that. Discalculia is a math disability. It's extremely common. So I track what all my clients have. And like 98 % of us have some sort of math disability. And uh it's essentially that it's a sequencing thing, much like I explained executive functioning. In algebra, you get a question and there's an answer and there's only one way to go.

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You know, I spent every summer in summer school for math when I was younger. But it was like I'd get half points because I'd get to the answer. I don't know how I got there, But, you know, but it your work. Yeah, exactly, exactly. Yeah. So so there's that uh trauma, like 82 percent of us have trauma. And there's like a little theory out there uh that says that individuals who are neurodivergent by the time they're

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18 will have received up to 200,000 more negative messages than their

neurotypical counterparts. So don't do this, don't touch that. Why are you things this way, that way, the next thing? And then you're automatically an adult and then all of a sudden, you know, you're supposed to be full of self-esteem and everything. There's a reason why a lot of us are struggling like, uh,

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Yeah, anxiety, depression, all the other stuff that goes along with And a lot of self-critique as well. Yeah, big time. And imposter syndrome out the wazoo, right? Depending on what you do. And so there's lots of techniques you can, strategies you can do to address that, yeah. You're speaking about the trauma, about all those things you've been told throughout your life. And I noticed that in previous work experiences, just trying to...

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be a member of the team and contribute, because that's important to me. It helps me to feel confident. But then I have all those memories of people telling me I'm lazy, or I'm not listening, or I don't care. And really, the fact is that they can't see that I really care. In fact, I care too much, and I'm losing sleep over this, because I don't know how to change my brain to work the way you do, or to fit in. m

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that resonated with me when you said that. So Michelle, why don't we uh keep going and just talk about like, what does a neuro inclusive workplace look like in practice for employees, for organizations? Like what does that really look like? The big word that comes to my mind is flexibility. Just because no two neurodivergent individuals are alike. One can have one trait, different sensory issues.

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Someone may prefer to work in the evenings. Someone may prefer to work in the mornings because that's when their brain just functions the best. So I always feel like flexibility is huge. And I understand that some companies, you know, they have limitations on the flexibility. But I think that just coming in with that mindset of like, how can we work together and make this the best situation for everyone? Yeah. Yeah.

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Absolutely. m That's such a huge kind of approach even across beyond neurodivergence. And I guess one of the things I want to add to the definition, because a lot of people use this language and don't really know, but an individual, so each of us is neurodivergent. And as a group, we are neurodiverse. so just that, you know, often that's a point that people don't understand the difference between those.

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I think, Michelle, as you said, we've each said, yes, we've been

diagnosed with ADHD. um And yet how that shows up for each of us will probably be very, very different. Right. And so then what does that look like in a workplace? Absolutely. A flexible model is great.

Keith, what else um in a workplace that really creates more inclusion and accessibility for neurodivergent individuals? as a person, so I run an

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or a diverse organization, would say. uh We don't have any hierarchy in my company. So the lowest person hired and me, we get paid the same, right? So there's, we all work as a collaborative unit ah to go towards a common goal. If we make profit, we profit share. It's all, we're all working together. And the one thing I use a roller coaster currently in my logo, I'm going to change it because it's of deficit focused, but

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At no point in time are all of us functioning at that same level. There's always somebody up, somebody down, somebody sideways. But the one thing with anybody who is neurodivergent, we can see that. We have high empathy, right? So we'll be like, I'll step in and help you or whatever. Like we always help each other out. Yeah, yeah, it's like, yeah, high empathy.

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spot one of us a million miles away and we can all sit just like we are now like we've just met each other but we're all like yeah old friends. It's kind of bad because so I was diagnosed later in life so I'm 51 like two years ago I was diagnosed. Okay. And to me it kind of came as a surprise because I didn't have maybe the typical

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indicators or what I thought were typical often for boys and men. so, but now that I understand this and I can look back and say, oh my gosh, like all the signs were there. ah Now, of course, I meet people all the time and in my head, I'm going neurodivergent, idiot sheet. Like, it's, I have to kind of stop myself from sharing that too, because I'm like, well, this was a positive thing for me to actually be diagnosed and

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Because I was able to put away um some of that self-shame, some of that imposter syndrome, was like, oh, okay, actually there's kind of a broader thing at play here. And as I talk to more people who are neurodivergent, we share some of those similar approaches and experiences while our, you know, maybe needs or, um you know, accessibility needs might be quite different, right?

