

TOP 10 LESSONS AND TIPS I LEARNED WORKING WITH MARK

1. TREAT MARK LIKE HE'S FAMILY

Not every day with Mark is going to be enjoyable. There are times where his perseverations are high, you're tired, and you do not have the patience to deal with Mark. However, if you treat Mark like he's family, you will be rewarded in working with Mark. Treating Mark like he's your family has to be your biggest 'why'.

Once I started going into each shift like Mark is my brother, that's when I started taking more pride in my work and Mark and I were able to build a strong relationship. Working with Mark tests your patience, discipline, and leadership, and I feel like I became a better son, brother, friend, and husband from this experience. What you put into your relationship with Mark, you will get out.

2. THE POWER OF MOTIVATION

Mark can literally do anything, as long as he is motivated. Mark's biggest motivations besides "Mommmyy" is food (his next meal), vanilla ice cream cones, going to the grocery store, Target, naps, and going to bed. You can even motivate Mark with whatever the next activity is, because it usually leads to his biggest motivations next. For example, if you are doing a chore like laundry with Mark, you can motivate Mark by telling him that after you do laundry, you're going to church, and then after church, is LUNCH (Subway, chicken sandwiches, etc.).

I noticed this especially worked when we were trying to get Mark more active. Mark can walk for days as long as you walk with him and he gets something at the end of it. Mark and I would walk 10+ miles on Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays, and this was good for many reasons. Walking is good exercise for Mark; it relieves some anxiety, because he's actively moving towards his next goal (instead of waiting in the house to leave via driving); and it tires him out. It still amazes me how Mark can walk so far while hydrating solely on sparkling water and Diet Coke/Pepsi.

3. BE CONFIDENT

Mark can feel if you are confident or not. As long as you are confident, this will relieve some anxiety from Mark. Be confident in responding to Mark's perseverations, going from event-to-event, and in what you decide to do. If you are not confident with Mark, he will continue to persevere and his anxiety will increase, because he has to trust you as a caregiver.

4. STAY ACTIVE

Mark is a very active person. He always needs to be doing something, but he can only do something efficiently for about 10 - 30 minutes (except walking). Even when Mark watches TV, he's moving around in the house, opening and closing doors, writing on sticky notes, etc. Even when the house is at its cleanest, there is always something you could be doing with Mark. Staying active relieves some anxiety from Mark, because it allows for him to focus to get something done in order to get what he wants (food, go to a desired location, etc.).

5. STAY ORGANIZED

Change is hard for everyone... especially Mark! When you are organized, this relieves some anxiety for Mark, and he can complete whatever task is at his hand more easily. If you are not, this can overwhelm Mark, and that's when you may see him act out. Keep the house organized, stay organized yourself so you can get to each event on time and in the same way you always have, and ensure Mark stays organized with his chores as well. Do not let Mark get lazy or this will create bad habits for later on.

6. KNOW THE SCHEDULE AND STICK TO IT

Once you have a schedule with Mark, stick to it. Being late to events, cancelling them, or creating new ones on the spot can create anxiety for Mark, so try to avoid doing this. Adjustments will need to be made from time-to-time, but as long as you're organized, you will be able to adjust in a way that still puts Mark at ease.

7. DON'T PANIC

The best thing you can do for yourself when working with Mark is to remain calm and confident. If you are not, then Mark will sense this and this will create anxiety for him. When Mark has attacked me, it started with high perseverations, my answers to his perseverations not really getting through to his head, Mark getting frustrated, and me panicking. You do not want to just let Mark have whatever he wants, but you do not want him to act out either. The more I worked with Mark, the more I learned about how much I can give and take from Mark so he gets the things he needs to get done completed and he doesn't act out.

8. CHANGE IS POSSIBLE AND IS GOOD

Mark is fine with change, as long as he gets something out of the change. For example, when we started walking to his favorite places, like the grocery store and Target, Mark would get his music (only listens to his music when we drive) and frown because of the change. As long as

Mark knows we are getting something at the store, he gets a CD/DVD from Target, etc. as a result of a change, Mark will follow.

9. DON'T UNDERESTIMATE

You do NOT have to baby Mark. Mark is capable of doing just about any chore needed. Mark just needs an example and some guidance along the way, and he will get the chore done. It might not be completed in the way you planned, but Mark does benefit in doing chores on his own as much as possible. Additionally, Mark has surprised me quite a few times when it comes to me not explaining what I want from him in the simplest of terms, his ability to walk long distances, and his ability to accept change. Mark will surprise you if you give him the opportunity to.

10. YOU WILL BE BETTER

I am grateful to have worked with Mark, because he pushed me to be a more patient leader. As a leader, your followers are not always going to be the most competent people at what you ask of them, but it's your job to make them as competent as possible. Working with Mark has made me a much more patient leader in that I understand that results come with a process, and that process is not always pretty. I will miss working with Mark and he will forever be my brother!