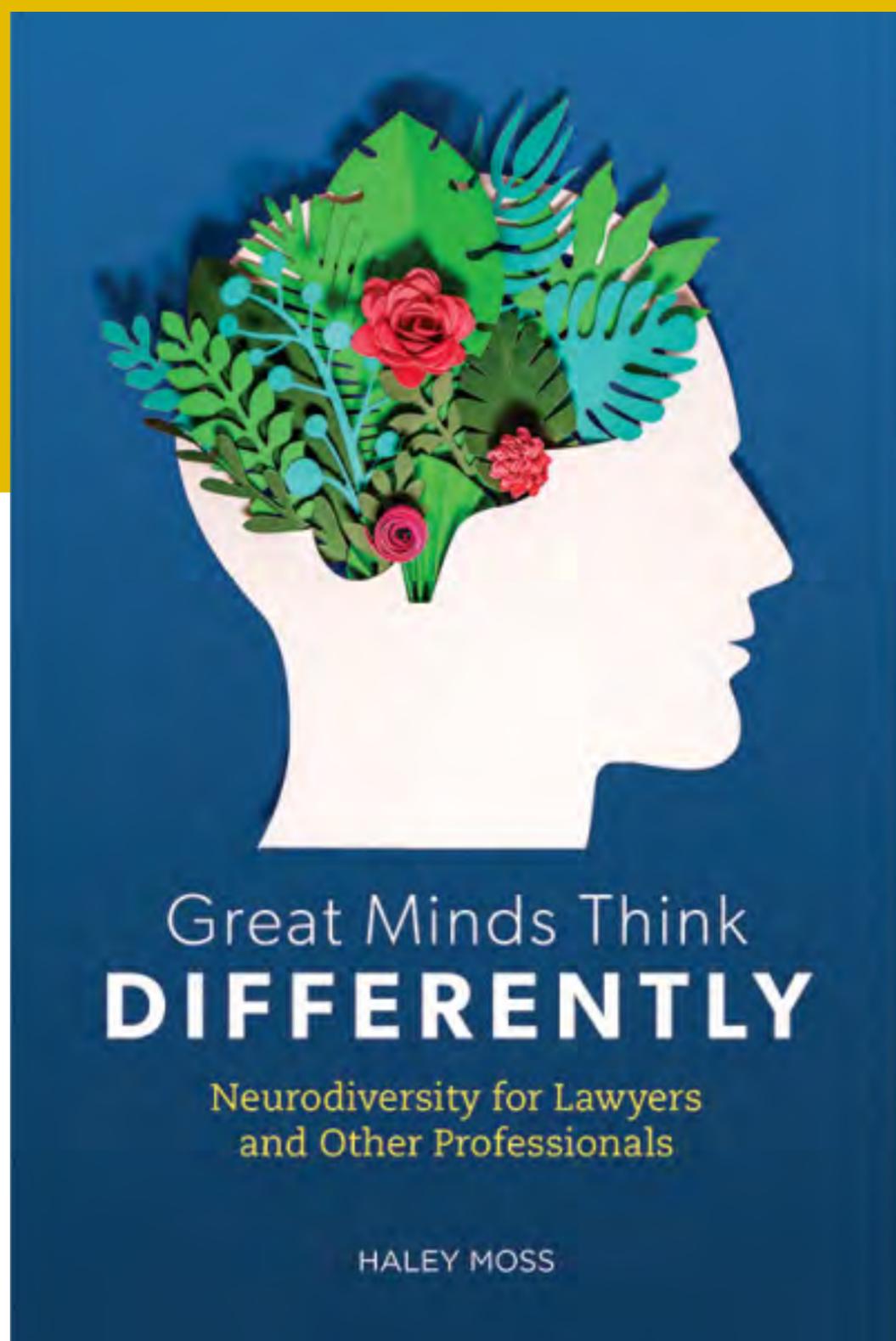


# BOOK REVIEW: ***GREAT MINDS THINK DIFFERENTLY*** OFFERS WINDOW TO UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSITY

By Maureen Reilly



In *Great Minds Think Differently: Neurodiversity for Lawyers and Other Professionals* from the American Bar Association, author Haley Moss lays the foundation for understanding and embracing neurodiversity in the legal profession. What makes this book particularly compelling is that, in addition to drawing on science and the law, Moss explains neurodiversity through the direct experiences and insights of neurodivergent legal professionals, educators, and students, including Moss herself, who is autistic. Her style of writing, which integrates her own experiences throughout

the book, adds credibility and relatability that makes this more than an informational resource. Released in 2021, this book will expand your knowledge, help check your biases, inspire you to appreciate neurodiversity in the legal profession, and give you some tools to make that happen.