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So I really, I really like that. I want to add to this too is that, so

in 2022, I was coaching an individual, this is a social worker named Kendra, and she was a social worker and just wasn't functioning under the structure of the government. No shocker, there's a reason why I don't work for them either. anyways, I was coaching her and I was like, man, this girl is like ridiculously detailed.

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Amazing writer, know all about the grant and just focused, right? So I was, I'd say offered. There was funding at Teamwork Cooperative for six months to bring her on as a trial. And I said, oh, I'll hire her, just see what happens. And by the end of the six months, I was like, we can't live without her, right? She was like, yeah, double checked all the emails going out, all the communication stuff. But it was funny, right around like the two, three month part. um

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we'd started noticing a trend, right? She looked like she was half asleep at the staff meetings and we couldn't get ahold of her from like 10 to four ever, right? And so it was, I didn't mind, I'm kind of a hands-off guy, but it was starting to affect some of the other team members, right? So we called a meeting and I was like, hey Kendra, what's going on, right? And she said, she's like, well, I function the best between like 11 o'clock at night.

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6 o'clock in the morning. She used to phone and text me at 6 o'clock with all of her IDs and 11 o'clock too, right? And then I said, well, why can't we reach her during the day? She's like, I'm toast by 11, right? And I said, well, what do you want? Like what would make you happy? And she's like, just let me work when I feel like it. I'll show up. And we made uh a, what's the word? An agreement, I guess. I said, all I want you to do is show up.

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on a Monday morning staff meeting, tell us what you're going to do. And uh Friday, tell us what you did do, essentially. And as soon as I did that, productivity like, boom, through the roof, right? And uh she's happy, all the staff's happy, everything else. And one other thing that I do in my company is very different. most, I don't know how your workplace works, but most people get like a 15 minute break.

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a half hour lunch and a 15 minute break in the afternoon, we get a 15 minute break every 45 minutes and it's mandatory. So I pay for an eight hour day, but you go eight, 30, nine, 15, nine, 30, 10, 15, right? We get up to lunch, you get an hour and a half and people are like, well, what am I supposed to do in that time? And I said, the stuff that you're doing anyways, if you're just being distracted, I said, be distracted. I want you to do that. Cause that's where the creativity and...

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gives you the ability to reset, right? So that's another thing that we've done over the years just to keep people in and then work on track. So I'm hearing a couple of things here. So one, touch point at the beginning of the day or beginning of the week. Yes. then that sort of review of like, OK, where did things go? Yeah, we do, we call it MOMO.

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Monday morning. So 20 minutes, everyone just gets five minutes. But it's that quick touch point of a mo mo. And we should wear our moos to the mo mo. We also have mojo monthly jobs. But just that quick touch point. And then it's kind of by the end of the week, it's like, okay, where'd you get to on those things, right?

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And then the other thing I'm really hearing is a different way that a day could be structured. So Michelle, you talked about people who might be most productive at night or during the day, mornings or evenings. And so that flexibility piece and someone being able to name kind of what works for them. uh I was noticing one of my person on my team, like we usually start at nine and inevitably she was showing up at.

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9.30, 9.45, and then, you know, I finally said, what's, clearly this isn't working, and not as a shame thing, But as a like, what can we do differently? And she was like, oh my gosh, I'm so embarrassed. And I'm like, no, no, no, no need to be embarrassed. And we just shifted her hours from like, from instead of nine to four, it's 10 to five. And she's on time now and feels much better and is not.

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carrying that feeling of embarrassment or stigma with her throughout the day. I was like, you know, why? So I've noticed this. you know, why did you feel like you couldn't bring this up? And again, she was just like, I was just so embarrassed that I was always late, right? And then I just wanted to get to it. So that idea of flexibility. Michelle, do you see this as you're supporting people to kind of connect to employment?

