**Transcript for Isaac**

So, good afternoon everyone. As Keren said, I’m Isaac Simmonds. I was diagnosed with autism from the age of four, which is quite young. And I work in the video games industry as a UI software engineer, to help make the football manager game series. I mean I work for interactive, who are owned by SEGA. And I’ve always really enjoyed programming, and it's quite a logical thinking job so kind of naturally, as I grew up and come round to what I wanted to do in this crazy world, I thought you know logical job, it kind of matches my way of thinking, that appealed to me. So I kind of careered towards programming. So yeah, I’ve only had this job for about three-ish years and only left university about three years ago. So I would say I’m very, very early in my career. So I have less of a story than Arrun or Mike, but I still think I can help someone at home. So I’m going to talk about more of the process of how I got here today, how I applied for jobs, and kind of talk about some of the stuff that helped me through that, because at the end of the day, I think, almost doing the job itself isn't the hardest part actually, it’s getting your foot through the door, making the impression. That can be really hard and I think it's something that hopefully I can help other people with. So obviously when I left uni, I got a first and I’m not trying to brag, but it's even with a first you can find it really hard to find jobs anywhere. Yeah it's a really crowded marketplace and I think it's even more crowded with covid today sadly. You have to try and figure out how to make the mark and how to make yourself heard. So, when I finished uni I had no idea how to make a cover letter, I’d only had like two Saturday jobs, and they were not anything to do with my skills. I went to the careers advice service at the university of Kent, because I was like please help me write a cover letter, please because I have no idea. So, with the covering letter, it can be really hard to sell yourself. That’s one of the things I struggle with autism is, I find it incredibly hard to lie, and it also extends to hiding the truth, also exaggerating. Even a tiny little white lie can make me feel really uncomfortable. It'll make feel like I have an itch I really need to scratch and its just not a good feel. But obviously selling yourself in a cover letter or a CV, it's essentially like lying but it's not. You know what I mean, you have to exaggerate, and I found that really hard. So, you kind of need to, its bad to lie, but in these kind of situations you need to promote yourself and show what you have to offer to employers. So the careers advisor I had, she helped me break down each paragraph of my cover letter and helped me say okay let's look at your skills, let's look at your, I think she referred to them as transferable skills. What do you have, I was applying, originally I started as a games tester. What do you have that could be useful and transferred from your skills, I worked as a shop floor assistant and a bartender in Wetherspoons. So yeah, how can they help me get a video games tester job. Naturally you think, that’s got nothing to do with each other. However, you look deeper into it and get someone to help you analyse and break down the stuff you did, there’s all sorts of practical skills at any job that are completely different. You can always transfer some skills. Wetherspoons and being in a shop floor team, you’ve got teamwork, you’ve got taking orders, and you’ve got pressure with it being a bar, there’s all sorts of skills that you can grab and take from that, and say look I’ve got all these skills, I can prove even though they may not be in the same industry, I have them. So it really helps to get someone else to kind of look into your life and help you break it down. Whether it’s your friend, your mother, your loved one, or a careers advisor to help break down and find those skills that you have. This the same thing for your CV. I think the CV in my personal opinion is a bit easier, because it's less of a love letter saying, look please hire me, it's more of just a general overview of your career. And again, sometimes you can, if there's a job you really want, you can tailor your CV to that job. So I think when I was first starting out, I was applying for programming positions and testing positions, so I have two CVs. One had a lean towards the testing side of things and analytic skills and stuff like that, and one that leaned towards programming. I think it's really good to get your friends, family’s to help to figure out how to make CV’s and cover letters. As someone, who actually, again like Mike, and I think Arrun as well, I read from a little thing, I never public speak. I actually had something, John you said to Mike, you said about how you want to get your foot in the door and contact someone. One kind of modern way of doing that is that using linkedin, and I know everyone complains. Actually it's really good. It's a really good modern way to connect to people in the industry. I always have my parents, go around and handout your flier to more jobs, but people would look at me and laugh at me at stores like what are you doing. And that's the bottom line, it's not what you do anymore. So linkedin is a really good way to actually talk to people who work in that job and sometimes they might have, you've got like a privacy settings or whatever, some can’t just let talk to them. Before I showed up here at SI, Sports Interactive, I though and I reached