

PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF...

On the 1st of April 2020, I unfortunately lost my job, right in the height of the COVID-19 crisis. The reason provided was that I was "Not suited to the role", following my six-month probation period. This role was working in Bushland Conservation, and involved constant social interaction, regular changes to work tasks, hard, physical labour, public engagement, and noisy environments besides main roads, and within heavily populated residential areas. I could complete the tasks required within the role competently, but ultimately, I did not really understand, or adhere to the hidden social and emotional landscape, and as such, was deemed not suitable.

Initially, I was quite dejected and disappointed, though these feelings were soon replaced with a sense of relief, as I knew I was not well suited to this role, though was hoping with persistence and dedication, that I might be able to overcome this. For the next few months, I did a lot of self-reflection, and referred to a past Birkman Report, which advises on vocational style, preferences, and suitability. The key insight drawn from this report, was the score of 92/100 in the Literary section, meaning I have a psychological need to perform such duties within my roles. This got me thinking about the careers related to this sector, one being a librarian, which has always appealed to me.

I've spent a lot of time in and around libraries in my life, and have always enjoyed research, analysis, learning, reading, sharing knowledge, along with the quiet they provide, allowing time and space for reflection and relaxation. I researched this career path online, discovering I could become qualified for information and knowledge management roles, by completing a Postgraduate qualification, such as a Graduate Diploma or Masters. I reviewed suitable courses offered in this space, then enrolled in a Master of Information Management at RMIT University.

This path would allow me to combine my prior IT background, with empowering others with the ability to research, learn, and become skilled in the required areas, to pursue their desired career paths. More importantly, the work environment is quiet, accepting, and non-judgmental. I figured this would take up half of my week, and so began researching and applying for part-time IT roles. I found this process quite frustrating, as most of the roles were either full-time, or full-time for short periods like 3, 6 or 12 months. Many of these roles were also entry-level, not reflecting the skills or knowledge I had gained, over thirteen years in IT support, across the health, education, and engineering sectors.

I stumbled upon the Australian Public Service job site <https://www.apsjobs.gov.au/s/>, and noticed that many of the Government Agencies, has non-ongoing employment registers, for temporary and intermittent roles. By expanding out the Advanced Search options, I noticed a drop-down-list box for "Programs and Initiatives". This revealed several interesting options, including "Disability Employment" (Affirmative measure vacancy), and with "RecruitAbility". Further research into these schemes, brought me to the following site <https://www.apsc.gov.au/recruitability-scheme-guide-applicants>.

The RecruitAbility Scheme allowed people with a disability, to opt-in to this scheme, when applying for certain Australian Public Service roles. If you opt-in, this means that having declared yourself as having a disability, you will automatically proceed to the next stage of recruitment, so long as you meet the core role requirements. So, I began to apply for as many of these non-ongoing vacancies with Government Departments as I could, hoping to find a role for 2-3 days per week, which I could perform whilst not studying.

I found this process really valuable, allowing me to refine and craft my writing style, towards delivering concise, targeted prose, to address selection criteria, and explaining key competencies for roles. These skills were necessary, as many of these roles, had unique criteria, and separate fields to address these within, with hard, defined, word limits. After doing this for a while, and saving my responses for each role, I became quite good at providing demonstrated examples, within nice, tight, paragraphs.

One of the Government Departments who had such roles available, was the Australian Bureau of Statistics. I researched this organisation, by reviewing and pulling key insights from their corporate and annual reports. The more I read, the more I liked, especially their inclusive culture, and the ability to improve our society, by using research and data, to form improved social, environmental, and vocational policies. This would thus improve future living standards, and provide better access to support services, for those that really need them.

In one of the applications for the Department of Agriculture, Water and The Environment, I produced an excellent skills and experience summary, with many demonstrated examples, of where and how I had applied core competencies required, for these and other similar roles. I then used this as a template for future applications, and pulled relevant responses as required, or tweaked the focus and direction of the summary, to suit individual roles and departments.

Eventually, after applying for twenty-one different roles across both public and private sectors, I received an interview for a Contact Centre Officer, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Naturally I was delighted, and with ongoing employment mentoring support from Autism Australia, performed some mock-interviews, and really honed in on what they were after, and produced and studied some bullet-point responses, to the key competencies required for the role.

This diligence paid off, as the phone interview I had shortly thereafter went quite well, and despite one curly question, I managed to provide adequate and well justified responses, to all questions. I continued to apply for other suitable roles following the interview, by which stage I had developed one standard resume for retail and generic roles like Coles, Bunnings, and Officeworks, along with separate resumes for both IT, and conservation. I found the advice from Autism Australia to use the My Perfect Resume builder and resume templates invaluable, to produce a concise, professional resume, with many demonstrated examples.

I received a few unsuccessful responses for the generic roles, as I found their behavioural analysis question and process, not very well suited to someone with Asperger's Syndrome. Not to be deterred, I persisted, and found that by keeping fit by walking, cycling, swimming and connecting with nature, I was able to stay sharp, and think in a clear, rational and logical manner, crucial during this process. I stayed up to date with current news and affairs, and found the Business articles, particularly valuable, to explain the current employment market, and which employers and sectors to target my energies towards.

I joined the Australian Computer Society, providing valuable ICT articles and learning development opportunities, while surging up reliable support in the information and knowledge management space, upon completion of my Master of Information Management. I received notification that I had been shortlisted for the Australian Bureau of Statistics role, and a week or so later, received a phone call confirming I got the role! I was ecstatic, as this employer provided the culture, focus, location, and direction I wanted, whilst not being too demanding, given my Masters will no doubt be very mentally taxing.

I made sure to contact my referees early on in my job search process, and adjusted them as required, to ensure they were kept informed of all opportunities, where they may be contacted, and to make sure only the people who could provide the best account of me, were selected. The support I received from my referees, along with employment and life skills mentoring from Autism Australia, were some of the key reasons I was able to maintain my self-belief, and persistence in the face of adversity.

I believe all people with a disability deserve the opportunity to secure meaningful employment, and that through greater understanding and inclusion from employers like the Australian Public Service, many of us with neurodiverse conditions, will have this opportunity. I would encourage everyone on the spectrum to learn more about the RecruitAbility Scheme <https://www.apsc.gov.au/recruitability-scheme-guide-applicants>, the Affirmative Measure Scheme <https://www.apsc.gov.au/recruitability-scheme-guide-applicants>, and to find out if you qualify for these schemes, by referring to the following article <https://www.apsc.gov.au/definition-disability>.