

# [ 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.”<sup>1</sup> We know now that workplaces that view themselves as being highly meritocratic often are, in fact, more biased than other organizations<sup>2</sup> and that the usual responses—one-shot diversity trainings, mentoring and networking programs—typically don’t work.<sup>3</sup>

### 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.<sup>4</sup>

- **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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>
- **Avoid inferring family obligations**  
Mothers are 79% less likely to be hired than an identical candidate without children.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> Studies show that top students from lower ranked schools are often similarly successful.<sup>9</sup>

## 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.<sup>10</sup>
- **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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>
- **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.<sup>13</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> Bertrand, M. & Mullainathan, S. (2004). Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination. *American Economic Review*, 94(4), 991-1013. doi: 10.1257/0002828042002561; Moss-Racusin, C. A., Dovidio, J. F., Brescoll, V. L., Graham, M. J., & Handelsman, J. (2012). Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(41), 16474-16479. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1211286109

<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, S. K., Hekman, D. R., & Chan, E. T. (2016). If there's only one woman in your candidate pool, there's statistically no chance she'll be hired. *Harvard Business Review*, 26(04). Retrieved from: <https://hbr.org/2016/04/if-theres-only-one-woman-in-your-candidate-pool-theres-statistically-no-chance-shell-be-hired>

<sup>5</sup> Leibbrandt, A., & List, J. A. (2014). Do women avoid salary negotiations? Evidence from a large-scale natural field experiment. *Management Science*, 61(9), 2016-2024. doi: 10.187

<sup>6</sup> 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

<sup>7</sup> 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

<sup>8</sup> 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

<sup>9</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> Rivera, L. A. (2016). *Pedigree: How elite students get elite jobs*. Princeton University Press.