

DAVID A. BAINBRIDGE USES HIS SPD TO DESIGN BETTER BUILDINGS

By Carol Stock Kranowitz, MA



Everyone else wore a shirt -- but not David!



Rather than getting in the way, SPD can lead the way to solutions for the greater good. David A. Bainbridge is an example of a different thinker whose life work helps us all.

Growing Up as a "Too Much Kid"

As a child, David believed that no one could possibly like long-sleeved shirts, pants, or ties, so how did other people wear them? He wondered how other children enjoyed bright, noisy birthday parties. He saw that his brother loved amusement parks, easily remembered what was said to him, and could eat anything, so why couldn't David do those things, too?

David was a "Too Much Kid" (a term coined by Carrie Fannin, an SPD Mom and Executive Director of Children's Institute for Learning Differences in Washington state). He was affected by sensations of sound, sight, smell, touch, and movement. Every car trip on winding roads was likely to cause motion sickness.

David's lifelong challenge has been sensory over-responsivity, but nobody recognized that problem while he was growing up. Information about it wasn't available for parents until Dr. A. Jean Ayres' seminal book, *Sensory Integration and the Child*, was published in 1979.

Throughout his childhood and adulthood, he did not understand why he was hyper-sensitive to ordinary sounds or had panic attacks in crowds. The physical and emotional cost of this mystery was high, as his cortisol levels from flight or fight reactions occurred in settings that other people would find enjoyable.

Finally Learning about SPD

David knew he was different but did not know about SPD until he was 68. Always interested in building design, he was curious about Temple Grandin's work on humane animal-treatment facilities. He picked up her book, *The Autistic Brain: Helping Different Kinds of Minds Succeed*.

Reading about the sensory challenges of cattle and many people, he had an epiphany.

"SPD -- that's me!"

He went on to read other books about sensory processing issues. He delved into breakthrough studies conducted by researchers including Julia Owen, Elysa Marco, et al., that revealed the structural differences in the brains of children with SPD. At last, he understood his own biology, preferences, and personality.

Choosing a Fitting Career

With his wide interests, David sought a vocation in which he could survive and thrive. He wanted to be an oceanographer ... but got sea sick easily, had a horrible first trip to sea in an oceanography class, and decided to stay on land. He became an environmental planner ... but couldn't tolerate sitting still in noisy, cramped spaces during lengthy, contentious meetings. He was keen on studying how people interacted with their natural environments around the world ... but found that traveling through loud, chaotic airports and sitting confined on noisy planes with bad air was hellish. His paradise was the desert, mountains, or a lake ... alone.

"If you like to work alone," David says, "SPD is okay. However, it would have helped if I had known about SPD earlier in my life."

Through trial and error, David selected career options that fit his neurological needs, such as working outdoors or doing library research. In his 50-year career, he spent just a few months working inside buildings with noisy heating and cooling systems, bad lighting, noxious smells, and poor air quality. Those physically painful months were enough to convince him that his job was to champion healthy work places.

Shaping One's Career to One's Brain

David has learned that one can shape one's career path to what one's brain can



David Bainbridge in one of his favorite environments

do. "I discovered SPD as the experience of my world. It's comforting to know what forces are in play. SPD is partly the reason that I have done those things that make me happy."

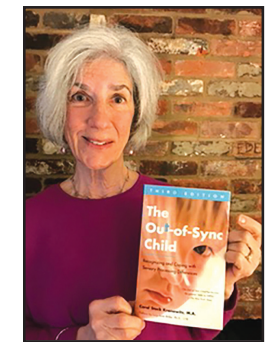
SPD is also partly the reason that David has done things that make not only himself but also everyone else comfortable. In his work today, he analyzes the environmental impact of unhealthy buildings on employees. He proposes better community design, passive solar heating and cooling, building codes, and solar rights. He leads the way to using sustainable materials and renewable energy, offering design solutions for buildings that people can love.

His latest publication is *Accountability: Why We Need to Count Social and Environmental Cost for a Livable Future*. Rio Redondo Press. Read about David's amazing work at https://works.bepress.com/david_a_bainbridge/ and www.sustainabilityleader.org

Grandin, T., with R. Panek (2014). *The Autistic Brain: Helping Different Kinds of Minds Succeed*. Mariner Books.

Owen, J. P., E. J. Marco, et al. (2013). Abnormal white matter microstructure in children with sensory processing disorders. *NeuroImage: Clinical*, 2013 Jun 23; 2:844-53.

Here's to neurodivergent thinkers like David A. Bainbridge! ■



Carol Stock Kranowitz is the author of the "Sync" series, including *The Out-of-Sync Child Grows Up: Coping with Sensory Processing*

Disorder in the Adolescent and Young Adult Years. Visit her websites www.out-of-sync-child.com and www.insyncchild.com to learn more.

REFERENCES

Bainbridge, D.A. (2023). *Accountability: Why We Need to Count Social and Environmental Cost for a Livable Future*. Rio Redondo Press. Read about David's amazing work at https://works.bepress.com/david_a_bainbridge/ and www.sustainabilityleader.org

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