

SELF-IMPROVEMENT AND ADVOCACY MENTORSHIP ITINERARY (INSTRUCTIONS)

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<https://aacphoenix.com/self-improvement-and-advocacy-mentorship/>
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After being identified as an Autistic/Aspie by my mom (who's now a retired LPN) in February 2009, then formally diagnosed by the US Social Security Administration in that summer, I started attending an Autistic/Aspie support group in September of that same year. I've since observed several things that I believe are reasons why so few Autistics/Aspies are not living the quality of life they want for themselves; but have resigned to an existence that has been imposed upon them:

- 1) The vast majority of Autistics/Aspies that I've encountered lack any genuine self-confidence and/or self-esteem. Some of them talk about "Autistic/Aspie Pride," but demonstrate that its such talk is nothing more then lip service when they refuse to disclose publicly. I know of two specific cases in which Autistics/Aspies were willing to lose their jobs rather than self-advocate to their co-workers and/or supervisors. One of those individuals was a Para-Professional (used to be referred to as a Teacher's Aid) for a special Ed. Classroom at a public school. This was in spite of the fact the teachers that he worked under, were not only trained to spot Autism from a mile away, but to work with them in order to help them overcome their deficits.

Then there are those who are always griping about the social stigmas of Autism negatively affect them personally, but they'll never engaging in public advocacy projects that are intended to address their grievances. There have been numerous civil rights groups that have changed how society view and treats the members of their various groups. None of whom succeeded by hiding out in closet meeting, complaining about issues that they won't confront with those whom are responsible for those grievances.

The building of self-confidence and self-esteem is, in my opinion, the greatest area of neglect of the Autism community.

- 2) It's well known that physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, etc. abuse can cause trauma that can dramatically undermine an individual's abilities to develop the relationship that all people need to have the highest quality of life possible. Furthermore, it's also well known that Autistics/Aspies are more likely to experience such abuse then the general public. However, the Autism community has failed to address issue as being factors in the social struggles of teen & adult Autistics/Aspies.

Nevertheless, I started developing all of the social skills that most Autistics/Aspies I know have given up on developing 20 years before I was diagnosed. I joined a Christ-centered, general purpose 12 Step Program, New Wine, which also help me develop stress management & conflict resolutions skill. When I tried to explain this to my fellow Autistics/Aspie in a support group that I joined after I got diagnosed, they all look at me like I was a mad man making claim that they assumed I couldn't back up. The majority of them therefore refused to even try a small group model that was adapted from New Wine.

- 3) Autism/Asperger's has become a "get out of jail free card" for many Autistics/Aspies as well as those whom will deal with. That ranges from assuming the Autistic/Aspie is at fault in any social conflict they may have, to Autistics/Aspies not taking responsibility for choices that they freely made.
- 4) The meetings that I attended were topical discussion about whatever random subject was preplanned for that month, but there's no structure in terms of an Autistic/Aspie mentorship program helping them develop the various areas that they need to in order to improve their quality of life.

The 72 presentation topics listed in the "Self-Improvement and Advocacy Itinerary" are suggests for study and research. No one should expect anyone to do a presentation on every subject, but all should be encouraged to do those that most resonate with them. If there are other subjects that someone believes is benefited to their own self-improvement, feel free to add them to your list.

I know a lot of individuals that are going to object to me giving what they'd consider special recognition to my religion, but I do have a logic-based explanation for doing so. Every time I've look at an AA, NA, etc. meeting list, not only are the majority of meetings being held at various Christian Churches, but I don't recall seeing meetings any other religion's house of worship. Furthermore, there are numerous churches that run their own unique variation of recovery/self-improvement groups. Some use modified versions the AA's 12 Steps in combination with the Bible, while other have gone in completely different directions with the Bible taking a far more prominent role. That's not to say no other religion has meetings of this type, but only that I've never come across one. So because Christians have demonstrated such a high level of commitment to supporting these types of programs, it seems only logical to me to show them that the Bible can take as prominent of a role in their variation of a program that they may choose to run for us as they wish.

Nevertheless, the great thing about downloading the original Excel spreadsheet is that its easily modifiable. You can flat out delete sections that are of no interest to you, such as those who do not practice Christianity might do with the "Biblical Attributes," and/or replace them with principles from whatever belief system you embrace. This is your program, feel free to modify it in any way you believe will benefit you. If you want to submit such addition to me to be added to future itineraries, I'll be more then happy to add them on the condition that you can demonstrate that 1 of your religion's houses of worship is willing to host such a program. I do this not as an act of biases towards Christianity, but to motivate the rest of society to be more supportive of anyone who strives for self-improvement.