out, so when I found someone who had an account here that I would talk to my message. I said, hey what advice could you give me for a QA position, and he was really happy to apply and I got direct advice from the source of the job that I wated. So there’s a help you can get from the people who work at the company as we. You just have to kind of take that risk and reach out because, the worse they’re going to say is no, I don't want to help you, which isn't that bad. When I actually applied and got the interview, and I again I have had to think of okay so I’ve only done a little bit about telling myself, in the interview, how can I actually do this? It's a difficult task it’s again, it's another challenge, and the advisor I had, she recommended using this system called the star acronym. It basically stands for situation, task, action and results. And obviously being autistic, I find it hard to sometimes come up with things on the fly, like come up with examples of my work on the fly. So I was like ok, how can I think about these situations. So using this star system, the idea is that you say, you can prepare, you can write down on a piece of paper and, especially, especially with modern technology with zoom calls now being introduced, you can write bullet points and stuff, like what I’ve done now, I'm reading off some bullet points and thinking. So you can use this kind of system. If they said, oh tell me, I’ve had a look your CV, and I see you've put teamwork. Tell me a situation where you've used teamwork. You think about situation. Ok, the situation is, I was working in Wetherspoon's. What was the task I had to do. The task, well it was wild a busy night, I had to serve loads of customers. What actions did I take. Oh, maybe I went to the back and asked for some help from someone who's doing something in the back. You tell them the result and how you got through it, and what was the good thing that came out your action and the part you had. What you can do is, you can write and think of questions they might ask you and use your CV as a template and also use their specification and look at the stuff they’re looking for. Think about, ok they might ask me about analytical skills. Let’s write down a situation when I was analytical, so I can tell them off the cuff, oh I’m analytical, I’ve got a situation about that. So a really good method is to write down these kind of questions you think you’re going to be asked, you have them ready to tell them. I think one of the things you can also do to help prep yourself for interviews is to definitely get support from your loved ones and friends. Again, I was incredibly nervous, I still am incredibly nervous going into any interview, and it’s a lot easier doing in video. You literally, she’s not her today, but normally I have my wife sitting a couple of feet beside me because she’s right there and they don’t know she’s there. But when I went to this interview in person, my wife came, I organised and talked to her, and she booked the day off work, and came all the way up on the train with me. So it can help to have your loved one giving you that support, helping you calm down whilst you go to you interview. Also an extra bonus tip. Less so autism or it might be, and it’s that you should definitely ask, if they don't tell you in the interview. This is more post-covid advice, I guess. You should definitely ask what the dress code is because you don't want to turn up to an interview in a suit and tie when everyone else is wearing a shirt, it looks embarrassing and it looks a bit silly. So it doesn't it hurt. They’ll just say, oh here's the dress code. So yeah, that's kind of prep we can do to help before the interview itself. And when I actually had arrived, and had my interview. They started with easing in questions. It doesn't happen with all interviews, of course, but if it does just try and be yourself. Normally when they ease you in and they’re relaxing, they’re trying to grasp whether you'd fit into whatever team you’d be joining. When they’re just chatting to you about, obviously I work for a football manager game, they were chatting to me about the news of football recently. They were talking to me, think at the time, it was the world cup 2018. So think about less about, oh its pressuring they care about what I’m saying, just be yourself. Being myself, you know, a part of you is being autistic. Maybe even say it before, oh I am autistic, so I might have these things, say it at the beginning. They’d rather know you were autistic going into an interview, than not and then thinking you’re just rude. Because I know sometimes people with autism can come across as rude, and it’s just a thing. Also, a great tip, and I definitely used it a lot, is if you ask them for a glass of water at the start of the interview. So if they ask you a question, and you haven’t got one of these situations in your head prepared, you get your glass, you take 5 seconds, you take a sip, and you can have this quick 5 seconds to really think in your head about how to answer that question. Also, another thing is I sometimes find it hard to express my interest. Sometimes if I want to express, I enjoy, and I want a job, and I really like them. It’s either I go too much, or too little. It’s hard to grasp it. So one way is to prepare some questions, because normally in any interview they say, oh do you have any questions for us. A really great one is, ask if you can be shown around the office. If they haven’t given you an office tour, say