

## Professional Issues and Innovative Practice

# College Students With High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder: Best Practices for Successful Transition to the World of Work

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The transition from college to work is a challenging time for students with autism spectrum disorder. College counselors who understand the challenges students face adjusting to the world of work can position themselves to be change agents for this population. This article illuminates the challenges facing these students to help close the knowledge gap of their career development trajectory. Strategies and best practices to guide these students through successful transition to the world of work are provided.

*Keywords:* autism spectrum disorder, college students, transition to employment, college-to-work transition

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) was found to occur in one in 10,000 individuals in the 1980s (Autism Science Foundation, 2012). Thirty years later, the estimates of prevalence for ASD changed to one in 88 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). With the recent changes in the American Psychiatric Association's (APA; 2013) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)*, Asperger's disorder has been absorbed into the ASD continuum. Individuals with a well-established diagnosis of Asperger's disorder according to the *DSM Fourth Edition, Text Revision* (APA, 2000) should be given the diagnosis of Level 1 ASD according to the *DSM-5* (APA, 2013). Throughout this article, Asperger's disorder is identified and discussed as Level 1 ASD, based on the new conceptualization that the Level 1 severity reflects the highest level of functioning in the ASD continuum (APA, 2013). Individuals with ASD have characteristic impairments in the areas of communication, behavior, and social interaction and may demonstrate unusual or repetitive patterns of behavior (Hendricks, Wehman, & Wehman, 2009).

Consequently, coping with ASD symptomatology can result in functional disturbance in personal, social, and occupational roles (APA, 2013). Enhanced and individualized services have improved functioning for students with ASD, and many are choosing college as a post-high school option (Grandin & Duffy,

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2008; Roberts, 2010). Hence, an influx of these students are entering higher education and residing on college campuses more than ever before (Smith, 2007). In a typical university of about 10,000 students, experts indicate that at least 100 students have Level 1 ASD (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011). With continued visibility, along with refined knowledge and services, it is estimated that the number of students with Level 1 ASD attending higher education settings will continue to rise (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011).

The purpose of this article is to illuminate the challenges of college-to-work transition faced by college students with Level 1 ASD and to provide college counselors with targeted strategies to aid in these students' career development. The article provides college counselors with necessary information to assist students with Level 1 ASD in making a successful transition to the world of work. Foundational information about this population is provided, along with enhanced strategies that can be used in the areas of social skills, executive functioning, career development, self-knowledge and advocacy, and work-life balance.

## Students With ASD in Higher Education

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Historically, many educators had to be persuaded that students with learning disabilities could go to college (Dipeolu & Cook, 2006). Student disability centers are staffed with disability experts who work closely with students with a variety of disabilities. College professionals are accustomed to providing assistance to students with physical, cognitive, and sensory needs; however, they are less accustomed to working with students who have accompanying significant social deficits (Fast, 2004). Higher education institutions are trailing behind in providing help to students with Level 1 ASD for myriad reasons (Hendricks et al., 2009). College counselors may not feel well prepared in addressing the neurotypical needs of these students in the areas of social and executive functioning. Without specialized interventions directed at critical deficit areas, students with Level 1 ASD may have difficulty coping with the atmosphere of higher education and could drift through several fields of study. This can result in frustration, anxiety, depression, and potentially dropping out of college (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011).

While a typical young adult may anticipate the freedom that college brings, young adults with Level 1 ASD may experience anxiety and pretransition distress due to leaving a structured school environment and familiar family routines (Glennon, 2010). The trepidation shown in transitioning to a new environment can be paralyzing, and college counselors may not have the experience of working with students with Level 1 ASD. With additional understanding and acquisition of targeted skills, college counselors may become uniquely qualified to open the door to new possibilities for lifelong success for students with Level 1 ASD.

Although much has been published on successful guidelines and interventions with college students with various disabilities (Beecher, Rabe, & Wilder,

2004), they cannot be generalized to students with Level 1 ASD (Smith, 2007). Without support, students with Level 1 ASD experience pervasive social difficulties involved in the uniquely social environment of college and find it difficult to meet the demands of the new learning environment (APA, 2013; Wolf, Thierfeld Brown, & Bork, 2009). Difficulties in the areas of social and executive functioning may present further challenges and complicate adjustment in several areas, particularly with issues related to career development. The students with Level 1 ASD who do persevere and graduate from college may face an additional challenge in becoming gainfully employed when there have been inadequate interventions provided to address areas of deficiency (Grandin & Duffy, 2008; Wenzel & Rowley, 2010).

