Hiring opens the door. What happens next?

Developing Cognitively Diverse Talent in the Age of AI

Bench Strength Advisors is conducting an interview-based study of how employers help neurodivergent talent grow, advance, and build meaningful careers — as AI changes the work people do.

From access to opportunity

Recruitment is only part of the story. What follows depends on how people are managed, how learning is supported, and how opportunities to advance are created.

The study asks what is working, what remains difficult, and what leaders are still trying to solve.

THREE QUESTIONS GUIDE THE STUDY

What helps people grow?
Management practices, learning, and support.

What makes advancement possible?
Career pathways, opportunities, and barriers.

How is AI changing the picture?
Implications for development, advancement, and leadership.

STUDY ESSENTIALS

25–30 interviews
CEOs and chief human resources officers

45-minute interview
One confidential conversation

Report and findings convening
Lessons shared with participating leaders

LEADERSHIP

Led by Jeffrey Cohn
Partner and Head of CEO Succession Practice, August Leadership. Author and host of *Imperfect Leaders*.

How the study will work.

The study invites CEOs and chief human resources officers whose organizations have practical experience hiring and supporting neurodivergent employees. It seeks accounts of difficulties and unfinished work as well as successful approaches.

Participation is one confidential interview of approximately 45 minutes. Discussion topics are shared in advance, and no formal preparation is required.

Research approach

The study aims to conduct 25–30 interviews with CEOs and chief human resources officers across a range of employers, analyzed thematically — patterns across conversations, not rankings of companies. A doctoral research team is being assembled to help design the interview protocol and conduct the analysis. An advisory panel of executives and scholars is being formed to advise on the study's questions and help reach the right interviewees.

The study examines employer leadership perspectives. It is not an employee survey or a statistically representative assessment of workplace experience.

What the study will produce

The planned report will synthesize employer approaches to development and advancement, illustrate management and career-pathway practices, and explore implications as AI changes work. Participants receive the findings first: a briefing before publication and an invitation to the findings convening.

Confidential and independent

Findings will be reported without identifying participants or their organizations. Any identifiable example will require separate written permission.

Bench Strength Advisors organizes the study. The study director and research team are responsible for participant selection, analysis, and conclusions. Funders have no role in those decisions, no access to interview material, and no prepublication review or approval rights. Financial support will be disclosed in the report.

> For Jeffrey, the question is also personal: he is the father of an autistic son, Luca.
>
> "By the time Luca's generation reaches the workforce, the world of work is ready for them."
>
> JEFFREY COHN · STUDY DIRECTOR

Proposed schedule: panel formation in early 2027; interviews in spring 2027; report and convening in fall 2027.

Learn more

jeffrey@bench-strength.com
bench-strength.com/study

Selected conversations behind the inquiry

Through *Imperfect Leaders*, Jeffrey Cohn has explored leadership with executives, researchers, and founders. Discussions of neurodivergence, family experience, and the conditions that help people contribute sharpened the question behind this study: how can employers better support development and advancement after hiring?

> These previously published interviews informed Jeffrey Cohn's thinking. Their inclusion does not imply that the guests or their organizations participate in, advise, sponsor, or endorse the study. Affiliations are provided for identification only.

SELECTED EPISODES

Leadership & Legacy for Neurodiverse Families

A conversation with Michael Duckworth · Managing Director, Duckworth Hagerty Group, Merrill Lynch
Imperfect Leaders · August 2026 · Listen to episode

How His Autistic Son – Caleb – Helped Him Become a Better CEO

A conversation with Brian Harper · CEO, 11 North Partners
Imperfect Leaders · July 2025 · Listen to episode

My Autistic Son Taught Me to Be a More Resilient Leader

A conversation with Adrian Jones · Chairman and Co-Head, Global Private Equity, Goldman Sachs
Imperfect Leaders · July 2025 · Listen to episode

Finding "Ability" in Disability

A conversation with Michael Paul · CEO, MARAbio
Imperfect Leaders · December 2025 · Listen to episode

The Neurodiverse Leadership Challenge

A conversation with Keivan Stassun · Founder and Director, Frist Center for Autism and Innovation at Vanderbilt
Imperfect Leaders · September 2025 · Listen to episode

Think Different. Can Autistic Children Develop into Innovative Leaders?

A conversation with Trenna Sutcliffe · Founder and Medical Director, Sutcliffe Clinic
Imperfect Leaders · April 2025 · Listen to episode

Roles reflect affiliations at the time of recording.

The full archive of conversations is at imperfectleaders.com.