

# [ BIAS INTERRUPTERS ] *small steps big change*

## INTERRUPTING BIAS IN HIRING

### Tools for Organizations

#### 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: A 3 Step Approach

##### 1. Use Metrics

Businesses use metrics to assess whether they have progressed towards any strategic goal. Metrics can help you pinpoint where bias exists, and assess the effectiveness of the measures you’ve taken. (Whether metrics are made public will vary from company to company, and from metric to metric.)

- 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 LGBT community, etc.
- Track whether hiring qualifications are waived more often for people from certain groups than other groups.

Keep metrics by: 1) individual supervisor; 2) a department; and 3) the organization as a whole.

##### 2. Implement Bias Interrupters

All bias interrupters should apply both to written evaluations and in meetings, where relevant. Because every organization is different, not all interrupters will be relevant. Consider this a menu.

To understand the research and rationale behind the suggested bias interrupters, read our **Identifying Bias in Hiring Worksheet (2-page version or with citations)** which summarizes hundreds of studies.

###### A. Empower and Appoint

- **Empower people involved in the hiring process to spot and interrupt bias** by using our **Identifying Bias in Hiring Worksheet**. Read and distribute.
- **Appoint Bias Interrupters**—HR professionals or team members trained to spot bias, and involve them at every step of the hiring process.

<sup>1</sup> Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Castilla, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006

# [ BIAS INTERRUPTERS ] *small steps big change*

## **B. Assembling a Diverse Pool**

- **Limit referral hiring (“friends of friends”)**

If your existing organization is not diverse, hiring from your current employees’ social networks will replicate the lack of diversity.

- **Tap diverse networks**

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**

If diverse candidates are not applying to your jobs, get the word out that your company is a great place to work for women and people of color. One company offers public talks by women at their company and writes blog posts, white papers, and social media articles highlighting the women who work there.

- **Change the wording of your job postings**

Using words like “leader” and “competitive” will tend to reduce the number of women who apply.<sup>4</sup> Explicitly stating that the salary is negotiable can reduce the gender gap in applicants.<sup>5</sup>

- **Insist on a diverse pool**

If you use a headhunter, tell him or her you expect a diverse pool, not just one or two diverse candidates. 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>6</sup>

## **C. Resume Review**

- **Distribute the Identifying Bias in Hiring Worksheet**

Before resumes are reviewed, have reviewers read our Worksheet 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 for whom requirements are waived.<sup>7</sup>

- **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.

- **Avoid inferring family obligations**

A candidate’s family situation should have nothing to do with your job search. Avoid inferring family obligations from a candidate’s resume and 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**

---

4 Gaucher, Friesen, & Kay, 2011

5 Leibbrandt & List, 2012

6 Johnson, Hekman, & Chan, 2016

7 Norton, Vandello, & Darley, 2004; Brewer, 1996; Tetlock, & Mellers, 2011

# [ BIAS INTERRUPTERS ] *small steps big change*

Don't limit your search to candidates from Ivy League and top-tier schools. This favors majority candidates from elite backgrounds and hurts people of color and class migrants (professionals from blue-collar backgrounds)<sup>8</sup>. Studies show that top students from lower ranked schools are often similarly successful.<sup>9</sup>

- **Try using “blind auditions” (unless you’re actively recruiting diverse candidates)**

If women and candidates of color are dropping out of the pool at the resume review stage, consider removing demographic info from resumes before review. This way, candidates can be evaluated based solely on their qualifications. Downside: if you’re actively trying to recruit women and candidates of color, this strategy will not apply.

## **D. 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**

Performance-based questions, or behavioral interview 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>

- **Administer skills-based screening**

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**

Does someone fit? Culture fit can be important but when it’s misused, it can disadvantage people of color, class migrants, and women.<sup>13</sup> Culture fit should not mean the “lunch test” (who you would like to have lunch with). Questions about sports may feel exclusionary to women, and questions about hobbies may make class migrants feel less at home if they did not grow up, for example, playing golf.

- **“Gaps in a resume” should not be automatic disqualification**

Mothers are 79% less likely to be hired than an identical candidate without children.<sup>14</sup> Train people not to make inferences about whether someone is committed to their job due to parental status.

- **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 for review.

---

8 Rivera, 2015

9 Dale & Krueger, 2002; 2011

10 Thorngate, 2009

11 Bock, 2015

12 Bock, 2015; Thorngate, 2009

13 Rivera, 2015

14 Correl & Paik; 2007

# [ BIAS INTERRUPTERS ] *small steps big change*

## 3. Repeat as needed

- **Return to your key metrics.** Did the bias interrupters produce change?
- **If you don't see change,** you may need to implement a stronger bias interrupter, or you may be targeting the wrong place in the hiring process.
- **Use an iterative process** until your metrics improve.