

Thomas D'Eri - Autism Innovations & Global Impact Conference Abstract

KEYNOTE ABSTRACT

TITLE: Autism Business Advantage: The Rising Tide Story.

The Rising Tide Car Wash in Parkland, Florida, isn't average in any way. When Tom D'Eri and his father John bought the location in 2013, it was struggling. Now it's one of the highest-volume washes in Florida. Its employee retention rate is five times that of its competitors. It has spun off into a second location that was immediately successful. Both locations are quite profitable. 350,000 cars a year drive away sparkling. Rising Tide has become a media darling, featured on *The Today Show*, NBC Nightly News, and in magazines including *Entrepreneur*, *National Geographic* and *Forbes*.

The Rising Tide Carwash has a unique mission: Tom and his father wanted to create employment opportunities for workers with autism. Like 1 in 54 Americans, Tom's brother Andrew has autism, and he was facing lifelong unemployment. So the family set out on a mission to wildly expand professional opportunities for people like Andrew, starting with one car wash. Rising Tide's workforce is roughly 80 percent on the spectrum, 20 percent neurotypical.

You might think that Rising Tide has been so successful because people have celebrated its social mission. That's true, but the mission alone doesn't explain the excellence that permeates every aspect of the business: service quality, customer experience, teamwork, management, and organizational design. Put any aspect of Rising Tide's operation against other businesses, and you'll find they have the edge.

In this session, Tom tells the inspiring, surprising reason why: The wash's excellence isn't in spite of their unusual workforce, but *because of it*.

Tom will walk the audience through how Rising Tide built a thriving business by:

- Developing highly accurate hiring practices
- Designing the work environment to empower all of its team members
- Developing managers who care enough to coach
- Building a culture of accountability and psychological safety

The audience will leave this presentation understanding how Rising Tide integrated all of these practices into an operating system that drives real business results and also mitigates the perceived risks and challenges of employing neurodiverse talent.

