

Job news & views

So what if that risk manager has Asperger's?

29 January 2010

Sarah Butcher

Nassim Taleb, of Black Swan fame, appears to have got into trouble for implying that people with Asperger's Syndrome shouldn't be employed as risk managers.

In *Fooled By Randomness*, Taleb suggests that people with the syndrome suffer from a kind of future blindness which inhibits their ability to judge risk properly.

Taleb appears to have fallen foul of Asperger's sufferers, because as **Paul Kedrosky** points out, he has felt the need to defend himself in an [update](#) on his site.

'Note that the very same people who attack me, on grounds of political correctness, for discussing Asperger as a condition not compatible with risk-bearing, and its dangers to society, would be opposed to using a person with highly impaired eyesight as the driver of a school bus. All I am saying is that just as I read Milton, Homer, Taha Husain, and Borges (who were blind) but would prefer to not have them drive me on the A-4 motorway, I elect to use tools made by engineers but prefer to have society's risks managed by someone who is not affected with risk-blindness.'

Asperger's sufferers are generally considered to be disproportionately represented among the quant community. So should recruiters screen for the syndrome before employing people?

No. This would be discrimination on the grounds of disability, says employment lawyer Ronnie Fox.

"Where there's a genuine occupational requirement, like sight for a bus driver, discrimination against people without the requirement (eg. Blind bus drivers) is justified," says Fox. "In this case, it's a medical question. Not all Asperger's sufferers will be unable to assess risk, it's a question of degree."

Comments (12)

Oldest first

Comments 1 - 10 of 12

I discriminate on grounds of personality - I would suggest that Aspergers candidates will not get through my interview.
risk recruiter 29 Jan 2010

The risk is in the paper clips holding the documents. Notice how some are green and other are blue.
Mr asp 29 Jan 2010

Taleb's response misses the point - it's not Aspergerites that are the problem, it's those who place a inordinate degree of confidence in their models, unaware (or unwilling to believe) that they can (and do) fail. What he meant to say is that they should screen for hubris.
djm 29 Jan 2010

To the "risk recruiter" comment. He might discriminate on the grounds of personality, but that really sounds more like he discriminates against anyone not like him ... and that might be why were had a meltdown in the first place.

I would suggest that he really cannot differentiate between someone with and without Aspergers consistently. Myself, I would prefer to hire on ability instead of personality ... it usually gets much better results.

bob s 29 Jan 2010

Bob you are wrong. Perhaps you are on the scale yourself if you truly believe that personality should not be a factor.

Also I am very happy to encourage people with a diverse range of backgrounds.

By personality I mean people the display behaviour such as:

Socially aware but displays inappropriate reciprocal interaction.

Appearing not to understand, empathize with, or be sensitive to others' feelings.

An inability to "read" other people or understanding humor.
Often described as eccentric.

Oh by the way people with my background don't easily get jobs in Financial Services, which is why we choose other industries.

risk recruiter 29 Jan 2010

Some Aspergians cannot fully understand the consequences of their own actions but they are far from future-blind. In fact, an Aspergian may have the rare ability to comprehend complex patterns in way that avoids risk when all else fails. I would say they need to be part of a team rather than all alone in their assessments, yet as part of that team they may be the voice that predicts the future more accurately than all others and who may also be able to shun types of risk noone else is able to see. Hiring someone with Aspergers is often the best way to get a team member with a truly different perspective that is not only different but highly bankable.

Joseph 29 Jan 2010

Risk recruiter - The notion that a person couldn't possibly be able "to get through your interview" is ridiculous. Don't underestimate the ability of an Aspie to act - at least in the space of your interview - like a normal person. As impressed as I am with your ability to rattle off the a few symptoms from the internet. And remember, if you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism, so I don't care to hear that you've known someone who has it. I'd fool your presumptive ass in a heartbeat...

Kim Valley 29 Jan 2010

Joseph, I think you are correct.

Incorrectly dealing with a high degree of complexity has been the cause of many wrong decisions. You probably should not make an Aspie a CEO, but he can be the one member of the team that stays calm and is able to explain what is going on when everybody else is going into panic mode.

DrGonzo 01 Feb 2010

Aspergers is another one of those psychological disorders that may not even be one, everyone exhibits many if those traits in differing circumstances.

Risk recruiter - based on your comments on this thread, you are demonstrating some traits of Aspergers yourself as well as perhaps narcissistic personality disorder - maybe you are yet undiagnosed, and if you are recruiting to match your personality, you may already have a very dangerous team.

efc3412 01 Feb 2010

Poor Aspies. Future-blindedness must be horrible to live with. As a normal person, I cannot imagine how life must be without my ability to see the future. All that uncertainty. Horrible.

Psychic? 01 Feb 2010

© Copyright 2000-2010 eFinancialCareers Ltd.

eFinancialCareers is a Dice Holdings, Inc. company. Dice Holdings, Inc. is a publicly traded company listed on the New York Stock Exchange (Ticker: DHX)