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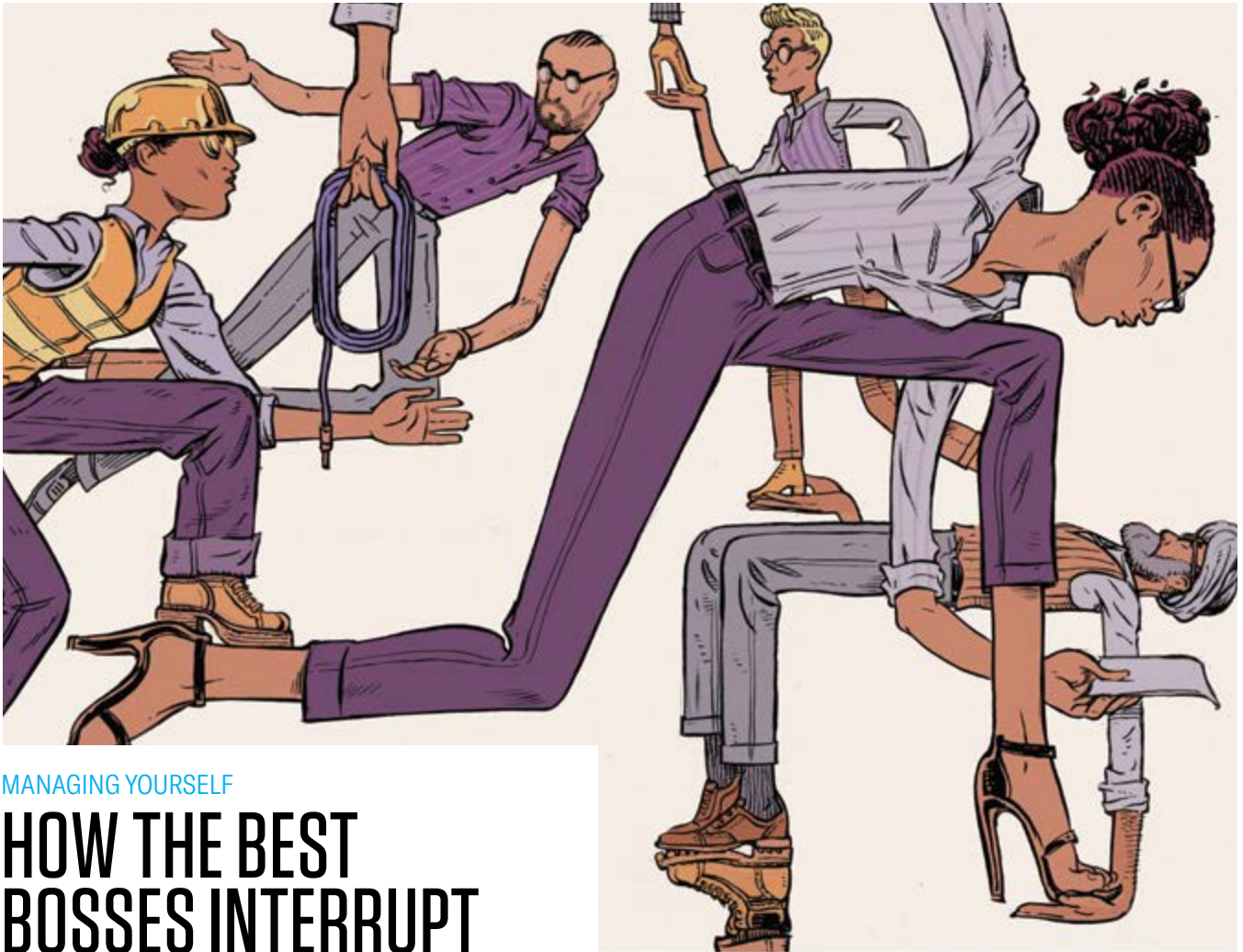
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MANAGING YOURSELF

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COMPANIES SPEND MILLIONS on antibias training each year. The goal is to create workforces that are more inclusive, and thereby more innovative and more effective. Studies show that well-managed diverse groups outperform homogeneous ones and are more committed, have higher collective intelligence, and are better at making decisions and solving problems. But research also shows that bias prevention programs rarely deliver. And some companies don't invest

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in them at all. So how can you, as an individual leader, make sure your team is including and making the most of diverse voices? Can one person fix what an entire organization can't?

Although bias itself is devilishly hard to eliminate, it is not as difficult to *interrupt.* In the decades we've spent researching and advising people on how to build and manage diverse work groups, we've identified ways that managers can counter bias without spending a lot of time—or political capital.

The first step is to understand the four distinct ways bias plays out in everyday work interactions: (1) *Prove it again:* Some groups have to prove themselves more than others do. (2) *Tightrope:* A narrower range of behaviors is accepted from some groups than from others. (3) *Maternal wall:* Women with children see their commitment and competence questioned or face disapproval for being too career focused. (4) *Tug-of-war:* Disadvantaged groups find themselves pitted against one another because of differing strategies for assimilating—or refusing to do so.

