

Avoiding Bias and Assumptions About Neurodivergence

TL;DR · QUICK SUMMARY

- Bias about neurodivergence often shows up quietly — in hiring, promotion and performance decisions — without anyone intending harm.
- This guide covers the most common assumption traps and how to catch yourself before they affect a real decision.

A Note Before You Read On

This resource offers general guidance and reflects common experience, not professional, legal, medical or financial advice. It is not a substitute for employment law, HR policy, occupational health guidance, or individual professional assessment. Every person's experience of neurodivergence is different, so please adapt anything here to your own situation. The Uniquely Wired Network does not accept liability for decisions, actions or outcomes arising from the use of this material. If you need advice specific to your circumstances, please consult a qualified professional (e.g. HR, legal, medical, or financial advisor).

Why This Matters

Bias doesn't need bad intent to cause real harm — it just needs to go unchecked.

Assumptions about neurodivergence can quietly influence who gets hired, promoted, believed, or given the benefit of the doubt.

Catching these patterns protects both your team and your organisation from decisions you'd struggle to justify later.

What This Might Look Like

- Rating a candidate lower for limited eye contact or a flat interview tone, regardless of their answers.

- Assuming someone who struggles with small talk will also struggle with client relationships.
- Reading direct communication as rude rather than simply direct.
- Assuming a visibly capable employee “can’t really” need support.
- Passing someone over for a client-facing role based on communication style alone

What You Can Do

1. Separate the skill from the delivery style.

- Judge interview and meeting performance on substance, not on eye contact, tone, or small talk fluency.
- Ask whether a “concern” is actually about the work, or about a style mismatch.

2. Build structure into decisions that affect people.

- Use consistent, criteria-based interview questions rather than impression-based judgement.
- Document the specific, job-relevant reasons behind hiring or promotion decisions.

3. Pause before acting on a gut reaction.

- If a reaction to someone’s communication style feels strong, ask yourself why.
- Get a second opinion before letting a style-based impression drive a real decision.

Helpful Phrases You Can Borrow

Challenging bias in a hiring discussion:

“Can we separate what we’re evaluating here — is this about the answer they gave, or about how they gave it?”

Catching your own assumption:

“I noticed I read that as abrupt — but actually, it was a clear, useful answer.”

Quick Tips

- Bias doesn't require bad intent to cause real damage.
- Judge substance, not delivery style — especially in interviews and reviews.
- Structured, criteria-based processes reduce bias more than good intentions do.
- A strong gut reaction to communication style is worth questioning, not acting on.
- Document job-relevant reasons for decisions, not impressions.
- This is an ongoing practice — one training session doesn't fix it permanently.

Want to Know More?

- See our companion guide: “Strength-Based Lens vs Deficit Lens” for reframing traits fairly.
- See “Policy Recommendations” for building bias checks into formal processes.
- Speak with HR about structured interview and promotion frameworks already in place.

Before You Go

Nobody is free of bias — the goal is to notice it before it becomes a decision. A little friction before you act is often exactly what fairness requires.