

Malcolm's Story

Malcolm wrote his own story

I am 44 years old. I have been married for almost 20 years. I am the Managing Director of a company and the author of an internationally acclaimed book. I also have a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome which I received when I was 37 years young.

The company I manage is Autism STAR Pty Ltd, where STAR stands for Spectrum, Training, Advocacy and Recruitment. My business website can be found at:

www.autism-star.com.au



The book I have co-authored is called *The Hidden Curriculum of Getting and Keeping a Job: Navigating the Social Landscape of Employment*. For options on how to purchase a copy of the book, please visit the following page on my website: www.autism-star.com.au/main/page_hc_employment.html

I lived three quarters of my life unaware that I was on the autism spectrum. I therefore lived with an autism spectrum condition for most of my life thinking that it was “normal”. But what is normal? It is a reference point using a person, or a type of person, as a baseline. Therefore, by using myself as a baseline for my way of living and learning, it was and is more than reasonable to consider myself normal.

Sensory overload, meltdowns, social confusion and awkwardness were all constant companions for me which I believed and still believe were merely challenges to be met and overcome. As a result I developed supportive and non-supportive strategies to focus beyond the overwhelm of this world and to seek the mystical utopia called “success”.

I held my breath to manage my high anxiety, often at the distress of my mother. I used fear of the consequences of failure to motivate myself to greater achievement. I learnt to dissociate myself from the sensory overload so that it was happening to someone else – at the expense of my awareness of the world around me.

I drew up internal rules of engagement to create order in a chaotic world. Rule number one: girls were only interested in teasing me and were therefore not interested in me as a potential mate. Rule number two: People were not interested in my opinion – so I rarely offered it. Rule number three: Information is more valuable than people.

Rule number one was shattered when I met the woman who would become my wife. She had to physically jump into my arms to get my attention and, once I realised that she actually was interested in me, I was determined to keep her in my life. For more than 20 years she has been a great teacher for me as I have been for her.

Rule number three led me through a successful career in engineering. I attained the rank of Senior Contract Administrator in a major South Australian construction company and was directly responsible for the budgets and administration of major projects, including the Adelaide Oval Western Grandstand – which I refer to as “meltdown central”.

I changed the second and third rules a few years ago when I realised that they were limiting my ability to further engage myself with the people. I realised I had something to offer to others on the autism spectrum – an attitude of can-do. I needed to learn to present myself to the world and therefore I needed to change the belief that the people of the world were not interested.

I made the change over a five-day period in a workshop that used the techniques of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) to give people the skills to present powerfully and effectively. That workshop changed me from a person who would not speak up at a team meeting to someone who actively sought out speaking engagements.

Since that time I have undertaken training in NLP and Master NLP and am now certified to use those skills to assist others to find their excellence. I created Autism STAR Pty Ltd to assist teenagers and adults on the autism spectrum to realise and fulfil their vast potential in the community and in the employment sector.

I believe I have achieved all that I have and so much more through my autistic abilities. It is through my belief I can do anything that I set my mind to if I really want to achieve the goal. Yes, there are aspects of autism that can be perceived as barriers to achievement, but the same barriers can also be used as stepping stones if you can rise above them.

I have sensory sensitivities and I have meltdowns. I get lost in the rules of society, but then I believe most people have at one time or another become trapped in the maze of social convention and expectation. Skills can be learnt. Achievement is a learnt response. Each of the 100 Leaders has chosen to tell their story because they have surpassed their barriers in some way and have found a way to move forward in their lives.

I have learnt how to regulate my senses. I have learnt that meltdown behaviour has a positive intention and I have learnt how to use that positive intention to drive me even further toward success. I explore the patterns of the words and rules of society and have created a road map through the maze for others to follow. I have done all of this because I believed it was possible.

Anyone can lament on the cannot and find themselves paralysed through fear and doubt. Likewise, all of us have the ability to reach for the can-do and show to others and especially ourselves that motivation is achieved through doing that which we can, then building upon it.

My ability to see patterns, to think outside the box and to remove emotions and judgements from the work I do all stem from my autism. It is why I say that I have achieved all of this, and will continue to achieve, because of my autism.

Autism is part and parcel of who I am as an individual. It is part of the definition of me. I see it as empowering and I created Autism STAR Pty Ltd because I want the world to know that autism is a gift to be nurtured, polished and cherished so that each autistic individual can learn to shine.

I have lived with autism all of my life and I am still learning what it means to be autistic. More than that, I am still learning what it means to be human – something I believe we are all striving towards.

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