

Ready, set, recruit

July 2014

By: Arin N. Reeves, J.D., Ph.D.

Nextions

Eliminate unconscious biases when reviewing resumes

The bad news: In the past few years, several groundbreaking studies have demonstrated the extent to which unconscious bias can impact how we recruit and who we hire regardless of our conscious commitment to diversity and inclusion.

The good news: Once we recognize that unconscious biases creep into our recruiting and hiring practices without our knowledge, we can tweak our practices with simple changes that can reduce the impact of bias on recruiting and hiring decisions.

As the official recruiting season for the next hiring cycle gets under way, I encourage you to pay special attention to one aspect of your recruiting and hiring process that is especially vulnerable to unconscious biases: candidate interviews. If you actively examine and interrupt the ways in which your organization's interviewing processes may be impacted by unconscious biases, you can tweak the processes to reduce the impact of bias in your recruiting and hiring efforts.

Every research study we have done, from initial campus interviews to follow-up organizational interviews, has unequivocally indicated that unconscious biases play a significant role in how candidates are implicitly perceived and evaluated by interviewers. While interviewers are consciously committed to diversity and inclusion, unconscious biases may be silently working in the background to steer them away from diversity and pull them back into their unconscious comfort zones, where familiarity and status quo reign supreme.

I hope the following interviewing tips will make your overall recruiting and hiring processes this year more AEI: active, effective and inclusive.

Increase your awareness

Recognize that everyone has biases. Increasing awareness of your own biases makes you more effective in evaluating resumes, candidates and hiring decisions.

Interrupt your assumptions

Ask yourself how much you like a candidate after scanning and reviewing his or her resume.



Then, put the resume aside and write down what you think you know (i.e., characteristics, abilities, talents, personality, etc.) about this candidate. Check your “knowledge” against the resume to see how much you “assumed.”

Substitute a different identity for a candidate on his or her resume, and see if the same criteria trigger different assumptions and perceptions.

For example, if you reacted positively to a male candidate being an athlete, would you feel equally positive about the athlete characteristic if the candidate was a woman?

Listen actively and empathetically

During the interview, take notes on the back of the resume or on a blank piece of paper.

Taking notes directly on the resume will unconsciously remind you of your biases and prevent you from actively listening to the candidate.

Try to ask at least one follow-up question to each response a candidate gives before you evaluate the response.

Recognize that the interviewer sets the tone in an interview, not the interviewee. If the tone is flat or disturbed in the interview, ask yourself what you could be doing to create that environment in the interview.

Create connections

Either prior to or at the start of the interview, find a point of commonality with the candidate and actively create a connection through that commonality. Return to that connection whenever the interview feels disconnected or flat.

Maintain eye contact and smile consciously. (We smile naturally when we feel similar to someone regardless of whether we like them or not, and we don't smile when we feel different than someone regardless of whether we like them or not.)

Balance individuality with group identity

Although diversity and inclusion focuses on group identities, interview candidates as individuals, not as members of a group.

After you evaluate candidates, revisit the candidates' interviews, and see if you would have felt the same way about their responses if you substituted their group identity for a different identity.

Would you view a Hispanic candidate listing Spanish fluency as a skill in the same way as you would view a Caucasian candidate or even an Asian candidate who listed Spanish fluency as a skill?

The bad news is that unconscious bias in interviewing prevents you from recruiting and hiring the best by ensuring that you will only recruit and hire the best reflections of the status quo.

The good news is that this unconscious bias can be interrupted using the tips outlined above, and interrupting this bias leads to excellence in how and who you hire.