

G&W ELECTRIC CO. CASE STUDY: WORKFORCE SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH NEURODIVERSITY

STANNUM CORE SOLUTIONS

With workforce challenges taking place across industries, neurodiverse strategy has been a point of interest for companies looking for creative solutions to attract and retain talent. One such company, G&W Electric Co., has committed to creating competitive, integrated employment outcomes for neurodivergent workers. This approach has reduced time and skill waste, leveraged the unique skills of these employees, and enhanced their culture to one of true inclusion.

About G&W Electric Co.

Headquartered in Bolingbrook, IL, G&W Electric Co. has been creating sustainable power solutions for over a century. Founded by engineers of Commonwealth Edison, Harry Gear and Paul Williams, G&W Electric has been a long-time industry leader in innovation and safety.

From the original manual and automatic switchgears to the creation of the Viper® recloser and Trident® solid dielectric recloser, and a state-of-the-art microgrid, G&W Electric continues to engineer the next evolution of power solutions for the needs of the future.

In addition to being in the vanguard of sustainable energy, G&W Electric is a workforce diversification trendsetter through its expanding culture of neurodiversity. To date, G&W Electric has completed six rounds of hiring for their neurodiverse workforce initiative. They currently employ nine individuals across five different departments. These efforts have created a foundational change for G&W Electric and are a vibrant aspect of the company's identity.

Achieving Efficiency through Neurodiversity

Launching a successful neurodiverse workforce strategy began with a keen analysis to identify jobs where neurodivergence was an asset. Generally, these jobs were repetitive in nature, had consistent and measurable expectations for productivity, clear chains of communication, and required little independent decision-making skills.

After identifying the most qualified positions for neurodiversity, it was time to prepare the environment and pre-existing

personnel. Creating this environment of success required Spectrum Certified™ job descriptions, detailed schedules, standard work enhanced with visuals, and other custom supports. Simultaneously, key stakeholders were trained on best practices for working with neurodivergent talent. Finally, prospective neurodivergent employees were guided through a robust skill-matching process to ensure that the right candidates were placed into the right positions.

The results garnered the attention of David Jones, Production Manager for G&W Electric Co. When asked how a neurodiverse workforce has impacted his production team, he said, "In our case, their ability to excel in repetitive tasks has led to increased production... Our neurodivergent employees' strong attention to detail and consistency have led to more efficient workflows. Their handling of lugs has resulted in reduced errors and better quality-control, leading to fewer disruptions and less waste." Not only did these neurodivergent workers meet the expectations laid out for all employees, but, in many cases, they, in fact, exceeded the pre-set standards.

Jones later went on to describe how the social behaviors of his neurodivergent workers have also led to an enhanced workplace. "We decided to have some neurodivergent employees lead the team during pre-shift stretches to highlight their leadership potential. Neurodiverse individuals can excel in different roles by leveraging their ability to focus on specific tasks and lead by example. By embracing neurodiversity, we have created a work environment that values and respects individuals for their diverse abilities. This inclusivity fosters a sense of belonging and motivation, increasing job satisfaction and higher employee morale." This inclusive approach created universal results. Creating space for these neurodivergent employees to take on leadership roles helps establish trust amongst all employees and highlights G&W Electric's deep commitment to belonging.

In closing, Jones remarked on the lasting benefits of integrating a neurodiverse workforce. "Integrating neurodiversity into our department has improved productivity, enhanced processes, and [provided] a more inclusive and innovative work en-

vironment. Our success story serves as an example of how embracing neurodiversity can yield substantial benefits for both employees and the organization as a whole."

A winning culture and lean process are critical for success in any organization, but we all know that the real gold comes in the metrics:

Microswitch Assembly:

- 30% increase in growth (150 switches → 210 switches)
- 75% decrease in required man hours (32 hours / week → 8 hours / week)

Aerial Lug Assembly:

- 30% increase in growth (300 lugs → 420 lugs)
- 62.5% decrease in required man hours (32 hours / week → 12 hours / week)

Embracing a neurodiverse workforce enabled a modern-day business alchemy for G&W Electric – trading waste for accuracy, dependability, and inclusion.

Cross-Training and Role Expansion

Another success story at G&W Electric includes a young man named Robert who was hired into a role in the customer service department. Historically, this was a position of exceedingly high turnover as it required heavy attention to detail and strong independent work skills. At its core, this job required somebody to ensure that all invoices were appropriately tracked, documented, and filed. This task necessitated constant upkeep at the risk of producing a heavy backlog of documents and it was a steady thorn in the side for departmental leadership. After much turnover, the position was targeted as an opportunity for a neurodivergent worker.

In the same manner as the production jobs, natural supports and training were implemented to ensure that the job was appropriately accessible for neurodivergence. A skills demonstration was conducted and, ultimately, Robert was selected as the best candidate for the job. He joined the team and made an immediate impact, eliminating a nearly year-long backlog in a matter of weeks. (As an aside, during the candidate selection meeting, it was noted that

Robert scored among the highest percentile for attention-to-detail in G&W Electric's pre-employment competency assessment given to all applicants.)