## Foundational Considerations

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With appropriate support and counseling, students with Level 1 ASD can become socially integrated into the college environment, complete required academic work, and be adequately prepared for postcollege employment expectations. However, career planning can be a difficult exercise because it requires dealing concurrently with multiple complex factors when available resources often cater to other populations (Hendricks et al., 2009). Typical career development resources may not encompass the unique needs or workplace issues that students with Level 1 ASD may encounter after graduation (Grandin & Duffy, 2008). Armed with accurate information, college counselors can partner with these students during the career planning process, while empowering them to make informed career decisions and acquire the necessary skills to successfully compete in the postcollege world of work (Fast, 2004).

Adolescence to adulthood is one of the most stressful developmental transitions, second only to the transition from adulthood to retirement (Fast, 2004). Adolescents undergo prominent physiological changes that affect identity and self-concept. Young adults with Level 1 ASD may be bullied, teased, or rejected by peers. Transition for youth with Level 1 ASD becomes increasingly problematic when they experience myriad changes (Grandin, 2006) and lack social skills. Furthermore, ASD imposes another layer of complexity on the already complicated world of the young adult, whose disability could preclude a smooth transition to adulthood if not properly managed (Grandin, 2006).

Transition services to a postcollege employment setting are considered important linchpins for the success of college students with Level 1 ASD (Roberts, 2010). Active involvement of college counselors and career development professionals in a gradual fashion should be included to lower transition-related anxiety and ensure student success. Researchers vary on the timing of when to implement postcollege employment preparation, from the moment that students with Level 1 ASD first enter college (Wenzel & Rowley, 2010) to their sophomore year (Wolf et al., 2009). There is strong agreement that the earlier that college counselors can cement necessary skills for students with

Level 1 ASD, the better prepared these students will be to face the challenge of postcollege employment.

## Basic Knowledge

Understanding the dominant characteristics of ASD is essential (Roberts, 2010; Wolf et al., 2009) for an accurate understanding of the challenges faced by students with ASD. Level 1 ASD is characterized by continuous social communication and social interaction deficits across various environments, as well as repetitive and restrictive behaviors (APA, 2013; Channon, Charman, Heap, Crawford, & Rios, 2001; Fast, 2004). Level 1 ASD is positioned on the mildest end of the ASD continuum that carries the best prognosis for successful transition into adulthood (Schall & McDonough, 2010; Wolf et al., 2009). Deficits in the social, behavioral, and language domains, labeled the *autistic triad*, have been referred to as hallmark qualities of Level 1 ASD (Croen, Grether, Hoogstrate, & Selvin, 2002; Wolf et al., 2009). Even though the *DSM-5* (APA, 2013) has embodied Asperger's disorder (now known as Level 1 ASD) within the ASD continuum, the challenges associated with the symptoms persist.

Students with Level 1 ASD symptomatology will continue to struggle in higher education settings, and college counselors will have opportunities to provide professional intervention. Level 1 ASD specifically affects one's ability to socialize and communicate with others and tends to appear more frequently in males (Attwood, 2007). Age, symptom or severity level, and intelligence are the three most important variables for predicting the best outcome for students with ASD (Coplan, 2000). Szatmari, Bryson, Boyle, Streiner, and Duku (2003) noted that excellent outcomes are possible for students with ASD who have relatively higher intellect. College counselors can assume the less symptomatic the student, the better the prognosis because the student has already surpassed great odds (Szatmari et al., 2003). Higher functioning students can typically hold more complex jobs (Grandin & Duffy, 2008). To be successful, college counselors should be prepared for the extra challenge created by the co-occurrence of higher intelligence existing side-by-side with low performance in work or other life environments (Fast, 2004). To be effective advocates for students with Level 1 ASD, college counselors need to possess foundational knowledge about the best practices when working with this population. Good beginning resources include [www.thinkcollege.net](http://www.thinkcollege.net) and the DO-IT Center ([www.washington.edu/doiit/](http://www.washington.edu/doiit/)).

