

Understanding ND at Work

TL;DR · QUICK SUMMARY

- Many well-meaning managers hold outdated or inaccurate ideas about neurodivergence, often without realising it.
- This guide walks through the most common myths and what's actually true.
- Checking your own assumptions is one of the most useful things you can do as a manager.

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

Myths shape decisions — who gets hired, who gets believed, who gets support. Even a well-intentioned manager can cause harm by acting on outdated assumptions. A few minutes checking your own beliefs can prevent a lot of unintentional damage.

What This Might Look Like

- Assuming a capable-seeming employee “can’t really” be struggling.
- Being surprised that someone diagnosed as an adult “doesn’t seem” neurodivergent.
- Treating a request for adjustments as a special favour rather than a normal accommodation.
- Assuming neurodivergence always means visible, obvious differences.

What You Can Do

Myth: “You don’t seem neurodivergent.” Reality: this isn’t a compliment — it just means you can’t see someone’s internal experience. Myth: “They’re so capable, they can’t really be struggling.” Reality: high performance and high struggle regularly coexist, especially in people who mask well.

Capability at work often comes at a real, invisible personal cost. Myth: “Adjustments give people an unfair advantage.”

Reality: adjustments level the playing field, they don’t tilt it.

Most adjustments are low-cost and benefit the whole team, not just one person.

Myth: “Neurodivergence is a new trend.”

Reality: neurodivergent people have always existed — diagnosis and language have simply improved.

Increased diagnosis rates reflect better understanding, not more people “becoming” ND.

Helpful Phrases You Can Borrow

Setting the tone with a new team: Catching your own assumption mid-thought:

“I noticed I assumed that because they’re so on top of things, they must be fine — I should probably just ask.”

Responding to a disclosure well: Responding to a colleague repeating a myth:

“I used to think that too, actually — turns out it’s more complicated than that.”

Quick Tips

- “You don’t seem ND” is not a compliment.
- High performance and genuine struggle often coexist.

- Adjustments level the playing field, they don't create an advantage.
- ND isn't a trend — awareness has simply improved.
- A diagnosis isn't required for someone's needs to be real.
- Checking your own assumptions is an ongoing practice, not a one-off.

Want to Know More?

- See our companion guide: "What Neurodivergence Is" for the foundational picture.
- See "Business Case & Psychological Safety" for why myths cost more than they seem to.
- Speak with HR or occupational health if you're unsure how a myth may be shaping a real decision.

Before You Go

Everyone carries some outdated assumptions — the goal isn't perfection, it's willingness to update.

Noticing a myth in yourself is progress, not a failure.