Robert eventually expanded to a full-time role and received training on year-end duties. The leadership gained back much of their day, no longer being forced to pick up the slack from an ever-growing stack of unfiled invoices. The possibility of going paperless, a high-level goal that once felt illusive, now felt realistic and practical. Robert is still effectively producing for G&W Electric to this day, over two years later.

Though exemplary by default, Robert is far from the only such example. Ed, a former contract employee hired in 2020, performed above and beyond before accepting a permanent full-time position as an Assembler. Gabe, a part-time Inspector in the EPOX department since 2021, has added to his resume by taking on multiple responsibilities in assembly and other areas of EPOX – always doing so with a bright smile on his face. And, most recently, Nick, a contract worker brought in during the Fall of 2022, was hired on permanently as a Material Handler in the Central Warehouse.

Abdul Basraoui, Warehouse Manager for G&W Electric Co., shared these thoughts when asked about Nick. "Nick is a pleasure to work with, he is consistent and on-time. He asks questions when he doesn't understand and chances of him doing the wrong thing, simply by taking a guess, are nearly zero." Nick's professionalism, sociability, and natural problem-solving skills helped him shine early into his tenure at G&W Electric. Basraoui continued by sharing, "Nick is excellent at sticking to his task and ensuring accurate counts of warehouse stock levels, which

allows us to run our business more efficiently. He requires upfront instruction, however, once that is understood he executes accurately and with minimal managerial oversight needed."

An Unexpected Unicorn

Embracing a neurodiverse workforce introduces candidates who may not otherwise pass an initial ATS screening. For the right company, this embrace can be history-defining. One such case is that of Kevin, an engi-

neer and certified calibration technician.

Kevin submitted for an entry-level skills demonstration, hoping to get his foot in the door and work up to a career in engineering. It was determined that Kevin was not the best fit for the entry-level job. Quite simply, he didn't possess the required fine motor skills, but he did hold a degree in engineering and impressed everybody with his professionalism and knowledge. Later that year, a position opened in the engineering department, and Kevin was invited back for a formal interview before ultimately accepting the role.

Kevin worked hard to meet the demands of his new job and soon decided to work towards a certification in becoming a calibration technician. After months of studying, he took the exam and passed. Throughout the entire history of G&W Electric, Kevin is the very first to ever achieve this distinguished certification. Effective skill-matching was the pathway toward this perfect pairing, but had it not been for the foundational work required to hire and retain a neurodiverse workforce, this match likely would have never manifested.

Strengthening Workforce through Community

Not to be missed among the myriad of benefits in workplace neurodiversity is that of community engagement and brand awareness. To be known as a truly inclusive employer is to immediately be set apart from other organizations vying for top talent in today's tight labor market. A creative workforce solution requires a creative approach to recruitment, including strategic partnerships with high schools and community agencies.

Katie DiCianni is the High School Transition Director for Hinsdale District 86, a local school district that has helped place four employees at G&W Electric. When asked about the neurodiverse hiring initiative, she shared, "It has provided an opportunity for our students to be supported while being shown that they are a contender for a job. The support and feedback we have received has been beyond any that we have received before from an employer. It really allows an under-employed population to have meaningful employment." Hinsdale

District 86 recently celebrated one of their most successful school years of all time, setting records for job placements with various employers across the county. Yet, G&W Electric stands apart from many others as a workplace where these students will gain valuable experiences and an opportunity for a long-term career.

American Sustainability

Earlier this year I wrote a piece on the intersection of neurodiversity and the current climate of the American workforce. I stated that the future of workforce development will require a sense of cultural innovation paralleling that which championed the integration of women into the workforce during and after WWII. Today, companies like G&W Electric, Gilster-Mary Lee, and Magnetic Inspection Laboratory have shown that this caliber of cultural innovation, as it pertains to neurodiversity, carries a strong return on investment.

Each of these three companies has achieved competitive, integrated employment outcomes for neurodivergent workers. Many of us may expect employment to inherently be competitive and integrated by nature; however, in the world of disability employment, that is often not the case. Many neurodivergent workers are sequestered to sub-minimum wage employment, sheltered workshops, dead-end jobs, and enclave-style work that leaves workers on a proverbial "island." Regardless of their capability, for many neurodivergent workers, competitive, integrated employment can feel unattainable. These three companies, however, showcase that the potential, not just for job outcomes, but for significant social and financial impact, is, in fact, attainable through a creatively holistic approach.

Not every worker is going to be right for every job. But every worker is right for a job. The most harmonious workplaces are those that best match skill sets across an organization and allow for people to be engaged in tasks that adequately challenge their abilities. That's the idea that drove American innovation through World Wars and global pandemics and I believe it's the key to unlocking long-term sustainability for our nation's single greatest resource – our people. ♦