PERSONAL GROWTH AND GENERAL SELF-ADVOCACY

These are tools to help you explain Autistic attributes, as a unique individual, so they can be more effective when advocating for themselves.

(Levels of Self-Disclosure)

Written: Writing out your thoughts and beliefs can help you can help a make a more thrall assess of yourself, and that can provide with a frame work from when you need to express yourself verbally.

Share in Small Group: After you write everything out, you are encouraged to share it in a support group. If it's not feasible for you to write everything out for whatever reason, you can still answer the question verbally its easier for you. Either way, this can enable you to get encourage and additional insights from the group that you might otherwise miss.

Share with a Mentor: The insights of someone who has gone before you can be instrumental in your personal development. Sharing A good counselor or therapist may be able to serve this purpose for those who are under the care of such.

Share with a Lower Risk Other: Sharing with those who understand Autism can help you prepare to share with those who don't. Those non-Autistics relatives and friends who you know are going to be supportive and accepting of you no matter what are perfect for this next step, especially if they can help you work out the kinks in how you present your information so that those who you disclose to later will have an easier time understanding.

Share with a Higher Risk Other: After progressing through the previous levels of self-disclosure, you many feel you're ready to do so with someone important to you whom may or may not reject what you have to say. Although this could include employers, co-workers, classmates, etc.; the consequences of being rejected by our closest friends and relatives can be the most devastating. Out of all of those most important relationships we have, the one with our moms are usually the most impactful. Although some of us who have disabilities of anytime are extra blessed with moms who are fully supportive of us, there are also those who's moms reject our attempts to explain ourselves can be extra troubled.

On the other hand, some well-meaning friends, relatives, professionals, etc. can be way over protective to the point that they deny those who have disabilities of anytime the opportunity to grow to become the best they can be. Standing up for our right to self-determination can be just as problematic as self-disclose to those who might reject us. Nevertheless, even those of us who are blessed with moms who do believe in us, sooner or later we will come across someone who we will need to be educated about our desire and our right to follow our own paths.

(Self-Disclosure Tools)

Self-Improvement & Advocacy Packet: A questionnaire that, along with the week support group meetings that I modeled after New Wine, are the center pieces of the self-improvement & advocacy program. Its designed for Autistics/Aspies to ask themselves important questions about issues that are common amongst Autistics/Aspies. Its broken up in to 6 sections:

- 1) WHO ARE You:** Describing how you see yourself in your own words, rather then view of what society, "experts," books and/or webpages may impose upon you.
- 2) COMMON AUTISTIC/ASPIE ISSUES THAT You MAY OR MAY NOT DEAL WITH:** When most people think about Autism/Asperger's, these are the issues that are most likely to come to mind. What's your view on how they do or do not affect you?
- 3) WHAT EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES HAVE You STRUGGLED WITH:** This is where you speak what is currently unspeakable in the Autism/Asperger's community, even though the rest of society spends a great deal of time talking about how these issues affect them. No, Autism is not psychological in origin, but it doesn't give us a built-in immunity to issues that effect all of humanity.
- 4) GETTING HELP:** What worked, what didn't and why?
- 5) WHAT IS YOUR OPTION ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:** There are a number of controversial subject that the Autism community is grappling with, many of which may directly impact which path you take for self-improvement. Understanding these issues, and the impact that certain viewpoints may have on you, will help you make better choices.
- 6) OTHER INFORMATION THAT You WOULD LIKE OTHERS TO KNOW About You AND YOURSELF:** Self-improvement and advocacy requires that you self-disclose the facts about you that are most important to you. Although it's my subjective opinion that the issues I listed are the most important ones that Autistics/Aspie need to be discussing, there are undoubtably other issues that aren't in the packet that impact you personally.

Situational Self-Disclosure & Considerations: Issues that may be at play in setting may not be at play in another. Example: Your boss isn't going to care if you're a recluse in social settings if it has no bearing on the job you've been hired to do. If there are aspects of your Autism that are affecting your job performance, just address those issues and nothing else. Not only is your boss going to want to present solution, or at the very least that you're open to trying solutions that might be suggested to you, but it would also be very helpful to explain how certain aspect of your Autism can be an asset.