## Relevant Legislation

The relevant laws that govern the provision of services for college students with ASD are the Americans With Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). Unlike these aforementioned laws, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act

of 2004 no longer applies to students once they graduate from high school. Specifically, Section 504 mandates accommodations in higher education settings. The ADAAA extends Section 504 to protect against discrimination for reasons related to disabilities in employment and educational settings and further recommends accommodations to provide access to programs and to public facilities. FERPA addresses the rights of students to have access to and amend their educational records (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011). Although these laws do not necessarily guarantee student success, they provide equal access (but not equal entitlement) to students with disabilities (McDonough & Revell, 2010; Wolf et al., 2009). By focusing on areas unique to students with ASD, we hope to highlight additional strategies and best practices to guide this population through a successful transition to the postcollege world of work.

### **Targeted Strategies for Successful Postcollege Transition Social Skills**

Social interactions are crucial on college campuses and in the postcollege workplace. However, social disability is a major hallmark of Level 1 ASD (Channon et al., 2001). Social deficit areas include self-concept, self-awareness, social perception, grooming, soft skills, negotiation, and social interaction. Although federally mandated programs that provide students with academic accommodations exist in higher education settings, there are no current laws that support the provision of social accommodations (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011). To help students acquire social skills, college counselors can use role play to rehearse different work-related and social situation scenarios (Wolf et al., 2009) in individual and group formats. In addition, demonstrating appropriate social skills with the use of scripting can be very effective with Level 1 ASD students (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011).

Group counseling can also be used to promote social skills acquisition and provide opportunities to practice these skills with immediate feedback. Jacobs, Masson, and Harvill (2009) noted that young adults listen more to peers than to adults; therefore, group counseling can be used as an avenue for learning and exploration. Some colleges are known to provide social skills groups for students with Level 1 ASD, giving the students the opportunity to meet others with similar challenges (Wolf et al., 2009). Group leaders should be aware that the group setting may lead to high anxiety for students with Level 1 ASD, exhibited by withdrawal or flight behaviors. For optimal utilization of the group modality for social skills acquisition, prior planning such as screening, limiting the number of group participants, and group rules promoting tolerance of individual idiosyncrasies are strongly recommended (Jacobs et al., 2009). To further refine acquired social skills, students should also practice reading body language, facial expressions, gestures, and interactions by watching videos with the sound turned off and on as needed (Wenzel & Rowley, 2010). Helping to address existing social deficits is important if students are to succeed in the college environment and the postcollege world

of work. Without interventions in social skill areas, students with Level 1 ASD may not succeed in college or in future employment.

The development and acquisition of *soft skills*, which include working as a team, knowing business etiquette, and getting along with coworkers, are essential to a healthy work environment (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011). Being able to have water-cooler conversations is vital to maintaining cordial relationships in the workplace (Wolf et al., 2009). Reading coworkers' emotions and social cues may be the most crucial soft skill to acquire (Grandin & Duffy, 2008) and can be used throughout one's career path (Chappel & Somers, 2010). College counselors may begin by encouraging students with Level 1 ASD to investigate the interpersonal requirements to be successful in a particular job before they identify the technical requirements. College counselors can focus individual sessions on both the social and technical requirements of a career and may find the Level 1 ASD student to be better prepared and more likely to have a successful employment experience when the counseling session addresses these important areas equally. The use of group counseling to practice soft skills, such as business etiquette and getting along with others, may also be helpful. Because of their social disability, students with Level 1 ASD may become very anxious, indicate a preference for one-on-one counseling, or not know how to initiate a conversation in a group setting. For the group to be effective, Jacobs et al. (2009) suggested that the group leader use structured exercises, such as sentence completion and listing exercises, to help with adjustment to the group setting.

## Grooming

Grooming is another important aspect of social skills development. Fast (2004) and Grandin and Duffy (2008) noted that although social mistakes could easily be overlooked because of the special abilities or extraordinary talents of students with Level 1 ASD, poor grooming is frequently observed. College counselors should consider the use of peer mentors and behavioral modeling to educate the student with Level 1 ASD about appropriate grooming skills. Peer mentors may act as coaches to help the student learn strategies for efficient grooming in addition to negotiating with others and recognizing the nonverbal cues of others. Additionally, college counselors need to be flexible and may introduce stress balls to help decrease any anxiety felt by the student with Level 1 ASD within the group process. Group leaders should be ready to normalize these interventions as strategies to overcome resistance to a sensitive topic. In cases where students are not aware of grooming, college counselors can educate students on grooming skills. Role play within the group setting provides opportunities to practice these skills in a safe and nonjudgmental environment (Graetz & Spampinato, 2008; Smith, 2007).

