

[BIAS INTERRUPTERS] *small steps big change*

BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR MANAGERS *Tools for Performance Evaluations*

THE CHALLENGE

A recent study of performance evaluations in tech found that 66% of women's performance reviews contained negative personality criticism ("You come off as abrasive") whereas only 1% of men's reviews did.¹ We know now that workplaces that view themselves as being highly meritocratic often are, in fact, *more* biased than other organizations² and that the usual responses—one-shot diversity trainings, mentoring and networking programs—typically don't work.³

THE SOLUTION

Bias interrupters are tweaks to basic business systems that can yield large gains: organizational interrupters change existing business systems; individual interrupters are steps individuals can take on their own.

Consider the Metrics

Here are some things to keep an eye out for:

- Do your performance evaluations show consistently higher ratings for majority men than for women, people of color, or other relevant groups?
- Do women's ratings fall after they have children? Do employees' ratings fall after they take parental leave or adopt flexible work arrangements?
- Do the same performance ratings result in different promotion or compensation rates for different groups?

Implement Bias Interrupters

1. **Start separating personality issues from skill sets for each candidate.** Remember the study that found 66% of women's performance reviews contained negative personality criticism, but only 1% of men's reviews did?⁴ Not acceptable. Personal style should be appraised separately from skills, because a narrower range of behavior often is accepted from women and people of color. For example, women may be labeled "difficult" for doing things that are accepted in majority men.⁵
2. **Level the playing field with respect to self-promotion by ensuring everyone knows they're expected to do so and that they know how.** Distribute our **Writing an Effective Self-Evaluation Guide** to help. Some groups, notably women, people of Asian descent, and first-generation professionals may be reluctant to self-promote.⁶ By equipping all employees with this worksheet, modest and introverted people can benefit as well.

3. **Don't accept global ratings without back-up. Require evidence from the evaluation period that justifies the rating.** Try: "In March, she gave X presentation in front of Y client on Z project, answered his questions effectively, and was successful in making the sale," instead of: "She's quick on her feet."
4. **Consider performance and potential separately for each candidate.** Performance and potential should be appraised separately, given the tendency for majority men to be judged on potential; others on performance.⁷
5. **Equip yourself** and others involved in the evaluation process by keeping a copy of our **Performance Evaluation Checklist** nearby when writing and reviewing performance evaluations.

To better understand the research and rationale behind the suggested bias interrupters, read and distribute our **Identifying Bias in Performance Evaluations Guide** which summarizes numerous studies.

¹ Snyder, K. (2014, August 26). The abrasiveness trap: High-achieving men and women are described differently in reviews. *Fortune*. Retrieved from <http://fortune.com/2014/08/26/performance-review-gender-bias/>

² Castilla, E. J. (2016). Achieving meritocracy in the workplace. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 57(4), 35.

³ Kalev, A., Dobbin, F., & Kelly, E. (2006). Best practices or best guesses? Assessing the efficacy of corporate affirmative action and diversity policies. *American Sociological Review*, 71(4), 589-617. doi: 10.1177/000312240607100404

⁴ Snyder, K. (2014)

⁵ Brescoll, V. L., & Uhlmann, E. L. (2005). Attitudes toward traditional and nontraditional parents. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 29(4), 436-445. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-6402.2005.00244.x; Brescoll, V. L., & Uhlmann, E. L. (2008). Can angry women get ahead? Gender, status conferral, and workplace emotion expression. *Psychological Science*, 19(3), 268-275. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02079.x; Judge, T. A., Livingston B. A., & Hurst, C. (2012). Do nice guys--and gals--really finish last? The joint effects of sex and agreeableness on income. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(2), 390-407. doi: 10.1037/a0026021; Rudman, L. A., & Fairchild, K. (2004). Reactions to counterstereotypic behavior: the role of backlash in cultural stereotype maintenance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(2), 157-176. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.87.2.157

⁶ Allen, T. D. (2006). Rewarding good citizens: The relationship between citizenship behavior, gender, and organizational rewards. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36(1), 120-143. doi: 10.1111/j.0021-9029.2006.00006.x; Deaux, K., & Major, B. (1987). Putting gender into context: An interactive model of gender-related behavior. *Psychological review*, 94(3), 369-389. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.94.3.369; Heilman M. E., & Chen J. J. (2005). Same behavior, different consequences: Reactions to men's and women's altruistic citizenship. *Behavior Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(3), 431-441. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.90.3.431; Kanter, R. M. (1977). Some effects of proportions on group life: Skewed sex ratios and responses to token women. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82(5), 965-990. doi: 10.1086/226425; Williams, J. C., & Dempsey, R. W. (2014). *What works for women at work: Four patterns working women should know*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

⁷ Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love and outgroup hate? *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(3), 429-444. doi:10.1111/0022-4537.00126; Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this "we"? Levels of collective identity and self-representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(1), 83-93. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.71.1.83; Hewstone, M. (1990). The 'ultimate attribution error'? A review of the literature on intergroup causal attribution. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 20(4), 311-335. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.2420200404