VARIOUS AUTISM RELATED TOPICS

Note that the 5 presentations lengths are divided into 2 separate categories, Self-Advocacy and Community Advocacy. Contrary to popular belief, I don't believe the longer presentations are just for those who are wanting to educate other, but I've found that the research involved in preparing such presentations result in some of the greatest personal growth in whatever area I study. I'm not just referring to my understanding of Autism, but any subject that is of interest to me.

(Self-Advocacy vs. Community-Advocacy Approaches)

I believe that there are significant differences in how I advocate for my personal needs & the needs of the Autistic/Aspie community in general.

Self-Advocacy: The biggest mistake that many Autistic/Aspies make when self-advocating is presenting their issues as our issues. Although it's appropriate for me to point out that sensory processing issues is very prevent amongst Autistics/Aspie, it would be inappropriate to claim that my twin issues of having difficulties judging how far away something is and how long it will take to reach me is also common. So when I disclose this fact, as well as how the impact it has on my day-to-day life, I make it clear that these are my issues so that no one should assume that every Autistic/Aspie they come across is dealing with them as well.

Community-Advocacy: When discussing issues that I struggle with when presenting on behalf of the Autistic/Aspie community in general, its my practice to describe who the same issue may manifest in at least 1 or 2 other Autistic/Aspies. Continuing the example of my difficulties judging how far away something is and how long it will take to reach me, my natural countermeasure is to track/process the movement everyone and everything at much further distances then is typical. This results in occasional situations in which I'm trying to track/process more movement than my brain can handle. I know other Autistics/Aspies who will process every source of sound they hear, include some that are beyond the ability for the average human to detect, such as dog whistles. There are also some who can detect smells that others can't, including the very early development of mold in walls.

The Grey Columns: I don't believe I can do a proper community Advocacy presentation in 5 minutes or less. So if I find myself in a spur of the moment discussion, I'll stick to self-advocacy approach unless I have them totally engrossed enough to where they give me more time. If that happens, then I can share the attributes that I've seen in other Autistics/Aspies. Although I'm more then happy to do longer presents about my Autism, I believe I'd be doing our community a great disservice is I spend too much time talking about me while neglecting to educate the audience about the diversity that exist in the Autism/Asperger's community.

(Presentation Lengths)

½ Page Presentation: This is the length of an email that you might send to someone who you want to self-disclose for the 1st time to. I first got the idea for this from a lady who did this when contacting her companies HR department in order to address issues that she fear may have been jeopardizing her job. What she wrote was brilliantly constructed and resulted in her, her supervisor and HR working together on a strategy that was perfect for her.

5 to 15-Minute Presentations: The 5 to 15-minute presentations can be...

- 1) ...the oral version of the ½ page. It is the maximum time you can expect in a self-advocacy situation. Contrary to popular belief, it has been my experience that if you nail the 1st 2 sentences, you can engross the other party enough to where they just might not only want you finish, but also to then tell them more. Its also my belief that if someone absolutely will not take 5 to 10 minutes to give someone else the opportunity to give an adequate explanation for something important, the shortest possible presentation that they'll allow someone to present will have no impact on them at all. In short, if someone actually care about the truth, then they make the time to learn what it is. If they don't, they won't.
- 2) ...the basis for a short presentation in venues that allot less time for teachings, more common in weekly support group meetings, and/or an opening statement when asked to be part of a panel.

20 to 90-minute Presentation: The typical amount of time given for presentations at major Autism conferences, but most monthly meeting formats set aside a lot less time for topical presentations.

You could decide to go the direction of creating an outline for a 45-minute presentation that you can scale down if you're given less time; or scale up if you given more. I prefer to create outlines of "master presentations" with everything I know on a topic, as well as "mini presentations" on various subtopics, that can be drawn from when creating a specific presentation.

2+ Part Presentation: Do a series of presentation on a specific topic that is so extensive you have to break it up into multiple parts.

10+ Page Presentation: Write at least a short book

(Various Autism Specific Topics)

Balance & Coordination: Although not a headliner issues, difficulties in these areas can impact us vocationally and athletically (impacting our ability to join in with our peers at recess & PE).