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What are other ways that employers can really build more flexibility in, but even other ways of supporting people who are neurodivergent? I think a big thing is just communicating with the people that you're working with and asking or having those open conversations where you can talk about like, well, what's working for you? Or like, what could I help you with? em And for me personally, that kind of

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opens me up to feel more comfortable to come to my managers or anyone if I am struggling to get up on time in the mornings or to get myself ready to go when I am coming late. um It does help me to not feel as anxious when I have to have those conversations. m Yeah, and a lot of people, I've noticed that is a very common thread is they just don't want to be misunderstood. So I think giving that chance to.

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Say, no, I just, I do care. Like, I just have this going on or it's just mornings aren't for me. um Yeah. Yeah. One of the questions I've heard or like, I mean, there's many ways to ask this question, but even instead of, know, what accessibility needs do you have? It's more like what, what helps you succeed at work? What helps you thrive? And then what might you need, whether it be flexible hours, if you can flexible start time or end time.

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what kind of communication, right? I know, for example, I increasingly, as I unmask from, um you know, uh ADHD diagnosis, and unmasking is just the process. I mean, let's all define this, because I'm not very good at it. But just like the unmasking for me means um I'm sort of accepting those parts of me that are are ADHD. So

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ah I, you know, get distracted easily. Oh, the shiny thing over here. So the, you know, thinking that I'm very good at multitasking, and maybe it's just distraction. um But for me, once I as I've unmasked, so accepting these parts of me, in fact, I see myself like I'm more ADHD, actually. And I know that that often happens. So are there other ways that you would describe this process of unmasking? Yeah, I actually do a talk on this kind of like,

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unmasking the CEO and talking about business owners. I always see a huge focus on all the DEIA stuff. Always focus on HR and down. The fact of the matter is that individuals say ADHD, example, dyslexia, more on those ones rather than autism, but we're like 300 to 400 times more likely to be

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entrepreneurs, right? And there's never a focus on that. So it's always like, how do I take uh employee and match them up to this HR level? But nobody's focused on the ADHD entrepreneur who created all those standard operating procedures and everything else. That's that's an area that I am specifically focused on right now. And yeah, it's like the leaders and the founders and leaders, founders, all those guys that will just are

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people, I should say, you're in the same boat, right? How much time have you spent, and you mentioned this earlier, like how much time you spend, know, perfecting each part of your business and then, oh, I could do this and this and this and this and all of sudden you're like 16 hours in. So it's, there's this hustle culture mentality in the startup world and entrepreneurship that these, I don't know who claimed it probably.

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as ADHDers who came up with that to be honest. But it's not the hustle culture per se, it's just the focus part of it, because everything looks good. yeah, everything looks like an interesting idea, but to come up with procedures and workflows for each one of those is, that's a whole other gamut, right? Yeah, exactly. Yeah, that's an area I'm really interested in. I find from my experience with unmasking, it's been,

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a very long process for me. And that's part of, um like you were saying, the acceptance part. For me, I've had to kind of like step into that um because finding out how much you've been masking in your life, takes time to change those habits or change that self-dialogue that you have going on. And for me, I've had to learn how to honor where I am.

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I have a term that I say at work when my brain just stops working. I say it malfunctions. I call it my mashed potato brain. And I'm trying to whip out the chunks. And previously, I would try to not let people know that that's happening. And I'm like, everything's fine. I can still do my work. I'm just typing the same word over and over because that's all my brain can do right now. But I don't want to get yelled at for not doing my work. uh This was in previous jobs.

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Yeah, honoring that process and being like, I can't have a conversation right now because my brain is literally like tumbleweed. So yeah. And I think about, so we're using these terms masking and unmasking. And so masking is really the like sort of the cover up, right? Putting a mask on, faking it, even though there's a whole lot of self-critique.

