BIAS INTERRUPTERS

small steps big change

BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS
Identifying Bias in Performance Evaluations Guide

The five 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, older employees, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and first-generation professionals.

1. ***"He'll crush it"; "They're not ready."*** PIA groups are judged on performance; others on potential.
2. ***"He's skilled; she's lucky."*** PIA groups' successes attributed to luck, majority men's successes attributed to skill.
3. ***"It could happen to anyone"; "She blew it."*** PIA groups' mistakes tend to be noticed more and remembered longer, whereas majority men's mistakes tend to be written off.
4. ***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. In addition, mistakes by one PIA group member may reinforce negative group stereotypes.
5. ***"We applied the rule—until we didn't."*** Objective requirements applied rigorously to PIA groups— but applied leniently or waived for majority men.
6. ***Little white lies.*** Women, people of color and people with disabilities tend to receive less specific and less honest feedback — meaning they aren't given the opportunity to improve.
7. ***Do only the superstars survive?*** Superstars may escape PIA problems that affect others.

Tightrope — A narrower range of workplace behavior often is accepted from women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community ("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."
2. ***Modest, helpful, nice; dutiful daughter, office mom?*** Prescriptive stereotypes create pressures on women to be modest, mild-mannered team players—so "ambitious" is not a compliment for women and niceness may be optional for men but required of women.
3. ***Direct and assertive—or angry and abrasive?*** Direct, competitive, and assertive in majority men may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups — "tactless," "selfish," "difficult," "abrasive." Anger that's accepted from majority men may be seen as inappropriate or even threatening in TR groups.
4. ***Office housework vs glamour work.*** TR groups report less access to career-enhancing opportunities and more "office housework"—planning parties & cleaning up; taking notes & arranging meeting times; mentoring & being the peacemaker.
5. ***"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 about how "real men" should behave. Strong modesty norms can make first-generation professionals, people of Asian descent, and women uncomfortable with self-promotion.
6. ***LGBTQIA+ employees*** may be stereotyped as "too feminine," "too masculine," or just "too gay." These kinds of judgement signal illegal discrimination under federal and state law.

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. They may be seen as deserving more pay or promotion because of their presumed family role.
2. ***"Her priorities lie elsewhere."*** Mothers are stereotyped as less competent and committed, are held to higher performance and punctuality standards—and are half as likely to be promoted as identical candidates without children.
3. ***"I worry about her children."*** Mothers who work long hours tend to be disliked and held to higher performance standards.
4. ***"It's not a good time for her."*** Opportunities or promotions may be withheld on the assumption that mothers will not—or should not—want them.
5. ***"No life."*** Employees without children may face the assumption that they can always pick up the slack because they have "no life."

Tug of War — Sometimes bias creates conflict within historically excluded groups.

1. ***Tokenism.*** If there is only one "token" woman or person of color on a team, they might be treated like they are only in the room to provide diversity, not expertise. Then, when it comes times for performance evaluations, they will get dinged for not having completed as many impressive assignments.
2. ***Strategic distancing and the loyalty tax.*** People from historically excluded 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. In performance evaluations, this might mean giving a lower rating to your own group members to avoid being accused of favoritism.
3. ***Passthroughs. PIA:*** People from historically excluded groups may hold members of their own groups to higher standards because "That's what it takes to succeed here." ***Tightrope:*** Women or LGBTQIA+ employees 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. ***Parental wall:*** Parents may fault each other for handling parenthood the wrong way—for taking too much time off or too little.

Racial Stereotypes — People of Asian descent are often stereotyped as passive and lacking in social skills; Black people as angry or too aggressive; Latino/a people as hotheaded or emotional.

Seven Powerful Bias Interrupters
1. Give 3 pieces of evidence (from the evaluation period) to explain and back up your rating.
2. Make sure to give everyone—or no one—the benefit of the doubt.
3. If you waive objective rules, do so consistently.
4. Don't insist on likeability, modesty, or deference from some but not others.
5. Don't make assumptions about what mothers—or other caregivers—want or are able to do.
6. 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.
7. Give honest feedback to everyone who is evaluated—otherwise some groups won't get notice of problems in time to correct them.