Ed(ucational) Considerations: Note that I did not say deficits or accommodations, but considerations. I believe that understanding your most effective learning method, and then putting you in the same class as other who learn the same way, could minimize your enhearten defects enough to where you might not need nearly as many special accommodations.

Executive Functioning: "The brain's ability to control itself and the environment so as to accomplish its goals."

(Sue Golubock, M.Ed., OTR/L [Retired Occupational Therapist & Autistic])

Some aspects of executive functioning that Autistics are notorious for struggling with include:

- ❖ The ability to remember information long enough to do something with it.
- ❖ The ability to follow a step by step procedure to...
 - ...plan and organize a task.
 - ...carry out complex instructions.
- ❖ The ability to monitor one's own progress toward a goal in order to see a task through to the end.
- ❖ The ability to initiate or get started on a task.
- ❖ The ability to organize one's materials or the environment in order to find the tools/information needed to perform a task.
- ❖ The ability to stop one's focus and shift to something else as required to complete a task
- ❖ The ability to control one's emotions in order to adapt when a task is not progressing as expected

(At least 90% of this list was written by Sue Golubock)

History of Autism: How we got from Autism being considered a variation of Schizophrenia to where we are now.

Personal Introduction: Autistics are 1st & foremost human being whose defects should not be at the course of how they present themselves to others.

Self-Care and Management: What you do to take of physical, emotional and spiritual needs? Autistics may need special accommodations, as well as 2nd and 3rd party intervention, in certain situations. However, many of us have been able to reduce our dependency on external assistance through our own personal development.

Sensory Processing Issues: What I wrote about this subject in the section, "Self-Advocacy vs. Community-Advocacy Approaches," is just the tip of the ice burg as far as the various ways these issues impact various Autistics/Aspie. Although hyper sensory processing gets most of the attention, hypo & confused processing are other variations that you need to understand.

Social Skills Development: This is not just all about how Autistics do not socialize the same way non-Autistics do, but also how all human beings acquired social skills in the 1st place.

Unique Gifts & Talents: Although our unique gifts and talents are well documented, Autism is still defined solely by our defects. This results in the majority of Autistics having no basis for having self-confidence or self-esteem, giving all due consideration to our gifts and talents does.

Usable Consensus Science: Not only are treatments and therapies that might come about in 5-10 years from now unusable for me when dealing with situation 5-10 minutes from now, but so is anything that is beyond my ability to comprehend. Furthermore, just because the latest concepts being sold sound great, find out how many scientists actually buy into them and why they don't.

Vocational Considerations: Note once again that I did not say deficits or accommodations, but considerations. Not only because there's more to us than our struggles, but sometimes the only special accommodation we may need is to be given jobs and tasks that are perfect for us as they already are.

(Recovery Principles)

As I mentioned back on page 1, I started working a program of recovery for co-dependency 19 years before I got diagnosed. During that time, I developed various social skills, including stress management and conflict resolution. When I tried to explain this to my fellow Autistics/Aspies after I got diagnosed, they all looked at me like a mad man because I was contradicting everything that they had been led to believe about themselves. Nevertheless, I assure you that these recovery principles will improve the quality of life of any human being that commits themselves to them, and that we Autistics/Aspies are 1st and foremost human beings.

(Possible Co-Occurring Mental Health Issues)

Autism is a mental health issue, not a mental illness. However, this doesn't make us immune to them. If we want to obtain the highest quality of life for ourselves, we can't ignore the fact that there could be other issues outside the actual scope of Autism/Asperger's that we are going to have to address.

Furthermore, difficulties managing issues such as stress and anxiety aren't exclusive to Autism/Asperger's. In April 20018, I went Recovery Innovations International to be trained as a Recovery/Peer Support specialist and am now taking additional training to become a Recovery Coach and/or Teacher. All of my classmates, and almost all of my instructors, have been individuals who struggle with addictions, as well as every imaginable mental health issues. I've met plenty of individuals who have bi-polar, multi-personality disorder, etc. talk about how they've overcome many of the same issues that Autistics/Aspies struggle.

Due to time constraints, I don't have time to brief commentaries on the 20 subjects listed in the "Recovery Principles" and "Possible Co-Occurring Mental Health Issues." Once I do complete them sometime in the future, I'll post the up dated version.

(Biblical Attributes)

I actually wrote a 14-page commentary, "Fruit of the Spirit," on the 39 attributes I listed in the itinerary. I therefore will simple post that as a separate document.