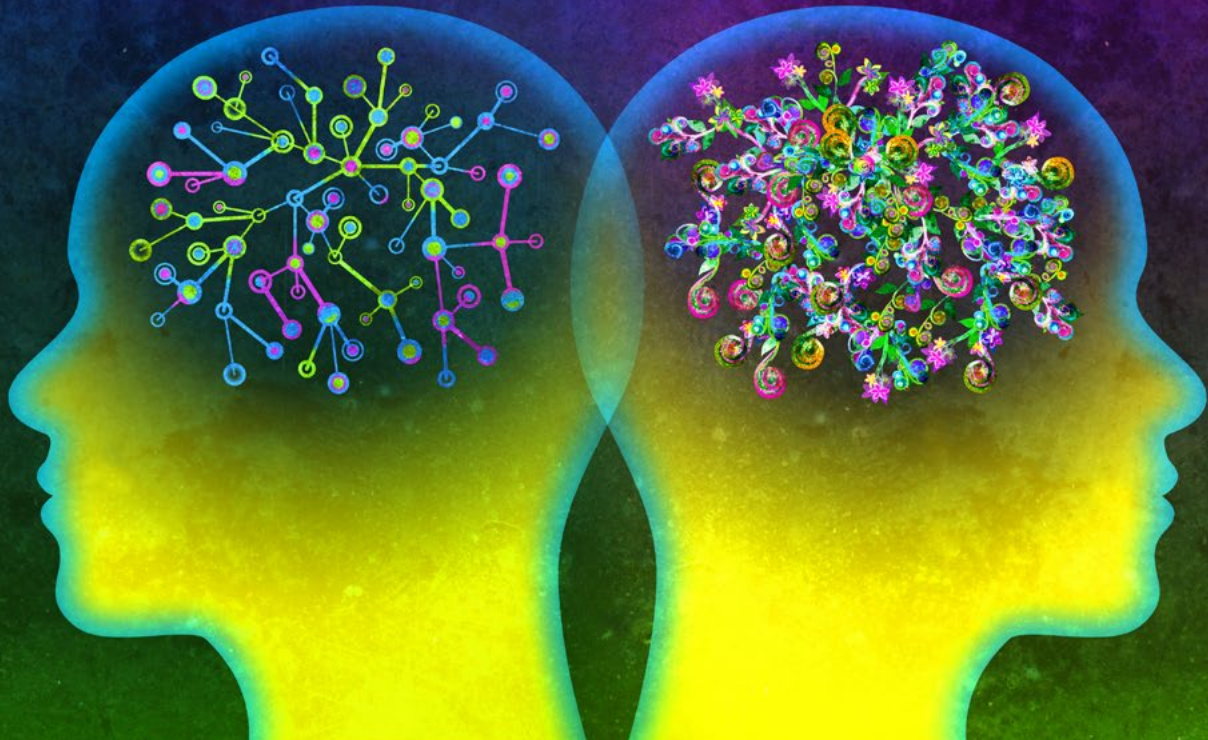




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Expanding Lawyer Well-Being: Neurodiversity in the Legal Profession

by Douglas S. Querin

One important dimension of well-being that has gained increasing attention in the last few years is neurodiversity. Neurodiversity recognizes that human brains naturally vary in how they develop, process information, communicate, focus attention, and experience the world. These neurological differences are part of normal human variation.

What Is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to the natural diversity of human cognition. The term emerged in the late 1990s¹ and reflects a shift from viewing certain neurological patterns exclusively through a deficit-based medical lens toward understanding them as normal variations in human functioning.

Individuals whose cognitive processing differs from what is considered statistically typical are often described as neurodivergent. Neurodiversity itself is not a diagnosis. Rather, it is an umbrella concept that includes a range of neurodevelopmental conditions and cognitive profiles. These may involve both areas of strength and areas where support may be helpful.

Autism Spectrum Condition.² Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference that often influences social communication, information processing, and sensory experience. A person with autism may process social cues differently, prefer predictability, develop deep and sustained interests, or experience heightened or reduced sensitivity to sensory input.

Autism exists along a broad spectrum, and support needs vary considerably. Many autistic people demonstrate strong attention to detail, sustained focus, pattern recognition, and the ability to analyze complex systems—capacities that can align well with legal work.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).³ A person with ADHD experiences differences in attention regulation, activity level, and executive functioning. Tasks that lack intrinsic interest may require greater effort to initiate or sustain. Organization, time estimation, and working memory may require structured support.

At the same time, many people with ADHD bring creativity, rapid problem-solving, adaptability, high energy, and the ability to respond effectively in dynamic or high-pressure environments.