oh can I be shown where I’m going to work, I’m quite interested. Sometimes you might catch them off guard. In my interviews they were like, oh sure, and they said no one had asked them before, but we stood up and took me around the office. It’s an easy way to show that your interested without having to do too much. Plus you get to come and see your studio or where you’re going to work. So yes, that’s some crap about how you can do interviews, and CVs as such. And as I progressed into the QA role that I got, I knew that I wanted to be a programmer on the computer development side. I knew that I originally all I’d have was a 4 month contract in games development, because it’s a yearly game football manager. They hire a bunch of QA testers for 4 months and then get rid of the not so good ones and keep the ones that are quite valuable and repeat this process every year. So I knew if one, I wanted to stay in my job I’d have devoted and focussed on it. But also, it’s hard because you also have to balance that with being a good people person. Being great at your job might not be enough to keep winning. I know in programming, there is quite a fair few high functioning people with autism. And again, as they might come across as quite rude and uncouth, they will get less jobs because they’re focussing so much on being great at programming and maybe not so much at trying to fit in. It’s hard. It’s definitely really hard to fit in in any business, but I don’t have the answer. Just try and make sure you get out there a little bit, even if it puts you out of your comfort zone, because it’s good to make your mark, especially in a short term job and you want to keep it. So I had about six months in the end at QA. Whilst I was in there, I expressed my interest in becoming a programmer and whenever I had the chance, my boss or higher up, I said, I really want to do programming on things. So eventually they gave me a chance. They said, the ball’s in your court. Here’s some books, learn it, and then we’ll hire you as kind of a probation programmer. And then if that goes well, and we’re teaching you up, we’ll give you a full time position. And even when getting that job that I thought of for so long, I had loads of nerves because there are so many people more experienced than me and people who are older. I was only 20 at the time. People who are older, people who are more experienced. I almost kind of had imposter syndrome. Even though I was doing fine, and my manager was saying you’re doing good and learning well, I nearly gave up and now I’m promoted again. I got support from my mentor, and I was honest with him, and I talked to him, I said look mate, I’m fearing this, I’m fearing for these reasons, I don’t know how good I am, and he helped me through it. And essentially, I did get a full time position, and I’ve shook off those imposter syndrome vibes. It kind of goes to show how important it is just talking to people who or close to you, or even colleagues who are close. Just talking can help you through situations that you invent in your own mind. Hence you making your own mind. Whilst growing up, I always used to have this idea that I didn’t like being autistic and didn’t like being different from other people. I wanted to fit in and I wanted to, I guess I considered it not normal. But I remember, we had some tests when I was in school. I’d say I don’t want the extra time. I want it to be fair. But as I got older I learned that it is kind of fair, it’s levelling the playing field. I may not be as good in interviews as other people, so if you disclose that you’re autistic in an interview or any place when you’re getting a job, it just levels the playing field a little bit. You don’t have always the same social skills as other people. When I first joined, I didn’t tell my workplace at all that I had autism. But as I leant into it and found my comfort zone, I eventually told my boss and I told a couple of colleagues. And I didn’t see much change, no one judged me for it and that made me more comfortable telling people. And even now, I’m applying for new jobs in the games industry, and I just bring it up casually in conversation. You can even use it as a bonus. People say, what are your strengths. You can say, well I have autism, and because of that I’m an out of the box thinker, I think different to how other people do. And because of that I can think of creative solutions and creative ideas that other people might not, and sometimes being autistic gives you an advantage. So it’s an interesting disability, I call it. Sometimes it’s an advantage, so it’s like an ability almost. It’s challenging having autism but there’s ways you can overcome it. I thinking growing up through my life, I’ve always been offered this formal support and stuff like that. I think eventually I realised as I got older, I’ve always had my informal support network by my side. I’ve had my wife, my mother, my friends, my family. And I suggest anyone out there is that you should take your informal support and they can help you get through tough decisions and hard situations. Without the support I don’t think I’d be where I am today. So yeah , make sure when you’re out there looking for work you get help from your close friends and family. And I think, if I wanted to give advice to my former self is that if you are applying for a job and you’ve got an interview, just think I am good enough because you wouldn’t have got the interview without impressing someone. Yeah, that’s it. Thank you everyone.