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um that inner dialogue of shame, even though there's a lot of maybe confusion around, okay, there's this big thing, how do I even break it down? Some of those like executive function and how the thinking, because thinking is like, you're taking in information, you have to process that, and then we make decisions. And we like, we do this, these are the building blocks of life, right? We do this over and over and over again. And so when there's like,

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when you have to use a lot of your own energy to make that happen, you might get really tired. And then as you say, burnout and people see that as, you're lazy or you're not, you know, productive or you're not doing good work. So yeah, that idea of like, how do you, how do you coach either individuals or employers around some of these things where, you know, you're trying to

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make sure a work environment could be supportive for people who are neurodivergent. How do you coach employers around that? Well, my experience is mainly working with the individuals themselves. Some of my colleagues could probably talk better on the employer part, but it probably looks very similar. The way I approach it is trying to find the solution that works best for the individual.

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um Everyone has a different way of communicating. Everyone has a different way of taking in information. So what I try to encourage people to do is to find what they're comfortable with. Because you know, you want to be genuine and that happens when you're comfortable with what you're doing and how you're doing it. em Yeah, so I've worked with people in the past about making, em having like scripts ready so that they kind of have like a

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an idea of what they want to say ahead of the conversation. And then they're not struggling in that moment to be like, okay, I'm going to think this and then trying to like remember all those points you want to make or um it really is down to the individual and what they are comfortable with. We just try to find what it is that they could do in that moment. Yeah. And that's really like being curious and asking questions and not making assumptions, right? About how

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ah how things might work for them. um Keith, what about in your experience, whether it's individuals or employers, like what are some of the key things that people really need to understand about neurodivergent uh folks? Well, one of things that I use in my company, I, uh let's talk about the hiring process, I'm sure that's of big interest to people, so I tell people to throw their

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cover letters in the garbage. I said, I want your cover letters. Just made up highlight reel. What I want is either, and you can tell us any way you want. It could be a written story, a video, a interpretive dance. I don't care what it is, but tell me about a time where you've had a struggle in your life, how you got through it, and how you can take what you've learned to help other people up the line, right? And

so, I mean, that's really prevalent in my industry, right?

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because that's what we're doing is helping people get through those challenges. And I don't care. You could have a PhD in like neuroscience, but if you don't live with it, you will not be able to relate with somebody who's going through it. You can do it on a surface level. I was thinking of a Brene Brown, you know, the power of sympathy versus empathy. There's a lot of sympathetic people out there. There's the only, the empathetic people are the only people who can actually express.

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true empathy are people who live with it, right? With that lived experience. uh Second part of it too, our interviews are not interviews. We just tell, I actually disguise it. say, I do this with everybody, so I'm like, you know, if people want to, I don't take phone calls that interrupt my day. So if you want to talk to me, you have to schedule through my little book and thing and fill out some information about yourself, right? And then, so I'll,

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anybody who's interested in a job with me, I'll just say, book a general inquiry of me and we'll have a chat, right? And then we'll be having a chat, just shooting the breeze, but I'm actually doing an interview with them. They have no idea it's happening, right? But I'm just asking general questions or whatever and getting a history of their life and how they've got through things or whatever else. And at the end, uh you know, I'll be like, hey, make sure you get resuméed. And that was great, great interview. And they'll have no idea it's even happening.

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Right? Which is takes all of that effort off, right? It's just a casual conversation, right? And it's probably, I think we might all agree that like, like, uh more traditional, like recruitment, hiring practices really don't work. No, they do not. You know, at the very least, I try to challenge people on things like giving questions, giving questions in advance.

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If you're going to do a typical interview, at least give, and not 10 minutes, but 24 to 48 or a week. Because that for a lot of neurodivergent people, like feeling prepared or having the time to process or being able to just feel more at ease is really, really key. So I love that you've kind of flipped that recruitment and interview piece on its head and said, oh,

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Let's just get to know one another, build a connection, see where your

strengths are, and then, you know, but without calling it kind of, you know. so people, yeah, they don't even know that it's happening when it's happening. And then they end up like, you sound like you'd be an amazing person to work here, right? And I've actually hired people that have inquired about other things, right? um Half my, at least half of the people that turned into coach are people that I have coached, right?