Dyslexia.⁴ A person with dyslexia processes written language differently. Reading and spelling may require additional time or alternative strategies, even when reasoning ability and intelligence are strong. Dyslexia is not related to motivation or effort.

Many dyslexic individuals demonstrate strong verbal reasoning, big-picture conceptual thinking, creativity, and strategic insight—qualities that are highly valued in legal practice.

Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Differences).⁵ A person with dyspraxia may

experience differences in motor coordination, sequencing, and task execution. Handwriting, physical organization, or complex sequencing tasks may require adaptive strategies.

Many dyspraxic individuals develop strong verbal reasoning, planning skills, and problem-solving abilities as they build effective compensatory approaches.

Tourette Syndrome.⁶ A person with Tourette Syndrome can experience involuntary motor or vocal tics that may fluctuate in frequency and intensity. Tics are often influenced by stress, fatigue, or environmental factors.

Tourette Syndrome does not affect intelligence. Many individuals with Tourette Syndrome develop exceptional resilience, self-awareness, persistence, and coping skills as they navigate fluctuating symptoms.

Neurodiversity in the Legal Profession

Neurodiversity has always existed within the legal profession. Lawyers with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette Syndrome, and related profiles practice successfully across all sectors of law. For many, neurodivergence is merely one dimension of identity.

Estimates suggest that a significant percentage⁷ of the general population is neurodivergent. Yet disclosure rates within the legal profession remain comparably low. In competitive and high-performance environments, lawyers may hesitate to disclose neurological differences out of concern that they will be misunderstood.

Neurodivergent lawyers who don't disclose may engage in "masking"⁸—intentionally or unintentionally adjusting communication style, work patterns, or behavior to align with perceived expectations. While many succeed, sustained masking can require considerable cognitive and emotional effort, which, over time, may contribute to fatigue and diminished well-being.

The Workplace

Legal workplaces have traditionally assumed uniform approaches to attention, communication, time management, and social engagement. When those assumptions do not align with an individual's cognitive style, tension can occur. Examples of potential workplace tensions may include:

- High levels of background noise or frequent interruptions that increase sensory overload;
- Extended networking or meetings that require sustained social processing;
- Multiple overlapping deadlines that strain executive functioning;
- Performance expectations tied to stylistic norms rather than substantive outcomes; and
- Limited flexibility in work structure or task sequencing.

Importantly, these tensions do not reflect a lack of competence. There is finally a growing recognition that thoughtful workplace design and neurological variation can, in fact, functionally coexist in a collaborative way that honors the neurodiversity of all.

Strengths and Contributions

Many neurodivergent lawyers demonstrate distinctive capacities that strengthen legal practice, including:

- Sustained focus and persistence;
- Strong analytical reasoning and pattern recognition;
- Creative and original approaches to complex problems;
- High integrity and careful attention to detail; and
- Innovation in technology-driven or data-intensive areas.

The legal profession already values these traits. Recognizing that they may be associated with neurological diversity allows organizations to cultivate them creatively and with thoughtful deliberation.

Communication differences may also be present. Some neurodivergent lawyers communicate directly and literally; others require additional processing time before responding; still others prefer written clarity over spontaneous verbal exchange. When understood in context, these variations represent differences in style rather than in professional skills.

Neurodiversity should also be considered at the institutional level. Billing models, supervisory expectations, open-office designs, and evaluation systems frequently assume a single model of functioning. Expanding awareness of cognitive diversity invites reconsideration of those assumptions.