## Executive Functioning

Executive functioning deficits are common in individuals with Level 1 ASD, putting them at a particular disadvantage because of difficulties in problem

solving (Channon et al., 2001). Executive functioning skills are commonly associated with planning and foresight, prioritizing, organizing, problem solving, completing tasks, monitoring behavior, synthesizing information, delaying, and initiating activity (Fast, 2004). These deficits affect students' ability to grasp a problem and come up with feasible solutions (Fast, 2004). Thus, the ability to successfully solve problems in daily life is directly tied to an intact executive functioning domain. College counselors can assist the students in developing the ability to set goals, identifying alternative solutions to potential problems by looking ahead, and addressing potential outcomes of behavior. Similarly, counseling sessions can focus on organizational skills, the inability to multitask, faulty integration problems, or literal-mindedness—areas compromised by symptoms associated with Level 1 ASD (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011).

### **Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Skills**

While in college, students will be confronted with several critical life decisions with potentially serious consequences, including choosing a career (Dipeolu, 2010). Resolving the dilemma surrounding career choice requires realistic vocational understanding and informed decision making. Therefore, college counselors can help students with Level 1 ASD to learn viable decision-making models to help in their career decision and other life choices (Fast, 2004). Decision making and problem solving are abstract concepts and can be translated into more concrete symbols by using the decision-making template of crystallization, analysis, synthesis, valuing, and executive (CASVE; Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz, 2004). This template provides a structured and tangible visual symbol to help translate the abstract concepts. Skills learned from using the CASVE template are easily transferable to help solve other life problems. Practicing different decision-making scenarios while in session will help the student with Level 1 ASD learn how to prioritize choices (Fast, 2004). Because there are no accommodations for deficits in executive functioning, college counselors can partner with the student disability office to access preexisting resources and teach students how to work around their deficits (Wolf et al., 2009).

### **Organizers**

Individuals with ASD can be very productive with a simple, efficient organization system. To help students with Level 1 ASD cope with complex work-related organization systems, college counselors can recommend simple organizers for the management of daily activities at work. For example, using different colored folders, planners, or electronic organizers may make it easier for students with Level 1 ASD to track events (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011). Electronic organizers and planning software can also be useful tools for programming repeating events or meetings (Fast, 2004). When students are learning to develop schedules or agendas, options such as hanging white



boards or personal digital assistants can help to structure the work day, week, or month. A smartphone, tablet, notebook computer, and a case to keep everything together are also of great assistance. These tools can help the new worker adhere to deadlines and become successful at work.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

Because strengths and weaknesses are unique to each individual, college counselors need to work with students with Level 1 ASD on identifying their own strengths and weaknesses during individual sessions. The use of a strengths and weaknesses checklist may serve as a stimulus in this collaborative process. The counselor can begin by asking the students to make a list of what they are good at, identifying areas in which they have received compliments and tasks they have completed well and that have aroused a sense of accomplishment. Fast (2004) recommended the use of a personal profile, which is a listing of individual strengths and weaknesses in the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical domains, with the goal of helping the individual to develop a balanced view of past successes and failures. Fast suggested that career counselors should ask the following questions: “What are your passions?” “What have been your major accomplishments?” “What makes you happiest?” “What are your most productive times?” “What are your dreams?” and “What don’t you do well?” (p. 154). Awareness of strengths and weaknesses is critical in helping students with Level 1 ASD to develop a sense of appropriate career direction (Grandin & Duffy, 2008).

College counselors can also work with students with job fit and help them to explore careers that emphasize strengths and minimize weaknesses (Fast, 2004). In situations in which students’ weaknesses appear overwhelming, multiple interventions should be used. For example, accommodations, in conjunction with medications, may assist in illuminating students’ strengths over the seemingly overwhelming weaknesses. Strength-based interventions provide a positive foundation that college counselors can use during the career counseling process to help students become important contributors in the workplace.

