

[BIAS INTERRUPTERS] *small steps big change*

BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR MANAGERS *Tools for Hiring & Recruiting*

THE CHALLENGE

Unconscious bias can affect the hiring process in ways that hurt your company. For example, studies have shown that when comparing identical resumes, “Jamal” needed eight additional years of experiences to be considered as qualified as “Greg,” and “Jennifer” was offered \$4,000 less in starting salary than “John.”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

1. Consider the Metrics

To the extent you can, keep metrics by: 1) individual supervisor; 2) a department; and 3) the organization as a whole.

- Track the demography of the candidate pool through the entire hiring process, from initial contact, to resume review, to interviews, to hiring. Break down the demography by under-represented groups: women, people of color, people with disabilities, veterans, members of the LGBTQ+ community, etc.
- Track whether hiring qualifications are waived more often for people from certain groups than other groups.

2. Implement Bias Interrupters

Assembling a Diverse Pool

- **Insist on a diverse pool**

If the initial pool is largely homogenous, it is statistically unlikely that you will hire a diverse candidate. The odds of hiring a woman were 79 times greater if there were at least two women in the finalist pool; the odds of hiring a person of color were 194 times greater.⁴

- **Limit referral hiring & tap diverse networks**

If your existing organization is not diverse, hiring from your current employees’ social networks will replicate the lack of diversity. Instead, reach out to diverse candidates where they are. Identify job fairs, affinity networks, conferences and training programs that are aimed at women and people of color in your field and send recruiters.

- **Getting the word out**

Take a close look at your hiring announcement, signal what you’re looking for by making the necessary and desired qualifications known. Keep in mind, explicitly stating that the salary is negotiable can reduce the gender gap in applicants.⁵ Let people know that your company is a great place to work.

One company offers public talks by women at their company and writes blog posts, and social media articles highlighting the women who work there. If you don’t currently have the diversity to create that kind of content, face it head on with an article about your organization’s interest in hiring more diverse candidates and your development plan to support new hires.

Resume Review

- **Ensure resumes are graded on the same scale**
Establish clear grading rubrics and ensure that everyone grades on the same scale. Consider having each resume reviewed by two different managers and averaging the score.
- **Distribute the *Identifying Bias in Hiring Guide***
Before resumes are reviewed, have reviewers read our guide so that they are aware of the common forms of bias that can affect the hiring process.
- **Pre-commit to what's important—and require accountability**
Pre-commit in writing to what qualifications are important, both in entry-level and in lateral hiring. When qualifications are waived for a specific candidate, require an explanation of why they are no longer important—and keep track to see if there's a pattern among waiver recipients.⁶
- **Avoid inferring family obligations**
Mothers are 79% less likely to be hired than an identical candidate without children.⁷ Train people not to make inferences about whether someone is committed to their job due to parental status. Don't count "gaps in a resume" as an automatic negative. Give candidates an opportunity to explain gaps by asking about them directly during the interview stage.
- **Consider candidates from multi-tier schools**
Don't limit your search to candidates from Ivy League and other top-tier schools. This favors majority candidates from elite backgrounds and hurts people of color and first-generation professionals.⁸ Studies show that top students from lower ranked schools are often similarly successful.⁹

Interviews

- **Use structured interviews**
Ask the same list of questions to every person who is interviewed. Ask questions that are directly relevant to the job the candidate is applying for.¹⁰
- **Ask performance-based questions & use skills-based assessments**
Performance-based questions ("tell me about a time you had too many things to do and had to prioritize") are a strong predictor of how successful a candidate will be at the job.¹¹ If applicable, ask candidates to take a skills-based assessment. For example, if part of the job is analyzing data sets and making recommendations, ask the candidate to do that.
- **Develop a consistent rating scale and discount outliers**
Candidate's answers (or skills-based assessments) should be rated on a consistent scale and backed up by evidence. Average the scores granted on each relevant criterion and discount outliers.¹²
- **If "culture fit" is a criterion for hiring, provide a specific definition**
Culture fit can be important but when it's misused, it can disadvantage people of color, first-generation professionals, and women.¹³ Culture fit should not mean the "lunch test" (who you would like to have lunch with), instead make it clear what the hiring criteria is to evaluators and candidates.
- **Provide candidates and interviewers with a handout detailing expectations**
Develop an interview protocol sheet that explains to everyone what's expected from candidates in an interview. Distribute it to candidates and interviewers before interviews begin. Here's a checklist of what to include:
 - Outline the interview process with as many details as possible. If you're planning on giving them a skills assessment, say so. If it's not clear in the assessment instructions, let them know what you're looking to learn from the assessment – "We will be evaluating your ability to use Adobe Creative

