

The Best Way to Figure Things Out

By Jason Oldford

“I figured it out; what I needed was someone to show me.” (Air Supply)

I’m autistic. I’m afraid, but always willing, to try new things. I’m also afraid to buy new things, especially if they require assembly. I’m not good at putting things together, and I’m often afraid to ask for help, even from family.

A major reason for this is my inability to read the instructions, which aren’t always in words anymore. More often than not, they’re in pictures and I can’t find where the part is just by looking at the picture. Case in point: About a month ago I bought a new vacuum cleaner and I couldn’t figure out how to use it by reading the instructions (which were in pictures). One of my brothers came and lugged it up to my condo for me because I can’t do it on an arthritic hip. So he put it together and tested it and it worked great. I still couldn’t figure out things like emptying the dirt cup or putting the hose back in position, so I decided to let my cleaning lady come and help me (she uses it more than I do, truth be told). Anyway, she came and showed me the things I had concerns about and then went on to do the usual great job she does vacuuming my condo. Anyway, sometime after she left I tried to use the new vacuum cleaner in my office. It worked well but it’s hard to push on an arthritic hip. Now came the time to empty the dirt cup. I found the release button, had a bit of trouble opening the lid, but figured it out and dumped the dirt in the trash. Then came the time to put it back in place; figured that out too. All you need to know is when you re-insert the dirt cup, the Hoover logo has to face you and you have to hear a click. The same thing goes when you put the hose back in place; when you hear the click, it’s locked in. I had trouble with that at first too, but all you need to know is to give yourself enough hose to fit in the compartment without stretching it.

So, with the help of my cleaning lady, I figured out my vacuum cleaner. Now my printer needs a new cartridge and I’ll need help replacing that too; otherwise, in my frustration, I might jam it into place and make things worse; it’s a common occurrence among autistics but then some are very good at things like that. My neighbour can help me with the cartridge. I’ll let you know how it goes. So to answer the question in my title, the best way to figure things out is twofold: Ask for help, or try it yourself first and have someone inspect your efforts and make any necessary corrections.



About the Author

My name is Jason Oldford. I work as a translator for Lionbridge. I have been on the autism spectrum since the 1970s, and back then not much was known about autism. I learned to read by the time I turned three so I guess you could say I got a head start as I entered school. I was a year late doing that, but it was for the better.

Although I am one of your shy, introverted types of autistics, I do have a knack for memorizing things like license plate numbers, dates, facts and figures, and I fell in love with pop music at a young age. I love listening to countdown shows from the 80s, remembering the old songs, and being able to count them down from 20 to 1 with computer-chip accuracy (and remembering the numbers of some memorable tunes further down the charts).”