## Career-Related Considerations

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### Strength-Based Careers

Experts have argued that there are specific jobs that are best suited for the strengths of individuals with ASD (Chappel & Somers, 2010; Grandin & Duffy, 2008). These professions tend to be independent jobs that have opportunities for self-employment, such as computer repair, graphic arts design, and bookkeeping. Freelancing could be suitable for individuals with Level 1 ASD who do not function well in closely supervised environments (Grandin & Duffy, 2008). Accounting, engineering, library science, commercial art, and drafting are excellent independent work possibilities and may



be better matches for some students with Level 1 ASD. College counselors need to help students examine associated career options thoroughly, while being aware that some careers appear to be a good fit on the surface but may not be in practice.

### Other Viable Career Options

Students with ASD may have obsessions about particular subjects. However, if used properly, these obsessions can propel them into well-paying careers. College counselors can assist students with Level 1 ASD make the connection between these obsessions/special talents and the world of work (Grandin & Duffy, 2008) on a case-by-case basis. Although the preoccupation of a specific topic can be a hindrance, it can also be an advantage for the young adult with Level 1 ASD who is able to align the talent with potential career paths (Graetz & Spampinato, 2008; Wenzel & Rowley, 2010).

### Career Assessments

Identification of interests, abilities, talents, and skills with the use of interest inventories is a time-honored tradition in the career development process (Osborn & Zunker, 2006). However, college counselors should be aware that many inventories are not normed for use with students with Level 1 ASD. College counselors should avoid the use of paper-and-pencil versions of available career assessments to prevent any connection to academic testing experiences that the students with Level 1 ASD may have (Wolf et al., 2009). We recommend the use of card sorts to help focus the students on a well-suited career for their unique talents. For maximum effectiveness, the students first should be asked if there are anxiety-provoking feelings associated with taking a career assessment. College counselors may consider infusing assessment exercises with other activities to avoid undue pressure associated with testing.

### Job Search

Job search preparation should include crafting a good cover letter, developing a clear résumé, and preparing to respond to questions at job interviews (Grandin & Duffy, 2008). Whereas a résumé can be viewed as the interview sales tool, the student is considered the sales product (Fast, 2004). Alternatively, students may choose to develop an electronic résumé or portfolio that can be posted to online job sites (Nemnich & Jandt, 2000). Online postings of career portfolios offer employers a sample of what the student is capable of accomplishing without verbal explanation (Fast, 2004). This could be a valuable alternative to help showcase the qualifications indicated on the résumé and deemphasize limited social skills (Grandin & Duffy, 2008). With this approach, the employer's judgment is based on what truly matters—the accomplishments of the student.

## Work Environment

Friendly and supportive work environments are crucial for students with Level 1 ASD to thrive. Students should be encouraged to look for the ideal company or work environment in which they can function optimally, rather than looking for the perfect job (Chappel & Somers, 2010). College counselors can help students look for a job environment that is more accommodating to their disability and encourage students to pay careful attention to settings that could generate nervousness or anxiety. Exploration of different work environments can be done during individual sessions or can be adapted to a group setting by having the students investigate different work environments on the Internet; this exploration will provide a foundation for students to discover their preferences for future work environments. Although this approach may require more work, experts assert that it will pay greater dividends in the long run compared with the traditional approach to the job search (Fast, 2004).

## Job Interview

It can become a daunting task when the student with Level 1 ASD realizes she or he will need to use a particularly weak area, such as her or his social skills, to complete a job interview. Thus, preparing the student for the job interview may become the biggest challenge for college counselors who work with students with Level 1 ASD (Wolf et al., 2009). College counselors and students will need to invest quality time in role playing, rehearsing, and possibly video- and audiotaping the interview rehearsal exercises (Chappel & Somers, 2010) for review and feedback. Taped interview exercises can also be compared with sample successful interviews. The students should be reminded that successful applicants are evaluated not only on their answers but also on their questions. The applicant who interviews the best is not necessarily the one with the best qualifications but may be the one with the best preparation (Fast, 2004). In anticipation of the interview, students can be encouraged to thoroughly research the particular jobs or the agencies of interest (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011). During the interview rehearsal, the student should be trained to find ways to articulate her or his interest and the reason that she or he is a good match for the position (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011). Without preparation and practice, students with Level 1 ASD may face countless and unnecessary rejections (Fast, 2004).

