



Microsoft's Specialists

We all know what it's like to lose our concentration once in a while when our tasks become too dull. And we all know about skipping details when they become overwhelming. However, this is not the case for SPECIALISTERNE ("The Specialists") who have tested Windows XP Media Centre for Microsoft. They have autism, and are therefore especially gifted.

Two very different companies can easily work together to mutual advantage – even if their cultures are diametrically opposite each other.

Microsoft Denmark is a company that generally demands a lot of its employees. They must be able to adapt, to take the initiative and to work independently. They must be willing to work in open office landscapes and their social skills must be optimal. The work day at Microsoft is often hectic and the stress threshold is high.

The Danish consultancy firm SPECIALISTERNE has very different priorities. Here, employees are attracted by a safe environment and fixed routines. They value the possibility of being able to lose themselves in their work, without necessarily having to

participate actively in social activities. The pace is certainly not hectic and stress is banned.

A COMMON VISION

Despite the fundamental cultural differences the world's largest software company, Microsoft, and SPECIALISTERNE share the same vision: to help people realize their full potential. This is the reason why Microsoft Denmark has entered into collaboration with the Danish consultancy firm SPECIALISTERNE.

SPECIALISTERNE's overall goal is to change people's view of autism and to prove that the "specialists" of society are needed on the labor market, and that certain tasks are solved better by a "specialist" than by a "generalist". Their hope is to create more possibilities on the labor market for people with autism.





SPECIALISTERNE is the first consultancy firm in the world to exclusively hire employees with autism. The company utilizes the special competencies of autistic people, to take on vital assignments from companies in areas such as programming, software testing and data registration.

GOOD BUSINESS

However, this is not only about visions. SPECIALISTERNE work under normal market conditions, competing on equal terms with other consultancy firms. Microsoft did not hire them for reasons of charity, but because it was good business for both parties.

SPECIALISTERNE's special abilities for concentration, precision and systematization were the exact competencies Microsoft were looking for when they were searching for employees to test the Windows XP Media Centre. The assignment involved going through television and radio programs, checking them against Media Centre, pointing out errors and lack of precision and thereby increasing the quality of users' experience. The assignment had to be repeated many times and therefore demanded a high degree of perseverance.

// The assignment could have been solved by one of our own employees, but there was a great risk that he or she would lose the ability to concentrate after repeating the assignment a couple of times. With SPECIALISTERNE, this risk is non-existent. Their ability to concentrate remains intact, even after solving the same task many times over. Furthermore, they have a fantastic ability to locate errors and aberrations. We "generalists" tend to see what we expect to see. SPECIALISTERNE are fantastically concrete, and only see facts. They are therefore really good at pointing out errors and aberrations. We're take advantage of this ability, and we appreciate our cooperation highly."

Nis Bank Lorentzen, Business Group Lead, Microsoft Denmark

// Of course we're a different sort of company and as such we wish to be judged by other criteria than our earning ability. However, SPECIALISTERNE is not occupational therapy. We truly

believe that one percent of business tasks can be solved just as well – or better – by a person with autism. We play the business side of the field, and we get orders because we're good at what we do. It is important for us that our clients demand something from us. Microsoft does. Being a partner of one of the world's most result-oriented companies is of course a stamp of approval of SPECIALISTERNE that we are incredibly proud of."

Thorkil Sonne, CEO, SPECIALISTERNE.

INTERNATIONAL AMBITIONS

The collaboration with Microsoft has started modestly. But the ambitions at SPECIALISTERNE are extensive. The company's goal is to become a sustainable global partner and player with a staff of a thousand consultants, all with autism. The first step on the way is the establishment of a subsidiary in the UK in 2007.

In Denmark, SPECIALISTERNE's short-term goal is to go from its current staff of 40 employees to one hundred consultants. This is a conservative goal, but SPECIALISTERNE believe that sustainable growth should take place at a speed that everyone can follow. It is first and foremost important to have time to create the perfect conditions for employees to work under, in order to allow them to realize their full potential.

About SPECIALISTERNE:

- Founded in 2004 by Thorkil Sonne after his son was diagnosed with ASD – Autism Spectrum Disorder
- 40 employees of which 31 have ASD
- Owned by CEO Thorkil Sonne
- Clients include Microsoft, TDC, KMD, CSC, Grundfos, Systematic, Cryptomathic
- For more information please see www.specialisterne.dk

