

Meet One of HBJ's 2021 Diversity Champions: Shawn Fry

Mar 25, 2021, 3:27pm CDT
Ryan Anderson/HBJ



[Watch the video to see a replay of the HBJ's Diversity in Business Awards event broadcast from March 25.](#)

Meet HBJ's Outstanding Diversity Champions, which recognizes individuals within the community or for-profit and nonprofit organizations who have shown outstanding initiative to promote diversity and inclusion either in the organization or community, making a positive difference in others' lives through contributions to social justice, equality and diversity.

Shawn Fry
Founder and chief science officer, Neurodiversity Foundation

Why is diversity important and how does it impact your clients or business? I am neurodiverse. However, I was not diagnosed until the age of 42. When I was growing up in the late 60s and 70s, there was no diagnosis of Asperger's or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), so I had to learn to assimilate without guidance. Despite my lack of social skills or abilities, I found ways to provide value and communicated through my own logic and data analysis. As a professional, I worked my way up to be the chief information officer at multiple regional hospital networks in Texas.

Moving forward, I leveraged that experience to become a successful entrepreneur. After my tenure as hospital CIO, I built several multimillion-dollar companies from scratch based solely on data analytics concepts that required no seed capital and no investors. The businesses quickly grew on their own revenue production. Realizing unseen opportunities, my neurodiverse and innovative approach to health care data complexity laid the foundation for my entrepreneurial company, Prevalent Health. At Prevalent Health, I hired nearly 140 employees and created my own "neurodiverse workplace culture." I found that by cultivating an environment based on open and honest dialogue, clear communication, and vulnerability, the workplace culture became more supportive and accommodating to everyone's needs.

In 2019, I sold Prevalent Health to a private equity firm. I am now CIO at Potentia Workforce and the founder of The Neurodiversity Foundation. I have dedicated my life to embracing neurodiversity's strengths and the powers it unlocks through thought leadership, innovation, and self-esteem in one's uniqueness.

Potentia's main focus is to create opportunities for individuals and organizations by demonstrating the unrealized impact on their bottom line and integrating neurodiverse talent into the workforce. Being a part of a business that empowers other organizations in Houston to be more inclusive and diverse is one of my most satisfying career achievements. In the past, individuals who were considered "different" were not given the opportunities to succeed, but today these individuals' contributions are meaningful to these organizations. I founded the Neurodiversity Foundation to build a path for others on the spectrum to recognize and utilize their remarkable abilities. We are a nonprofit built and run by the neurodiverse for the neurodiverse. We promote a "Strengths First" mentality instead of cataloging individuals by their deficits. I seek to change the core of the narrative and provide autistic advocates the ability to speak from their experience, redefine and provide better pathways for others. By redefining a highly stigmatized narrative and reframing misconceptions around autism, we are challenging inaccurately forecasted "outcomes" that harm an individual's self-efficacy. Our projects are evaluated through a lens of empowerment. Our approach enables individuals to feel proud of their identity rather than be limited by it.

What advice would you give to boost diversity in your organization? Growing up with the type of prejudice that many face, I have always been extremely cognizant of how I treat people, whether they be employees, colleagues, or friends. I view every policy decision, hiring opportunity, and think about how it will impact society's future. Neurodiverse individuals have a strict moral code, and we are insanely loyal. As employees, friends, or partners, we will not leave our jobs or relationships for a better offer. That type of loyalty has a tremendous intrinsic value. Almost all people on the spectrum would never lie, cheat, steal or devalue naturally. Loyalty is ingrained in us, and it is a huge asset to any person or organization.

These profiles have been edited for length and clarity.

Sara Samora

Reporter

Houston Business Journal