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“... strong analytical reasoning, pattern recognition, persistence, and deep focus—traits valued in law—are often associated with cognitive diversity.”

Myth vs. Reality: Neurodiversity in the Legal Workplace

by Douglas S. Querin

People with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette Syndrome, and other neurodevelopmental differences have always been part of the legal profession. Historically, many have worked successfully without openly discussing their neurological profiles, often adapting their working styles to align with prevailing workplace expectations.

As the legal profession's focus on lawyer well-being has expanded, so too has attention to neurodiversity in the legal workplace. With that attention comes an opportunity for law practice leadership to distinguish myth from reality and ensure that performance is assessed accurately, fairly, and sustainably.¹

1. MYTH: Neurodiversity is rare in the legal profession.

REALITY: Neurological diversity is a normal feature of any professional population, including law. Many lawyers and staff members with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette Syndrome, or related profiles practice successfully in a wide range of legal roles. Because disclosure is personal and voluntary:

- Lawyers frequently work alongside neurodivergent colleagues without knowing it.
- Many neurodivergent legal professionals choose not to disclose unless a specific workplace adjustment is needed.

Neurodiversity is not an anomaly in legal practice; it is a normal part of the human condition. Moreover, strong analytical reasoning, pattern recognition, persistence, and deep focus—traits valued in law—are often associated with cognitive diversity.

2. MYTH: Workplace adjustments lower performance standards.

REALITY: Workplace adjustments do not reduce expectations. They remove unnecessary barriers so that individuals can meet existing standards. In practice:

- Deadlines, quality requirements, and ethical obligations remain unchanged.
- Adjustments often increase accuracy, reliability, and efficiency.
- Many adjustments involve modest changes in communication or workflow—not altered standards.

The goal is equal opportunity to perform, not reduced accountability.

3. MYTH: Adjustments are expensive and/or disruptive.

REALITY: Most workplace adjustments in legal settings are low-cost or no-cost. Examples include:

- Clear written follow-up to verbal instructions;
- Advance notice of deadlines or meetings;
- Access to quiet or lower-distraction workspaces;
- Predictable scheduling when possible; and
- Flexibility in how tasks are sequenced.

When costs arise, they are typically modest. Disruption, if any, more often results from avoidable misunderstandings, turnover, or preventable performance friction.

4. MYTH: Lawyers with neurodivergent profiles cannot succeed in client-facing or interpersonal roles.

REALITY: Success depends on clarity, structure, and role alignment—not neurological style. Lawyers with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette Syndrome, or related differences often excel in:

- Client counseling where clarity and precision are valued;
- Complex litigation and transactional analysis;
- Compliance, research, drafting, and regulatory interpretation; and
- High-stakes analytical problem-solving.

When challenges arise, they are typically the result of unclear expectations, excessive cognitive load, or ambiguous feedback—not lack of ability.

5. MYTH: A request for a workplace adjustment must disclose detailed diagnostic information.

REALITY: Employees are not required to provide comprehensive medical explanations to supervisors. Effective management focuses on:

“Neurodiversity reflects natural cognitive variation within the profession. It is not a flaw to be corrected but a workplace reality to be understood and managed thoughtfully.”



- Functional needs (to support strong performance);
- Observable workplace impact; and
- Practical adjustments that improve outcomes.

Management does not need clinical knowledge or expertise. They need clarity, responsiveness, and a structured approach to dialogue.

6. MYTH: Treating people differently is unfair.

REALITY: Fairness in professional settings means equal opportunity to meet standards—not identical treatment. Legal workplaces already individualize:

- Mentorship;
- Work assignments;
- Business development opportunities; and
- Scheduling for health or family responsibilities.

Workplace adjustments for neurological differences typically fit comfortably within existing professional norms of individualized supervision.

7. MYTH: Differences in communication style reflect attitude or professionalism problems.

REALITY: Communication styles naturally vary across neurological profiles. Differences may include:

- Direct or literal language;
- Reduced emphasis on small talk;
- Preference for written communication;
- Additional processing time before responding; or
- Differences in eye contact or nonverbal expression.

These are normal variations in communication style—not reflections of character or commitment. Clear, structured communication benefits entire teams regardless of neurological profiles.

8. MYTH: Supervisors must become experts in neuropsychology.

REALITY: Effective leadership requires curiosity, consistency, and clarity—not diagnostic expertise. Best supervisory practices include:

- Asking what helps someone do their best work;
- Providing explicit expectations and priorities;
- Offering predictable, concrete feedback; and
- Evaluating performance based on results and ethical standards, not stylistic conformity.

These practices improve management across the board.

9. MYTH: Workplace adjustments increase legal risk.

REALITY: Legal risk more commonly arises when adjustment requests are ignored, differences are mischaracterized as misconduct, or dialogue is avoided.

Thoughtful, documented engagement in good-faith problem-solving typically reduces exposure and strengthens retention.

The Bottom Line for Law Practice Leadership

Neurodiversity reflects natural cognitive variation within the profession. It is not a flaw to be corrected but a workplace reality to be understood and managed thoughtfully.

Law firms and legal organizations that respond with clarity, flexibility, consistency, and respect create environments where lawyers can perform competently and sustainably. Doing so strengthens performance, reduces unnecessary turnover, and upholds the profession's commitment to fairness and sound judgment. ●

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ENDNOTES

1. The information and observations contained in this sidebar are provided for general educational and informational purposes only. They do not constitute legal advice, nor should they be relied upon as a substitute for consultation with qualified legal counsel. Employment-related matters, including workplace adjustments, disability law compliance, and personnel management decisions involve fact-specific legal considerations. Organizations and individuals should seek advice from a qualified legal advisor regarding their particular circumstances.