This engaging read is perfect for anyone who wants to increase their knowledge about the role of neurodiversity in the legal profession and learn new ways to contribute to greater inclusivity. This includes law schools (in selecting, educating, and supporting students),

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law students (in supporting and advocating for themselves and their fellow students), legal employers (in hiring, developing, and

It reflects the ideal of meaningful, joy-filled living for neurodivergent people by recognizing and accepting neurological differences

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ensuring the success of their lawyers), and lawyers (to be effective in their chosen area of practice).

Continue reading for highlights of what you can expect to learn from the book.

### **About Neurodiversity**

The book begins with an introduction to neurodiversity and its place in the legal profession, including its definition and prevalence, the value of neurodiversity to the legal profession, and the differences in how neurodivergent lawyers learn, communicate, and work. As Moss explains, although the term “neurodiversity” seems new to many, the concept has been around for over 20 years.

as natural variations in the way our brains are wired. Conditions and disabilities relating to neurodivergence include, for example, autism, ADHD, dyslexia, intellectual disabilities, and certain mental health conditions.

As our understanding of neurodiversity has improved, and the perspectives of neurodivergent people are included in the conversation, terms and models for understanding have changed as well. Moss helps to demystify common terms relating to disability and neurodiversity. Helpful tips include avoiding stereotypes about strengths and weaknesses, removing negative language like “disorder” and “deficit,” and seeking to understand an individual’s preferred terms. Individuals may differ in their preference for

disability-first (“autistic person”) versus person-first (“person with autism”) language, while other historic terms should be avoided altogether, such as labeling someone as “special needs.”

### **How Best to Be Inclusive**

Neurodivergent workers often bring valuable strengths to their work, including, for example, attention to detail, concentration, diligence, organizational loyalty, and a passion for justice. They also add an important fresh perspective. Neurodivergent people think about problems differently and with great passion, which helps to generate innovation.

Making the workplace inclusive is not about giving someone a pass. It is about making work accessible for people who work differently. Meeting the needs of a neurodiverse workforce puts everyone on a more equal footing with their peers. More good news: once empowered with the right tools, neurodivergent workers meet (and often surpass) their peers with excellent performance and superior retention rates.

Moss describes the success of neurodiversity inclusion efforts in other industries, including

with corporate giants such as Microsoft, SAP, Goldman Sachs, Ernst & Young, and JPMorgan Chase. The tremendous success of these programs demonstrates the value that neurodiversity brings to the bottom line of a business. So much so that what may have started as an initiative has now transformed into part of their business model.

Similar opportunities are present for the legal industry. Because their brains work differently, neurodivergent attorneys are more likely to address problems in new and innovative ways, delivering and enhancing value for clients.

### **Neurodiversity and Inclusion**

Moss also addresses neurodiversity and inclusion in law schools and the legal workplace. Neurodivergent law students and lawyers experience the world differently and have different needs to help them learn and develop as professionals, and care for themselves. The book offers a wealth of information both to understand inclusion and to effect change in law school and the legal workplace.

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Moss challenges schools and employers to counteract long-standing cultures of stigma, secrecy, and shame associated with neurodivergence, replacing them with inclusion and acceptance. For schools, accessibility is not just about extended time for exams. Many students do not need extended time, for example, but may benefit tremendously from a IL pre-orientation program.

For employers, in addition to reviewing legal rights and obligations, Moss provides practical solutions for optimizing the selection process and work environment to ensure accessibility for neurodivergent applicants and employees. For example, rather than waiting for accommodation requests, employers should redesign the selection process to be more hospitable to neurodivergent applicants. The same is true for the workplace. This can include ensuring that the workplace is designed to be comfortable and accessible, removing distractions, modifying communication, and offering tools that support organization, time, and project management.

For employees considering how to broach their needs, a focus on positive framing (“I work best when...”) can be effective and

empowering. The same is true for employers. Asking, “how can we help you work best?” may offer an avenue to meet the needs of workers who are not comfortable with disclosing, or who may not even know that they are neurodivergent.

Moss also provides tips for managers who supervise and develop neurodiverse lawyers, including how to build trust, understand sensory needs, identify effective communication tools, establish clear expectations, and provide clear feedback. These are excellent tips that help managers be effective across the board, while also supporting an inclusive, neurodiverse workforce.

### Understanding the Importance of Neurodiversity for All Lawyers

Moss concludes with a powerful message — that understanding neurodiversity is an important skillset for all lawyers. This is true for law students and lawyers, as well as clients. This means that understanding neurodiversity really isn’t a choice for the legal profession. It is an imperative. Opening your awareness to the neurodiversity of the world around you will not only help those around you, but it will

also make you a more understanding, compassionate, and inclusive person. This book is an indispensable resource in achieving those goals. +



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