



Being Conscious of Your Unconscious Bias: Tips for Recognizing Bias in Your Recruiting Strategy

Did you know more than 60% of CEOs are over six feet tall? Or that blondes earn 7% more annually than brunettes or redheads?

As any recruiter or hiring manager knows, certain applicants stand out against others. Hopefully it's because their experience fits the requirements. Perhaps the candidate attended your alma mater or has worked for the same organization as you once did. **Maybe you can't quite put your finger on it, but your intuition tells you they just may, or may not be, a good fit and your reasoning for this is based only on a sense of yours. This is what unconscious bias is.**

Unconscious biases can be formed from one's culture, upbringing, and personal or professional experiences. They are the brain's shortcut to quick decision making. Unfortunately, biases in hiring decisions and/or succession planning is not a new phenomenon. Despite diversity training and interview guidelines, highly qualified candidates are often passed over during the recruiting cycle due to the unconscious bias of the hiring manager.

Unconscious bias works on the other side of the table, too. Candidates who cannot visualize themselves doing a job due to a poorly worded job description or a misinformed perception of the position or company, will likely take themselves out of contention before they even apply when in fact they may be a great fit.

Impact of Bias

Unconscious bias has a ripple effect in the workplace. For many jobseekers or those looking to be promoted, the process generally consists of submitting a resume or application, waiting for contact via an initial telephone screen or e-mail, and interviewing with one or a group of hiring managers. These types of interviews rarely say anything about how a candidate might realistically perform, yet are the norm when it comes to hiring. Worse yet, a group setting interview generally persuades others into choosing which candidate they like the best. Although these individuals may have the best of intentions, an unstructured interview process can reinforce unconscious bias rather than recognize and work around it.

Possible discriminatory practices, limited collaboration amongst staff, lack of interpersonal working relationships, and a potential lack of diversity within your workforce, will without a doubt, negatively influence the opportunities for your organization to flourish.

So... What can YOU do try to reduce possible bias?

Challenge yourself to be more self-aware by trying to recognize and acknowledge unconscious bias within your own thought patterns.

- Talk about unconscious bias in the workplace and how it can affect the hiring process, and question others when you perceive there to be an identifiable bias.
- Look for patterns or consistent similarities within the candidates that have been hired
- Craft job descriptions with neutrality in mind careful not to deter potentially qualified candidates
- Consider your sourcing. If you post on job boards or in talent pools known to attract one type of candidate, widen your search net. Post to multiple job boards to get the broadest possible response to your job description.
- Remove names and other cues which may suggest gender or ethnicity from resumes to avoid possible bias at the outset.
- Consider a telephone screen to learn about a candidate free from visual cues.

- Think about a trial project or other blind skills assessment to assess the capability of potential candidates. For final candidates, an assignment similar to what they can expect to do on the job is a powerful way of determining the type of work product they will produce versus a verbal interview alone.
- Develop a bank of interview questions that are given to each candidate in the same order. Following a structured interview procedure allows the brain to slow down and process the responses.
- Move away from group interviews to avoid supportive bias situations and obtain thoughtful feedback from each interviewer.
- Keep records of hiring managers who show, over time, that they are less likely to use bias when interviewing or offering feedback.

Unconscious bias can be quite common. Despite this natural inclination, try using strategies to help you and your team make informed hiring choices that build a more skilled, creative, adaptive, and engaged workforce.

When you have questions about incorporating unconscious bias strategies into your hiring processes to reduce bias and boost diversity, contact us at McCloskey Partners, LLC for skilled guidance.

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