College counselors can further help students with Level 1 ASD become comfortable with open-ended questions and learn how to allow the interviewer to be in control during the interview (Grandin & Duffy, 2008). Assisting students to acquire skills that will help them actively listen to the interviewer, focus on what is being said, and distinguish between qualifying and disqualifying questions is paramount during individual counseling sessions (Meyer, 2010). College counselors can develop scripts to cover a range of experiences that students may encounter during the interview process, including when they

first meet the interviewer, the types of questions to be expected during the interview, and cues to signify when the interview has ended (Wolf et al., 2009). Students should also practice how to end an interview with a follow-up question on the next steps and learn to write a follow-up letter to the employer.

## Work Accommodations

Consequences of disclosing a disability or refraining from disclosing a disability may affect the accommodation received in the work environment. Fueled by the desire to be forthcoming, students with Level 1 ASD may prematurely disclose their disability to potential employers (Meyer, 2010). Therefore, college counselors should encourage them to thoroughly assess the situation during the interview process before making a decision about disability disclosure (Fast, 2004). The student may also consider signing a disclosure/release of information with the college counselor for the purpose of sharing this information with an employer (Wolf et al., 2009). Students should be aware that unless disclosure intentionally explains unfamiliar mannerisms, it should be done with extreme caution because the employer cannot lawfully ask if a potential employee has a disability.

If students choose to disclose, the employer does not need the details of the disability, only the functional limitations. Periodic breaks, alternatives to open cubicles, and limited exposure to ringing phones (Grandin & Duffy, 2008) may be new accommodations to be negotiated in the workplace. Exposure to constant phone ringing may create sensory overload, and oversensitivity to light may necessitate the request for accommodations of soft lighting (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011). Too many sights, sounds, and smells can be overwhelming and compound problems at work for some individuals with Level 1 ASD. Noisy environments and crowded or fast-paced work settings are likely to aggravate the senses and perception and should be considered before students fill out job applications (Wolf et al., 2009). Students may need to negotiate reasonable accommodations to facilitate optimal work performance (Fast, 2004).

## Self-Knowledge and Self-Advocacy

Deciding on a choice of career requires extensive understanding of the self and adequate occupational information (Sampson et al., 2004). College counselors can help students with Level 1 ASD acquire information by helping them to reflect on multiple areas related to self. The more self-reflection the student engages in, the easier it becomes to advocate on behalf of self (Chappel & Somers, 2010). Self-knowledge is a prerequisite for self-advocacy and is essential for those with Level 1 ASD (Grandin & Duffy, 2008; Meyer, 2010). Arming students with self-knowledge will help them to articulate the contributions they can make in a career, including how they can benefit prospective employers.

Self-advocacy and self-determination are critical skills for individuals with Level 1 ASD, both in and out of employment settings (Rothman, Maldonado,

& Rothman, 2008). Learning to be good self-advocates in college and at work can provide successful outcomes for this population (Meyer, 2010). At work, these individuals will need the skills to appropriately approach supervisors and colleagues to negotiate for what they need. College counselors can help students with Level 1 ASD understand that possessing self-advocacy skills is the key to adapting to the adult world of work. Having the ability to explain to employers what does not work well and suggesting alternative and productive ways of handling situations are excellent self-advocacy skills for students to possess.

## Management at Work

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### Time Management

Fully functioning adults can project at least 6 months into the future. For students with Level 1 ASD, their projection can be as short as 48 hours because of deficits in executive functioning (Wolf et al., 2009). Many students with Level 1 ASD have difficulty with time management and meeting deadlines for long-term projects (Roberts, 2010). It is often challenging for these students to learn time management skills if it is not modeled or aided by the use of assistive technology. As a result, college graduates with Level 1 ASD will need to acquire these skills (i.e., getting to work on time and having good organization skills) by recognizing the importance of timeliness, punctuality, and deadlines (Fast, 2004). College counselors should direct sessions to explore the student's history with time management. Before a student with Level 1 ASD applies for competitive employment, she or he should be exposed to situations in which time management, delayed gratification, and sustained effort are learned and adequately demonstrated (Grandin & Duffy, 2008). Discussion and potential role playing of these topics are essential in individual or group sessions to enhance successful outcomes.

