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Neurodiversity in Legal Hiring:

From A(dvising) to (Gen) Z

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Agenda

1. Terminology
2. Discussion: Key Challenges and Opportunities
3. Exercises: Supporting Students in Interviews

Building a Toolkit:

Ways to support neurodivergent students

	Monday Morning Goal	Longer Term Goals
Networking		
Interviewing		
Accessing accommodations		

Terminology

- Neurodivergence vs. Neurotypical
- Accommodations vs. Adjustments
- Awareness vs. Acceptance

Neurodiverse vs. Neurotypical

Neurodiverse *or* Neurodivergent

- someone who thinks differently from the way most of the population “expects” that they would

Neurotypical

- someone whose brain behaves like most of society

Accommodations vs. Adjustments

Accommodations

- A modification or adaptation made to an employee's work environment or how an employee performs their tasks

Adjustments

- Simple changes/not onerous
- Low cost, high impact

Awareness vs. Acceptance

Awareness

- Autism is a condition
- Autism is very common
- Autistic employees require supports
- Autistic employees exhibit challenging behaviours

Acceptance

- Autistic employees are valued team members that bring a unique perspective

Recruiting Neurodivergent Talent: Challenges

1. Accessibility/Inclusivity
2. Standard recruitment structures
3. Lack of understanding and training
4. Making adjustments (accommodations)

Advising Neurodivergent Talent: Challenges

1. Primary Challenges
 - Developing knowledge
 - Signaling access and inclusion
 - Helping students navigate through the existing recruiting systems
 - Influencing change to promote neurodiverse workforce
2. How can schools and employers make their programs & services more accessible?
 - Training and education
 - Student outreach
 - Practice – support each other

Key Opportunity: Networking

1. Primary Challenges

- Lack of clarity on the purpose and expectations
- Some formats are very inaccessible/uncomfortable for some neurodivergent people

2. How can employers & schools increase access and success?

- Resources – what to expect and strategies for success
- Varied opportunities
- Training an education for workforce

Key Opportunity: Applications & Interviews

1. Primary Challenges

- Standard interview not ideal for showcasing neurodivergent talent
- Recruitment marketing
- Competency metrics
- CV screening
- Communicating & interpreting “fit”

2. How can employers & schools increase access and success?

- Clarify what to expect
- Provide strategies for success
- Offer varied interview formats
- Training & education

Critical Issues: Disclosure & Requesting Adjustments

Why disclose?

- Need for accommodations (adjustments)
- Participate in diversity initiatives
- Assess fit based on employer's response
- soft disclosure

Issues relating to disclosure

- Privacy and identity
- Fear of discrimination
- What is the process
 - clarity, transparency, confidentiality, ease of access
- Will it be confidential
- Will it be timely
- Requesting adjustments without disclosure

Making Adjustments

- Toolkit for recruiters/interviewers
- Virtual interviewing
- Neurodivergent-friendly job postings
- Clear communication
- Explain the process and what to expect
- Bespoke “not recruitment” tours
- Partnering with our schools to facilitate student experience

Exercise: Supporting students in interviews

Devon is getting ready for OCI interviews. Devon processes information differently. It helps to take notes during conversations and to have a few additional seconds to process what was said and formulate responses.

Devon is worried about keeping track of information during and after interviews, but is concerned that taking notes during the interview and pausing before answers will be viewed negatively.

Devon also needs breaks between interviews.

How can the career office support Devon in preparing for

- virtual screening interviews?*

- callback interviews?*

How can employers make this process more accessible to Devon?

Exercise: Supporting students in interviews

Devon also does not know what to expect with callback interviews in terms of the timing and format. They have heard about firms requiring assessments at the interview, interviews with multiple people at the same time, and non-stop back to back interviews.

Devon's is concerned about needing an accommodation, but not knowing in time to address it. Devon can't find any details about how each firm handles callbacks and is worried about drawing attention by asking.

How can the career office support Devon in securing this information?

How can employers make this process more accessible to Devon?

Exercise: Supporting students in interviews

Ali finds it difficult to maintain eye contact and focus on what the other person is saying at the same time. Ali also can focus better when handling a “fidget”.

Ali participated in a mock interview with a firm and got feedback that he needs to make better eye contact, and that his answers are too long and too detailed.

How can the career office support Ali in preparing for interviews?

How can employers make this process more accessible to Ali?

More Exercises

Omar is concerned about networking with firms. He is especially worried about networking receptions. He struggles with crowded rooms. The noise, sounds and smells (food) are distracting. His questions are as follows:

- What is the purpose?
- Do I have to attend these?
- What am I supposed to wear? What does business casual mean?
- When an attorney at a reception invites me to contact them with any questions, what am I supposed to do? Am I expected to contact them? Will it reflect poorly on me if I don't? When should I reach out to them?

More Exercises

- **Alex** is a member of his school's disability affinity group. He is worried that if he puts this on his resume, he may be treated unfairly by employers.
- **Sarita** struggles with learning names, especially in unfamiliar or stressful situation. She is also very worried about law firm social events during her summer associate experience. She finds it exhausting to navigate these social events and she doesn't understand the purpose. Does she have to go?

Key Themes

- Education & training
 - For ourselves and our colleagues
 - About neurodiversity
 - About bias and inclusivity
 - About adjustments
- Inclusive recruitment
- Build a positive culture of adjustments
- Identify and combat unconscious bias
- Support mental health & well-being
- Enhance clarity in:
 - what to expect
 - how to ask for adjustments