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And, uh but another piece that I want to touch on this and it's kind of circling back. You're talking about the processing piece, right? Process information, bring it back out. I use this analogy all the time when I do training, right? So I think in metaphors, right? That's my thing. So ah my sister, so I was adopted into a family, right? All my family's high achievers. My sister's got a PhD in behavioral genetics, trying to figure out why she turned out the way she did.

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And I turned out the way I did with the same upbringing, right? So when I think about her, she's got like a Ferrari taking information back and forth in her brain, right? In her brain is the Autobahn, right? So 200 miles in, 200 miles out. And it's just, you know, quick-witted, you know, straight through university, all-star everything, right? And then as we were chatting about, you know, we go in, we got the Ford Pinto, right? Ford, you might not know what a Ford Pinto is. I know. You know? Okay, cool.

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Wouldn't want to drive one. Wouldn't want to drive one, Because it had the bumper behind, or the gas tank behind the trunk, right? Oh, wow. And behind the bumper, so your rear end, blows up, which is another analogy we can talk about later, of the emotional dysregulation. But anyway, so I got the Ford Pinto, and I'm driving down like back roads, Nova Scotia, pothole roads and everything. And at the end of all the roads are closed filing cabinets that are full of chaotic paperwork, like in all of our houses, probably, right?

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and we're going through this in here. No, let's go down this road. No, it's, oh, here it is, right? And then you come out and you want to be part of that conversation. You're just like, I'm not there, right? So the only way to basically get up to fury mode is to do one of two things. One, you put NOS in the Pinto, which is equivalent of like a stimulant medication, right? Problem with stimulant medication is that like 80 % of my clients were on by vance, right?

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but there's a bunch of different ones, but it wakes you up. So you take it at eight, from eight to 10, you're awake. And I'm buzzing now because I took blood and sweating. And for like 10 to two, it's good.

And then it starts to wear off and you crash and stuff in the afternoon. And so when I got diagnosed, I was like, I was complaining about the crash and the doctor pulled out a pad and I said, what are you writing? He's like, I'll give you some Ritalin, just take that. And I was like, no, man, I need.

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Skills, right and that's where that executive function piece right is can create skills that can help help people out in all of our stuff, right? We don't we don't need a bunch of medication. We need somebody to Lay a roadmap right help us figure out how to get there. So things like time management breaking down tasks organization all those key things like I know for me if I didn't have my two calendars that I

36:25

immediately put everything in, like my, wouldn't be able to function. And so yeah, you, so there's, so I love that metaphor, sort of that car metaphor of like, now I'm like, I want to be a Ferrari, how do I become a Ferrari? And, but that idea of just kind of that roadblock of disorganization, like dysregulation, all of that.

36:52

And so, and I hear you talking about what are the skills to kind of get us past that roadblock, right? And that's really those individual skills. think a lot about what are the things that employers, what are the skills that employers need to have or to be able to do leaders, managers, hiring managers, HR. And I know both of you work with

37:21

neurodivergent individuals. And now I'm like, now let's kind of flip that on its side. But I think there's some key things that our players need to know. Like a big one is absolutely flexibility and the benefits that could have. think another one is really understanding the impacts of sensory overload, whether it be noise, light, distraction, all of those things. And and some really key

37:50

small things that can make a big difference, right? So whether it's you're wearing headphones or you, uh Keith, what you just said, that you have an approach or a system where you don't pick up the phone and people need to book with you, for example. But you still, but you still, and I...

38:08

continue to answer my phone and I'm like, why am I not doing what Keith does? Because it totally distracts me all the time. What are some of those other things that employers need to be aware of when we're thinking about ah just really supporting and creating these environments that are really uh where neurodivergent people can thrive and succeed? Sorry, I'm jumping in there. Great.

