

# [ BIAS INTERRUPTERS ] *small steps big change*

## BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR ASSIGNMENTS *Identifying Bias in Assignments Guide*

### What's the difference between assignments?

- **Glamour Work:** high-profile assignments that are career-enhancing and provide the opportunity to develop the competencies, visibility, and networks needed to progress.
- **Low-Profile Work:** assignments that are necessary and beneficial to the organization but don't advance the individual's career.
- **Office Housework:** literal housework (ordering lunch, cleaning up after a meeting), administrative work (scheduling a time to meet, making sure everyone is on the conference line, sending the Zoom link), emotional work ("he's upset—can you fix it?"), and behind-the-scenes work (setting up the summer intern program).

### Tendencies that lead to inequities in assignments:

- **Modest, helpful, nice; dutiful daughter, office mom?** Prescriptive stereotypes create pressures on women to be mild-mannered team players—so they are under social pressures to volunteer for office housework activities. Due to these stereotypes, women are also more likely to be *assigned* office housework tasks because assigners tend to believe that women are more likely to accept the task.
- **People of color** also face pressures to volunteer for and accept office housework, due to prescriptive stereotypes, notably that people of Asian descent are supposed to be "deferential worker bees."
- **Not a "details guy."** Majority men are less likely to be asked to do the office housework, and they experience less backlash if they refuse to do it or do a bad job.
- **"Not a team player."** Women and people of color risk pushback if they don't gratefully accept and perform the office housework and low-profile work: "She's just not a team player," or "He thinks highly of himself, doesn't he?"
- **The mommy track.** Women return from maternity leave to find that they are no longer able to get the quality of assignments that they could before having children.
- **"But she's good at planning parties."** Managers tend to assign office housework to women because "she's good at it," or "she likes it."
- **Golden boy.** Managers may consistently assign glamour work to the same person over and over again because the manager knows "he can get the job done." This can lead to a precarious position for a company where only one or two people are capable of doing the most important work.
- **Who wants the glamour work?** Women and people of color get less access to the glamour work in their organizations. Sometimes this is due to the belief that they don't want the high-profile assignments. Data shows this isn't true.
- **People with disabilities** get passed over for the career-enhancing work due to negative assumptions about their capabilities or fit for the work.

- **Out of sight, out of mind.** What the military calls “hey you” tasking — making assignments based on whoever happens to be around — leads to the same people getting tapped again and again, while others get left out despite their talents. If women, caregivers, and people of color are more likely to prefer remote work, an informal assignment system can negatively impact their access to career-enhancing opportunities.

### Seven Powerful Bias Interrupters:

1. **Don't ask for volunteers** for office housework. Instead **establish a rotation**. This can be based on any factor—seniority, astrological sign, etc.
2. **Hold everyone accountable** for the tasks they are supposed to do. If someone does a bad job on a low-profile assignment, that's a performance problem. Treat it as such.
3. **Demonstrate that you value DEI work and mentoring** when it comes time for performance evaluations and promotion decisions.
4. Before assigning a glamour work assignment, **consider all eligible employees**.
5. If only a few people are eligible to do the glamour work, find ways to **expand the pool**. One way is to have more junior people shadow more senior people.
6. **Ask people returning from parental leave** if they want the assignment before deciding they don't. You can say, “I have this assignment you would be great for, but I know you're getting back up to speed. Want to jump in? If not, there will be another opportunity in the future.” – and make sure there is.
7. **Ask everyone on your team what support they need to do their best work**. Not all disabilities are visible, and making this a regular practice will enhance everyone's performance.