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Anthem shifts hiring practice to include workers with autism

By [NANCY CROTTI](#)

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[Anthem](#) has joined the ranks of companies that have brought on workers with autism to do precise, repetitive jobs.

The mega-insurer is in the process of centralizing its data quality and cleansing functions, and needed workers its Minnetonka, Minnesota, office. Patrick McIntyre, senior vice president of healthcare analytics, contacted [Mind Shift](#), a Minneapolis organization that trains adults on the autism spectrum for specialized work that others might not enjoy.

Mind Shift recruits, hires, and trains the workers it calls “specialists” for the jobs that companies need to fill. The organization provides on-site support as long as necessary for additional training and troubleshooting sensory issues that might make the workspace uncomfortable for the specialists, such as a noisy room or lights that are too bright.

Three Mind Shift specialists began working at Anthem in late October, and they have been doing well, according to McIntyre. Onboarding was fairly seamless, and one of the specialists has already amazed his supervisor with the precision, accuracy and efficiency of his work, he said.

Anthem has joined the trend of major corporations, including accounting firm EY (formerly Ernst & Young) and Microsoft, hiring workers on the autism spectrum for their cognitive abilities and other strengths, such as focus. The move toward neurodiversity, while in its infancy, is already changing the workplace, making managers more aware of process improvements and communication, according to a [report](#) in The Atlantic.

Anthem has the specialists working in an area of the company that needs a more consistent, reliable process, according to McIntyre. Until now, the Indianapolis-based company has deployed data quality workers to different departments, where they report to different managers. Having a central data analysis unit will help with standardization, he said.

The company treats the specialists like the rest of its healthcare data analytics team, including them in workplace social events such as potlucks and the annual holiday party, according to McIntyre.

“Anthem is interested in recruiting and retaining a very diverse population of employees,” he added. “We felt it was a win-win partnership to be able to solve for what we feel are some fairly critical data quality, data integrity needs with an organization, Mind Shift, that can provide highly reliable, very consistent resources for data cleansing and balancing and control functions. They provide a unique skill set for a unique need that we have, and it matches very well.”

Anthem has a one-year contract with Mind Shift. The Indianapolis-based payer may extend that contract, hire the specialists as its own employees or end the relationship,

according to Cortnee Jensen, director of community relations and development for Mind Shift.

“The idea behind the contract is that we want to see the people that we place have the support that they need, if they should need it, to be as successful as possible,” Jensen said. “Most of the time, those supports are fairly minor things. However, if they come up, having us there helps keep that relationship and allows us to kind of be the translator where it’s needed.”

Anthem’s specialists had all worked elsewhere previously, but either had trouble keeping jobs or landing ones that utilized their skills and intellectual abilities, Jensen said.

As many as 90 percent of adults with autism are unemployed or underemployed, according to the advocacy organization Autism Speaks. A Drexel University [study](#) showed that only 58 percent of young adults with autism were employed, compared with their peers.

Anthem will continue working with Mind Shift to fill data-cleansing jobs during 2017, according to McIntyre. He expects that the specialists will identify other roles they might be interested in pursuing with the company, and said they will be welcome to apply.

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