

Kirk – Examples of how self-advocacy has helped you at work.

Kirk: Hello, I'm Kirk and I'm a full-time user experience designer. Prior to this, I was an assistant 3D artist and graphic designer. I will be discussing my experience at work and how self-advocating has helped me in my career.

Kirk: Advocating means representing yourself and others in a positive manner. It means expressing your thoughts, feelings, and suggestions openly and honestly. It's about using the power of leadership, communication, and persuasion to initiate change.

Kirk: When I started the UX graduate program in 2021, I explained I was autistic in my application. This led to reasonable adjustments being made, allowing me extra time to process and the program to be modified, to exclude a rotation which could prove stressful.

Kirk: I undertook two rotations in my first year. In the first one, I was required to do a tax exam. I had a mentor who helped me with the questions and information. One day a colleague told me about an organisation wide neurodiversity network. I participated in informal fortnightly webinars run by the network. I gained insights into the working patterns of neurodiverse staff and socialized with them. In early 2022 I applied to become a co-chair for the network.

Kirk: My application was unsuccessful. However, I was instead offered to join the network steering committee. This is when my self-advocating journey in the workforce began.

Kirk: The network held monthly progress meetings. I was actively attending, contributing to discussions and sharing ideas. We determined the network's long-term goals, and we volunteered to work on projects. I provided feedback for an online neurodiversity training package. I'm also designing a logo for the network.

Kirk: A challenge I encountered was finding the time to volunteer. Another problem was slow progression due to the workload of other committee members. I overcame these obstacles by raising them during a progress meeting and contributing to the network while there were gaps in my workload.

Kirk: What helped me the most was discussing my strengths and weaknesses with my manager.
The reasonable adjustments allowed me to hone my skills.
Asking questions helped me understand the work more in depth. As a result, I moved forward with determination and passion.
I learned to make my workload manageable.
Taking on too much can lead to failure.
I did this by prioritising the opportunities that were the most important to me.

Kirk:

My advice to any autistic or neurodivergent employee is to remain open to learning new things.

Take public speaking, for example. The ability to communicate confidently to an audience is an essential skill.

Make sure you always plan for presentations and speeches. Write out what you are going to say and practice beforehand.

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.

Advocate for yourself and others.

Advocating has helped me excel in my role.

Ensure you advocate to break down the barriers and create a more inclusive workforce.

Thank you.