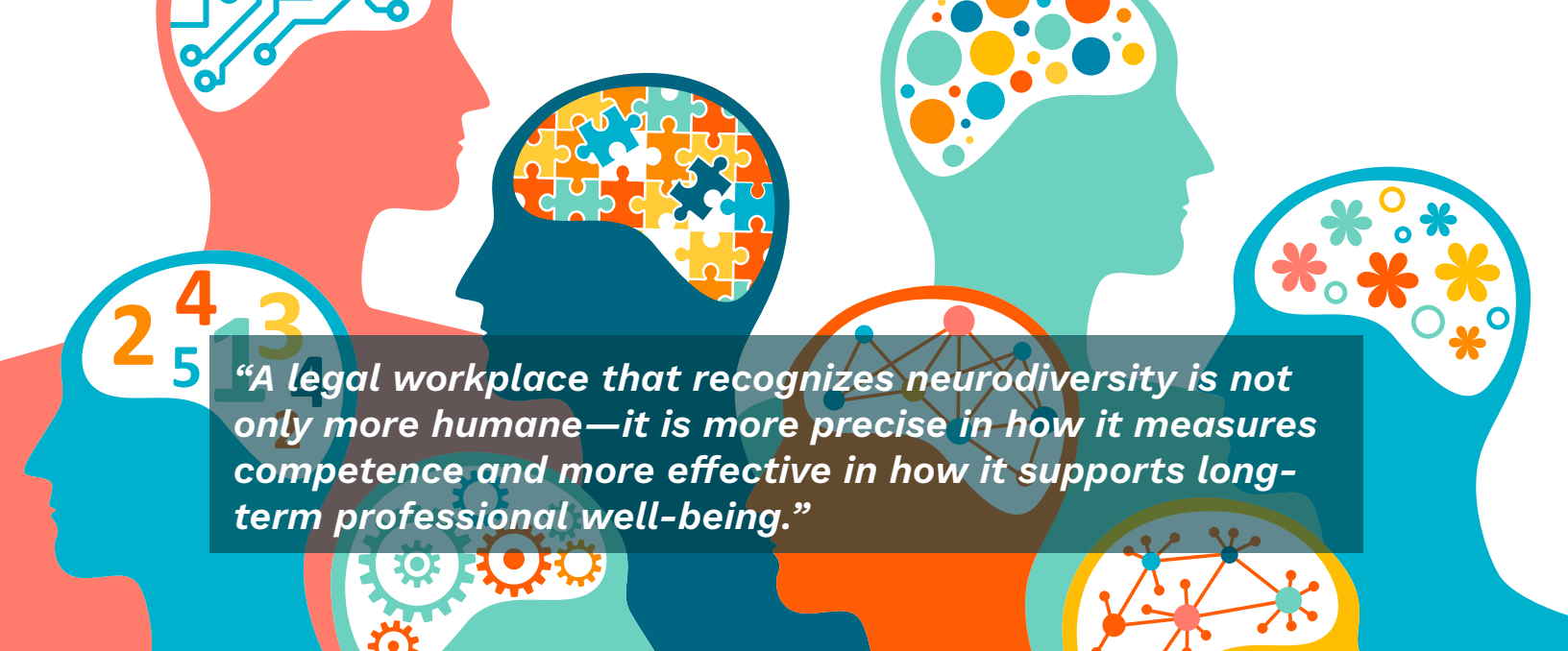
Expanding Well-Being and Opportunity

Understanding neurodiversity in the legal profession is not solely about compliance or accommodation. It is about aligning workplace structures with cognitive diversity in ways that enhance well-being, retention, and performance.

Greater understanding reduces misinterpretation. Differences in pacing, organization, or communication may otherwise be attributed to a lack of motivation or poor judgment. When colleagues understand these differences as natural variations in neurological processing, feedback becomes more accurate, performance better understood, and advancement more attainable.

Many workplace practices that support lawyers with neurodivergent profiles are straightforward and beneficial to all professionals. These include:

- **Clear communication:** written follow-up to verbal instructions; explicit priorities and deadlines;
- **Predictable workflows:** advance notice of deadlines and meetings; reduced last-minute changes;
- **Time-management support:** task-management tools, visual schedules, or reasonable flexibility;



“A legal workplace that recognizes neurodiversity is not only more humane—it is more precise in how it measures competence and more effective in how it supports long-term professional well-being.”

- **Flexible work structures:** remote or hybrid work; alternative task sequencing where feasible;
- **Adjusted performance evaluation:** emphasis on quality and accuracy over speed or style;
- **Executive functioning support:** shared task lists, checklists, and brief, regular check-ins;
- **Reduced sensory overload:** access to quiet spaces, noise-reducing tools, or flexible office layouts;
- **Education and training:** normalizing neurodiversity and reducing stigma through awareness; and
- **Strength-based task assignment:** aligning work with individual strengths and core legal skills.

These approaches emphasize clarity, fairness, and outcome-based evaluation—principles already central to the legal profession. When workplace expectations are explicit and flexible enough to accommodate normal cognitive variation, all lawyers are better positioned to contribute fully and sustainably.

Conclusion

Neurodiversity describes the natural variability of human cognition and has always been present in the legal profession. What is changing is the profession’s willingness to recognize, understand, and accept it.

Lawyers who are neurodivergent contribute meaningfully to modern legal practice. Despite this, there may be times when workplace design and expectations create unnecessary strain. When that tension is misinterpreted, opportunity narrows. When it is understood as differences in normal neurological processing, opportunity expands.

For a profession committed to analysis, fairness, and ethical responsibility, acknowledging cognitive diversity is an appropriate and timely step toward a more sustainable practice of law. A legal workplace that recognizes neurodiversity is not only more humane—it is more precise in how it measures competence and more effective in how it supports long-term professional well-being. ●

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- An Intelligent Response: AI Counseling vs. Human Counseling (Fall 2025)
- Lawyer Well-Being: The How-To of Managing Distress (Spring 2025)

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