38:37

Definitely in my workplace, we have designated areas where people can go that are quiet. you know, have the option to control the lighting. We have noise machines that can kind of muffle out some sound and they have noise cancelling headphones in some of the spaces. And that's really helpful for when you are overstimulated and you just need that moment to be like, I just need to sit in

39:06

quiet for a moment. And then also having like items that for people who like to hold things or sensory items like sensory toys. um My manager also recently brought in a puzzle and has it in our workspace so people can go to it when they need just like a moment to focus on a puzzle. um And I find that really helpful because it's sometimes you just need

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to do something that completely occupies your brain, but not on what sent you into that almost burnout moment. Yeah, absolutely. I have one of my team members crochet is a lot at work. And just that idea, you know, like she's still processing, but she's kind of moving her hands and I wish I crocheted as well. Okay, so now I'm going to learn crocheting and I'm going to turn off my phone. Yeah. Or cross stitching. I like cross stitching.

40:01

Cross stitching. amazing. We have some people who will color in meetings. Yeah. It helps to focus. Absolutely. Yeah, it comes back on a kinesthetic learner. Yeah. Right, most of us are hands-on feeling and doing. sitting, I always say, like sitting in classrooms, like sitting in jail for me, right? Right. I've had three offices in the last 14 years. I've never spent more than two days in a row at them. Right. So it's just like a tank of a waste of money.

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But at my house, I have an office downstairs. I have my couch. I have another office and I have the living room table. And I don't know where I'm going to be every week. It drives my wife nuts. it's just having a bit of a change of scenery. And being at home, not having to travel. That's another piece. I hate driving. I moved from Vancouver because I'm just so anxious driving.

41:00

three car accidents in the last three months here, rear ended and another guy backed into me and everything else. It just drives me nuts. if I stay at home, you'll get max productivity out of me. If I have to go somewhere, it's like, you again, you take away the need to make a whole bunch of decisions. am I wearing? What am I bringing for lunch? What's my route? What does the traffic like? Am I taking public

transit? All of those layers of information, intake, processing and decisions.

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you get to take away from that. Well, yeah, I want to talk about one really specific thing with employers. ah all these performance reviews and everything, right? So, you know, managers, they channel it to HR. HR is like slamming people with all the things they're doing wrong. Like I said before, we get those 200,000 messages. Every single one of these just reinforces. It makes you feel worse than you could have from the start. But what I always see

41:59

is so I get a lot of employers calling me about these, you know, employees of theirs that are the problem, right? And it's not even a problem, it's lack of communication is all it is, right? And so, you know, even in the non-profit stuff, they'll support, like I've got 20 different people that I coach right now who are employed in various capacities. uh

42:26

Think about one who's in HR right now, right? And the thing is, so they're funding her, right? Her boss has ADHD, the owner has ADHD, and there's no communication whatsoever. So it doesn't matter. Like if you only focused on the employee and you're not taking anybody else into consideration up the chain, you're doing a disservice to everybody. I, like I will quote on just supporting the employee, but ideally,

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for an extra thousand bucks, I'll do a separate needs assessment with HR, whoever's up above. Halfway through, we will have a collaborative meeting, and at the end, we will put together a game plan leading forward. it's, yeah, we don't wanna be siloed, right? We're like community-type people, and I think that's what gets a lot of us in trouble, is that,

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you people say, oh, you're chatting all the time, you're doing this, you're doing that. But we just, we need people around us. That's why body doubling is so important. I always had myself and Alana, we're kind of co-founded company, right? We just have open office hours. We have a running WhatsApp group. You got a question, throw it in there. Whoever's available will answer it, right? But it's a constantly open door without, without necessarily like,

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well, we all work remotely, but without having that feeling of interruption. Everybody has the understanding. That's part of the reason we have those 15 minute gaps. That's when we can reach out and help. And so I hear a big thing, Keith, that you're saying that is so

in alignment with accessibility overall and disability is that what you're saying is, OK, the barrier is not

44:18

with the individual, the barriers in the environment. The system. The system, the environment. so that's where it's so important to think about the broader workplace, the broader system, whether it's health, school, legal, education, whatever it might be, the barriers being in the environment is really kind of that definition of a social view on uh disability.

44:45

um but also just the idea of accessibility, that the barriers are in the environment and we need to change that. So same for neurodivergent individuals, right? It's not a ramp, it's not a doorway, but those environmental pieces are things like ah how is information shared with you, ah the time that you get to process that, the ways that you get to share that back.