### Stress Management

Inappropriate anger outbursts are a common reason for individuals with Level 1 ASD to be terminated from employment (Meyer, 2010). Therefore, skills to manage stress appropriately while adjusting to a new work environment are as important as the technical and social skills necessary to perform optimally at work (Myles, 2003). Students with Level 1 ASD should be aware that the tolerance of inappropriate stress management is much lower in the work environment than in the college environment (Grandin & Duffy, 2008). Counselors should devote time to address issues tied to frustration by using evidence-based interventions for stress management and appropriate expression of anger (Myles, 2003; Roberts, 2010). Interventions including regular exercise, listening to relaxation music, visualizing peaceful settings such as

the beach or waterfalls, and using cognitive reframing have been shown to be helpful when used with individuals with Level 1 ASD (Dubin, 2009). Cognitive reframing requires the individual with Level 1 ASD to think about alternative ways to handle an anxiety-provoking situation (Dubin, 2009). Additionally, Myles (2003) suggested encouraging students with Level 1 ASD to find appropriate outlets for stress, such as scheduling downtime and maintaining a healthy eating and sleeping schedule. College counselors can help students with Level 1 ASD to identify triggers of work-related stress and how stress manifests itself in social situations (Wolf et al., 2009).

## Medication Management

Often, students with Level 1 ASD are plagued with accompanying comorbid psychological difficulties. Anxiety and depression are two disorders associated with Level 1 ASD (Schall & McDonough, 2010) that may complicate academic and occupational roles for individuals with Level 1 ASD. Psychotropic medication is a viable option that could add to the quality of life and help individuals with Level 1 ASD function at optimal levels at work. Thus, medication should not be ruled out as an additional intervention for individuals with Level 1 ASD but can be part of the successful transition into the postcollege world of work when appropriate (Grandin & Duffy, 2008). Having discussions about the use of psychotropic medication can be done on an individualized basis with students with Level 1 ASD. College counselors may consider collaborating with the psychotropic prescriber prior to periods of heightened stress.

## Vital Resources

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### Mentors

Most individuals can benefit from the support and guidance provided by a mentor. Mentors can help translate the culture of the work environment and assist with adjusting to new experiences and social roles (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011; Grandin & Duffy, 2008). It is important to emphasize that mentors provide modeling behavior for students with Level 1 ASD, but they do not provide “truth” in workplace situations. Sensitive and skilled mentors should be identified early (Roberts, 2010), or a “go to” person with patience, compassion, and understanding should be identified who is willing to assume the responsibility of a mentor role (Wolf et al., 2009). College counselors may reach out to graduate students in programs such as counseling, psychology, speech and language pathology, social work, college student personnel, special education, and rehabilitation to locate mentors for students with Level 1 ASD. Given their academic background, in addition to mentor training, these individuals can quickly familiarize themselves with their mentees’ strengths, weaknesses, and developmental needs (Brown & DiGaldo, 2011).

## Community Collaborators

To expand the range of supports available to students with ASD, college counselors can collaborate with state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies (McDonough & Revell, 2010). Counselors may find that some students with Level 1 ASD have registered with their state VR agency since their senior high school year as part of their Section 504 transition plan. In these situations, partnering with students' VR counselors to jointly develop job readiness skills can be an ideal arrangement that could help smooth the students' transition to postcollege employment. In situations in which the VR counselor is not accustomed to working with individuals with Level 1 ASD, the college counselor and student should be prepared to educate the VR counselor about the unique needs of an individual with Level 1 ASD (Fast, 2004). The goal of this partnership is to prepare the student to make the transition to an employment setting, to ensure that the student is properly prepared for the work environment, to ascertain that the workplace is ready for the student as a new employee (Chappel & Somers, 2010), and to ensure that the student has appropriate advocacy with potential employers.

## Conclusion

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The transition from young adulthood to adulthood could be particularly challenging for college graduates with Level 1 ASD (Rothman et al., 2008). Chappel and Sommers (2010) indicated that if a person with ASD does not find employment immediately following graduation from college, she or he has a 70% chance of never being gainfully employed. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) indicated that only 6% of students with ASD have full-time jobs after college graduation. Starting the transition process early and focusing on targeted strategies, college counselors may become an important ally in guiding these students through successful transition from college to the postcollege world of work. Working in tandem with the college professionals in admissions, residence life, career center, counseling center, and the disability office; VR counselors; transitions specialists; and life coaches may result in a team that advocates for all students with ASD.

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