Suite by asking you to make social media graphic for a fictional event.”

- Qualities your organization values because they better the work environment. Think: “culture fit.”
- Skill sets required for the position.
- Any additional qualifications your hiring team thinks are important, cross-check with your interview evaluation form.

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

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² Castilla, E. J., & Benard, S. (2010). The paradox of meritocracy in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(4), 543-576. doi: 10.2189/asqu.2010.55.4.543

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

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⁶ Norton, M.I., Vandello, J.A., & Darley, J. (2004). Casuistry and social category bias. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87, 817-831. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.87.6.817; Brewer, M.B. (1996). In-Group Favoritism: The Subtle Side of Intergroup Discrimination. *Behavioral Research and Business Ethics*, 160-170. Russell Sage, New York.; Tetlock, P. E., & Mitchell, G. (2009). Implicit bias and accountability systems: What must organizations do to prevent discrimination?. *Research in organizational behavior*, 29, 3-38. doi: 10.1016/j.riob.2009.10.002

⁷ Correll, S. J., Benard, S., & Paik, I. (2007). Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty? *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(5), 1297-1338. doi: 10.1086/511799

⁸ Rivera, L. A. (2016). *Pedigree: How elite students get elite jobs*. Princeton University Press.; Kraus, M., Torrez, B., Park, J. W., & Ghayebi, F. (2019). Evidence for the reproduction of social class in brief speech. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. DOI:10.1073/pnas.1900500116

⁹ Dale, S. B., & Krueger, A. B. (2002). Estimating the payoff to attending a more selective college: An application of selection on observables and unobservables. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117(4), 491-1527. doi: 10.1162/003355302320935089; Dale, S., & Krueger, A. B. (2014). Estimating the return to college selectivity over the career using administrative earnings data. *Journal of Human Resources*, 49(2), 323-358. doi:10.3368/jhr.49.2.323

¹⁰ Thorngate, W., Dawes, R., & Foddy, M. (2009). *Judging merit*. New York, NY, US: Psychology Press.

¹¹ Bock, L. (2015). *Work Rules!: Insights from Inside Google That Will Transform How You Live and Lead*. Hodder & Stoughton.

¹² Bock, L. (2015). *Work Rules!: Insights from Inside Google That Will Transform How You Live and Lead*. Hodder & Stoughton.; Thorngate, W., Dawes, R., & Foddy, M. (2009). *Judging merit*. New York, NY, US: Psychology Press.

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BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR HIRING & RECRUITING *Identifying Bias in Hiring Guide*

The four patterns below describe *tendencies not absolutes*. Here's what to watch out for:

Prove-It-Again! ("PIA") — Groups stereotyped as less competent often have to prove themselves over and over. "PIA groups" include women, people of color, individuals with disabilities,¹ older employees,² and first-generation professionals.³

1. **Higher standards.** When evaluating identical resumes "Jamal" needed eight additional years of experience to be considered as qualified as "Greg",⁴ and "Jennifer" was offered \$4,000 less in salary than "John."⁵
2. **"He'll go far;" "She's not ready."** Majority men tend to be judged on their potential, whereas PIA groups tend to be judged on what they have already accomplished.⁶
3. **Casuistry: education vs. experience.** When a man had more experience (when compared to women peers), people tended to choose to hire the man because he had more experience. But when the man had more education, people again chose the man because he had more education. Both education and experience counted less when women had them.⁷
4. **Elite school bias.** Over-reliance on elite educational credentials hurts first-generation professionals and candidates of color. Almost half of Harvard students are from families in the top 4% of household incomes.⁸ Top students from lower ranked schools are often as successful as students from elite schools.⁹
5. **PIA groups get horns; others a halo.** Horns=one weakness generalized into an overall negative rating. Halo=one strength generalized into a global positive rating.¹⁰
6. **"We applied the rule—until we didn't."** Objective requirements often are applied rigorously to PIA groups—but leniently (or waived entirely) for majority men.¹¹
7. **Do only the superstars survive?** Superstars may escape PIA problems that affect others.¹²