45:13

Like you talked about in an interview, someone can do a video, someone could do, you know, or whatever it is, the sort of the cover letter, And then you talked a lot about, okay, if that environment, if there's flexibility, if there's support through mentorship, if all of those things mean that that person can thrive. And it's not again placing the...

45:41

focus or the onus on the individual, but saying, no, it's these bigger pieces that support many, many different ways that people can thrive. So I've loved this conversation. Is there anything that you want to share, like that we haven't uh touched on yet that's important for this conversation around neuro-inclusive um workplaces and environments? I know for myself what I'm just speaking about.

46:09

We're actually developing a specific kind of block system for this, right? So I bring in another lady named Kayla Bagnell. She's worked in employment services forever. so I've got Alana. She'll be like the director of the student stuff. And Kayla's the director of the employment side of things and recruiting. And then I'll do all the manager part of it. But the...

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biggest part is involving, yeah, like looking through the whole organization, not this top down industrial revolution, that's gone, right? And especially now with AI and everything involved, right? uh There's so many tools that you can use to get yourself out. Like I'm an AI wizard, I've learned it all in like three months. Now there's a gener of AI because you can ask it questions and it'll actually

produce something before you ask questions.

47:04

then you'd have to go to all of them. But there's so many things that we can use in that collaborative space to help get ahead. And that's actually the piece that we're building. I've always left that community piece out. I used to run support groups and stuff, but you'd go in, we're going to do training, right? You go to your training, you come out and they're like, ah, see you later. Everybody forgets everything. So we're building communities for each one of those programs that you can slowly advance up to.

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and uh as well as tackling some of the common soft skills that you asked about what skills are missing. Biggest ones that come about communication, uh social, emotional intelligence, uh any conflict resolution pieces, all of that. It's not up. So again, like I flip everything on its butt, right? Everybody's like those employee.

48:01

employees need to learn that part before coming in. Right? I hear it in all these conferences I go to, it's all about the employee. But if you, if, it's around that piece of it, you can have the employee take it, but also the employer take it. So now you're both on the same page. Now you've got a framework. Now you take the framework and you run with it, right? Versus like say it's a segmentation of, of business just in general that just destroys that

48:30

forward momentum. we all work together, use this ELE movie called Semi Pro. Everybody loves everybody, right? If we all work from that collaborative perspective, everybody's going to win. And if you do get that, it ultimately comes down to what business owners care about. I'm one of them. It's kind of like the bottom line, right? Because if you're not making money, you're kind of screwed. uh

48:58

But if we're all working together, everybody's benefiting, then you'll have those long-term employees. That's one thing you can't say. And anybody on the spectrum, I've worked with kids with Down Syndrome and stuff in the past too, those guys will take a job and they'll be with you 40 years down the road, best employee, loyal, everything. They just want to be respected and not told all the time what they're doing wrong. Tell us what we're doing right. Yeah, absolutely. Man, you're all amped up. You go ahead. Michelle, anything you want to add? Yeah, I think...

49:28

One thing that I always try to remember myself, and I think it would be really important for workplaces to also remember is that there are

a lot of people out there who don't realize yet that they are neurodivergent. They haven't come to that realization, or maybe they do, and they don't have access to getting that diagnosis, because we all know it's really difficult to get those diagnosis. They're expensive.

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The wait times are really long. em And I know you said you had a late diagnosis. So I always just think about those people who are out there in the world, raw dog in it. I hope I can say that. But they have ADHD. They are autistic. They have learning disabilities, but they don't yet know it. em And I think it's just really important for workplaces to adopt that mentality of just

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patience and compassion, kindness, and just don't always assume that people are just out there not wanting to do their job or they're, you know, being whatever terms people like us have heard before or neurodivergent people have heard. I always think about those people because that would be really hard. Yeah, absolutely.

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Well, thank you both so much. Sharing your personal journeys, some of your thoughts around workplaces and individuals, it's really affirming to have this conversation with other neurodivergent people. you, Appreciate it. Thanks so much. right.