

# Here to Stay: Redefining Autism in the Workplace

*Narrator Script, Documentary for Autism South Africa*

## **OPENING (01:37 – 02:30)**

What do you see when you see this man? I see someone who's smart and kind. He works hard, and he has integrity. But people often misunderstand him. He agreed to be interviewed to help others, but he just couldn't do it.

He wasn't being difficult or dramatic. Nico is autistic. Now imagine his boss asking him to do something at work that made him feel like this. Something that wasn't really part of his job and that someone else could easily handle. Does that seem fair to you? What if bright lights gave him headaches? Or the smell of a colleague's lunch made him feel sick? What if he kept asking to get his tasks in writing because that's what helps him do his best work, but no one listened?

Accommodating someone like Nico isn't about giving special treatment or lowering the bar. It's about understanding how he experiences the world and meeting him where he's at so that he can thrive. That's what true inclusion looks like.

## **MID-FILM (04:09 – 04:46)**

When I looked for participants to interview, I wanted to include people from different races and cultures so that we could hear stories from a wide range of voices that reflect who we are as a nation.

I wasn't able to get any people of colour to commit to an interview, and there are likely many reasons for this. There is still a stigma around autism. When you add factors like financial barriers, racial discrimination in the workplace, and social pressures, it can make the decision to be interviewed overwhelming. Added to that, getting a diagnosis just isn't accessible to many South Africans.

## **CLOSING (46:04 – 47:03)**

At the beginning of this project, I was 100% convinced that I would find companies who have a policy on autism in the workplace, and who support their autistic employees. I contacted more than 16 different companies in different spheres of corporate South Africa. Many of the companies I contacted have their Diversity and Inclusion policies available online for everyone to read, but yet, when I wanted to conduct a friendly interview to hear how they support their employees, they were not available to do it. I think I was a little naive because I believed that autistic people would get the support that they needed in the workplace and that I just needed to find evidence of that, but unfortunately, that is not what I found. If this is what it's like just to get the companies to talk to me, imagine what it must be like to be an autistic employee working for one of those companies.

Remember him? The reason his story is so familiar to me, and I know the struggle so well, is because I'm married to him. And that is what sparked an interest in digging deeper into this topic. I really do hope that when employers see this and when they get to know a little bit more about the positive attributes that their autistic employees have and that they can bring to the workplace, that they will be more than willing to accommodate them.

One last thought: ask. Talk to your autistic employees. And here's the challenge, really listen. Be willing to suspend your preconceived ideas. It has been proven that autistic employees can be more productive than neurotypical employees when they are properly matched to their jobs, and when their needs are supported. This is just one of the many reasons to create the right conditions for them to thrive.

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## CLIENT TESTIMONIAL

*“Marinda van Wyk is a gifted storyteller who has an exceptional ability to get to the heart of an issue. Her narrative style is courageous, authentic, and deeply human, capturing the lived experiences of real people with honesty and dignity. Autism South Africa worked with Marinda on a documentary featuring three autistic adults sharing their workplace experiences. Through skilled interviewing and thoughtful storytelling, she created a powerful piece that presents the realities faced by many autistic individuals in professional environments.*

***The documentary has become an important tool for raising awareness, challenging assumptions, and promoting more inclusive workplaces.***

*Marinda does not shy away from difficult conversations or stories from the margins of society. She combines empathy, professionalism, and strong communication skills to create content that is both impactful and meaningful. I would recommend Marinda without hesitation to any organisation or individual seeking support with storytelling, content creation, or strategic communications”.*

***Juliet Carter, National Director: Autism South Africa***