Temple Grandin is an expert cattle handler and an assistant professor at Colorado State University. Born autistic, she not only strives to make the cattle industry more humane, but also tries to help people learn more about autism.

**Keywords**
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Transcript

Temple Grandin Beats the Odds of Autism
KATIE COURIC, co-host:
Autism is said to affect approximately 400,000 people in this country. It leaves some unable to speak or function. But, as NBC's Roger O'Neil tells us, it leaves others with exceptional talents.

ROGER O'NEIL reporting:
Temple Grandin has a special knack for handling cattle.
Ms. TEMPLE GRANDIN: The way I think is much more like how an animal thinks.
That's right. Guys, keep on going.
O'NEIL: She is one of the world's experts in animal behavior.
Ms. GRANDIN: Cows as an animal, it has the same kind of nervous system as I have-- very high-strung, very attuned to any little changes in the environment.
O'NEIL: Grandin is autistic. Her autism allows her to see the world differently than the rest of us.
Ms. GRANDIN: You see, I didn't realize until I was 30 that other people didn't think in pictures. I thought everybody could see movies in their head.
O'NEIL: The movie "Rain Man" certainly raised the level of consciousness about autism in this country. Are you a savant, much like Dustin Hoffman's role was in that movie?
Ms. GRANDIN: No, I'm not. The type of savant shown in "Rain Man" is about 10 percent of autism cases. I don't have that skill. The skill I have is being able to visualize in three dimensions.
O'NEIL: Grandin can look at a set of blueprints and visualize in her mind what the project will look like when it's finished and whether it will work. As a result of her special affinity to animals, she has devoted
her life to their humane treatment, and has become one of the top designers of cattle feed lots and slaughter houses in the world.

Ms. GRANDIN: I've done a lot of work with the industry just to show them that if they handle cattle nicely, they'll have less bruises, they'll have better quality meat.

O'NEIL: The industry is listening.

Mr. MIKE CHABOT (General Manager, Excel Corp.): What she's done for us is set us up with a facility that requires the least amount of handling by the individuals within the yards and causes less stress to the cattle.

O'NEIL: It's a message Grandin also drives home in lectures to cattle ranchers.

Ms. GRANDIN: I've been working with these big feed yards on getting rid of electric prods. They say, `Ah, these big feed yards, there's no way we can get rid of electric prods. We've got to use electric prods, OK?` And I said, `You want to make a bet? I'll show you how to get rid of them.'

O'NEIL: And in the classroom at Colorado State University, where she's an assistant professor.

Ms. GRANDIN: You have got to look for the silly things. Like here's a hose on the ground. They will balk at that. Make sure that you're...

Mr. BLUE ALLEN (Student, Colorado State): Rather than just throwing information at you, she gets you to--to visualize it.

Ms. LESLEY OTTOMAN (Student, Colorado State): She gets down on the level that, you know, you need to see--you need to look at the perspective of what the animal is seeing.

O'NEIL: Fifty years ago, as an infant, Grandin displayed the classic symptoms of autism.

Ms. GRANDIN: I would sit in the corner and rock, loud noise hurt my ears, because I was so sensitive that the environment hurts. So I would do things like sit for hours and dribble sand through my hands, 'cause I could shut out the hurtful world.

O'NEIL: While doctors recommended the little girl be institutionalized, Grandin's parents enrolled her in a nursery school that specialized in speech therapy, and hired a nanny to keep her occupied with creative games. But the real turning point for Grandin came when she was 15, at her aunt's Arizona ranch. She saw cows in a squeeze chute, a devise used to hold animals still during vaccination and branding.

Ms. GRANDIN: And I noticed that when they put the calves in the squeeze chute some of the animals just kind of relaxed when pressure was applied. And I thought, `Well, I want to go and try that.'

O'NEIL: The squeeze machine that works for cows also worked for you?

Ms. GRANDIN: Yeah, it did. For about 45 minutes afterwards, I was a lot calmer. The pressure has a calming effect on the nervous system. So then I built a device I could get into that applied pressure.

O'NEIL: Grandin says the squeeze machine helped her get through school. She's Dr. Grandin now, and still uses it today, as do autistic children across the country.

Dr. MARGARET CREEDON (Clinical Psychologist): Squeeze. That feels so good.

For some children, it makes a critical difference in their day. The use of the squeeze machine to calm themselves, to help structure their behavior and their time.

O'NEIL: Grandin has also become a spokesperson for autistic people everywhere.

Ms. GRANDIN: One of the things that everybody in the field of autism will agree with is the importance
of early intervention.
Dr. CREEDON: Temple is unique. She has diligently worked to not only present us with information, but also to document it so teachers and other professionals can build on her information. That's a lasting impact.

O'NEIL: Is your autism cured, or do you still have it?
O'NEIL: You can't--you--I would still have the autism. Autism is caused by immature development of the brain, but what I have done is I've been able to adapt better. You know, a lot of clients didn't know I was autistic. They just thought, you know, I was weird.

O'NEIL: Regardless of what people may think, if she's judged by her work, Temple Grandin is a leader, in animal behavior for sure, but more importantly, as an example that people with autism can lead productive and fulfilling lives. For TODAY, Roger O'Neil, NBC News, Ft. Collins, Colorado.