Tightrope — A narrower range of workplace behavior often is accepted from women¹³ and people of color¹⁴ ("TR groups"). First-generation professionals and modest or introverted men can face Tightrope problems, too.

1. **Leader or worker bee?** TR groups face pressure to be "worker bees" who work hard and are undemanding...but if they comply, they lack "leadership potential."¹⁵
2. **Modest, helpful, nice; dutiful daughter, office mom?** Prescriptive stereotypes create pressures on women to be mild-mannered team players—so "ambitious" is not a compliment for women and niceness may be optional for men but required of women.¹⁶
3. **Direct and assertive—or angry and abrasive?** Behavior seen as admirably direct, competitive, and assertive in majority men may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups — "tactless," "selfish," "difficult." Anger that's accepted in majority men may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups.¹⁷

4. **"She's a prima donna"; "He knows his own worth."** The kind of self-promotion that works for majority men may be seen as off-putting in TR groups. Modest men may encounter bias that reflects assumptions about how "real men" should behave. Also, strong modesty norms can make first-generation professionals, people of Asian descent, and women uncomfortable with self-promotion.¹⁸
5. **Racial stereotypes.** People of Asian descent are often stereotyped as passive and lacking in social skills; Black people as angry or too aggressive; Latinx people as hotheaded or emotional.¹⁹

The Parental Wall can affect parents of all genders—as well as employees without children.

1. **"He has a family to support."** Fathers face expectations that they will not—or should not—take time off for caregiving, or that they should get jobs because they are breadwinners.²⁰
2. **"Gaps in her resume."** People take time off for many reasons. Be consistent. If you don't penalize for military service, don't do so for taking time off for children either.²¹
3. **"Her priorities lie elsewhere" (or should!).** Mothers are stereotyped as less competent and committed and are 79% less likely to be hired than identical candidates without children.²²
4. **"I worry about her children."** Mothers who work long hours tend to be disliked and held to higher performance standards. Taxing jobs may be withheld on the assumption that mothers will not—or should not—want them.²³

Tug of War — Sometimes bias creates conflict within underrepresented groups.²⁴

1. **Tokenism.** If people feel there's only one slot per group for a prized position, group members may be pitted against each other to get it.
2. **Strategic distancing and the loyalty tax.** People from underrepresented groups may feel they need to distance themselves from others of their group, or align with the majority against their own group, in order to get ahead.
3. **Passthroughs. PIA:** People from underrepresented groups may hold members of their own groups to higher standards because, "That's what it takes to succeed here." **Tightrope:** Women may fault each other for being too masculine—or too feminine. People of color may fault each other for being "too white"—or not "white" enough.²⁵ **Parental wall:** Parents may fault each other for handling parenthood wrong—taking too much time off or too little.²⁶

Eight Powerful Bias Interrupters

1. Decide in advance what factors are important for the job.
2. Give each candidate a separate rating for each factor, then average the ratings to identify the highest ranked candidates.
3. Don't just hire friends of friends unless your networks, your org, or both, are diverse. Consider candidates from multi-tier schools, not just elite institutions.
4. Make sure to give everyone—or no one—the benefit of the doubt.
5. If you waive objective requirements, do so consistently and require an explanation.
6. Don't insist on likeability, modesty, or deference from some but not others.
7. Don't make assumptions about what mothers—or fathers—want or are able to do, and don't count “gaps in a resume” against someone without a good reason for doing so.
8. If you comment on “culture fit,” “executive presence,” or other vague concepts, start with a clear definition and keep track to ensure such concepts are applied consistently.

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