The second step is to recognize when and where these forms of bias arise day-to-day. In the absence of an organizational directive, it's easy to let them go unaddressed. That's a mistake. You can't be a great manager without becoming a *bias interrupter.* Here's how to do it.

PICKING YOUR PEOPLE

Bias in hiring has been extensively documented. In one study, "Jamal" needed eight more years of experience than "Greg" to be seen as equally qualified. Another found that men from elite backgrounds were called back for interviews more than 12 times as often as identical candidates from non-elite backgrounds. Other studies have found that women, LGBT+ candidates, people with disabilities, women in headscarves, and older people are less likely to be hired than their peers.

Fairness in hiring is only the first step toward achieving diversity, but it's an important one. Here are four simple actions that will yield the best candidates by eliminating artificial advantages:

1 Insist on a diverse pool. Whether you're working with recruiters or doing the hiring yourself, make it clear from the outset that you want true diversity, not just one female or minority candidate. Research shows that the odds of hiring a woman are 79 times as great if at least two women are in the finalist pool, while the odds of hiring a nonwhite candidate are 194 times as great with at least two finalist minority applicants. For example, when Kori Carew launched the Shook Scholars Institute at Shook, Hardy & Bacon, she designed it to bring a diverse mix of students into the law firm and offered career development and mentoring that prompted many of them to apply for summer associate positions.

2 Establish objective criteria, define "culture fit," and demand accountability. Implicit biases around culture fit often lead to homogeneity. Too often it comes down to shared backgrounds and interests that out-groups, especially first-generation professionals, won't have. That's why it's important to clarify objective criteria for any open role and to rate all applicants using the same rubric. When one insurance company began hiring in this way, it ended up offering jobs to 46% more minority candidates than before. Even if your organization doesn't mandate this approach, ensure that everyone on your team takes it. Write down the specific qualifications required for a particular position so that everyone can focus on them when reviewing résumés and conducting interviews. For example, when Alicia Powell was managing chief counsel at PNC Bank, she made a point of listing the qualities that would make new team members successful in their roles: proactive in managing risk, self-disciplined, patient, customer focused, and independent. Powell shared this information with the rest of her team and candidates, ensuring that everyone was on the same page. You should hold people accountable in the same way. Waive criteria rarely, and require an explanation for those exceptions; then keep track of long-term waiving trends. Research shows that objective rules tend to be applied rigorously to out-groups but leniently to in-groups.

3 Limit referral hiring. If your organization is homogeneous, hiring from within or from employees' social networks will only perpetuate that. So reach out to women and minority groups. Google partners with historically black colleges such as Spelman and Florida A&M University and with Hispanic-serving institutions such as New Mexico State and the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez. As an individual leader, you can work with the same organizations or recruit from similar ones in your industry or local community.

4 Structure interviews with skills-based questions. Ask every person interviewed the same questions and make sure that each question directly relates to the desired knowledge and skills you've outlined. Rate the answers immediately—that will allow you to compare candidates fairly on a preestablished rubric and prevent favoritism. You should also use skills assessments: Rather than ask "How comfortable are you with Excel?" say "Here's a data set. How would you find out X?" For more-complex skills, such as project management, pose a problem or a task that candidates are likely to encounter on

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the job and ask them to describe in detail how they would handle it.

MANAGING DAY-TO-DAY

Even good leaders sometimes fall into bad habits when it comes to the daily management of their teams. Women report doing about 20% more "office housework," on average, than their white male counterparts, whether it's literal housework (arranging for lunch or cleaning up after a meeting), administrative tasks (finding a place to meet or prepping a PowerPoint), emotional labor ("He's upset—can you fix it?"), or undervalued work (mentoring summer interns). This is especially true in high-status, high-stakes workplaces. Women engineers report a "worker bee" expectation at higher rates than white men do, and women of color report it at higher rates than white women do. Meanwhile, glamour work that leads to networking and promotion opportunities, such as project leadership and presentations, goes disproportionately to white men. When the consultancy GapJumpers analyzed the performance reviews of a tech company client, it found that women employees were 42% more likely than their male colleagues to be limited to lower-impact projects; as a result, far fewer of them rose to more-senior roles.

Meetings are another problem area. Research shows that men are more likely than women to dominate the conversation, and that whereas men with expertise tend to be *more* influential, women with expertise tend to be *less* so. Our study of lawyers found that half of women report being interrupted in meetings at a higher rate than their male peers are. Another study found that in meetings that included more men than women (a common scenario), women typically participated about 25% less often than their male coworkers did. Double standards and stereotypes play out whenever diverse identities come together. Is a woman "emotional," or a black man "angry," while a white male is "passionate"? We once heard from a woman scientist that she was sharply criticized as "aggressive" when she brought up a flaw in a male colleague's analysis; after that she felt she needed to just "bring in baked goods and be agreeable." A black tech company executive we know told us about a meeting during which she said little while the only other woman, an Asian-American, said a lot. But she later heard that people thought she had "dominated" the conversation while her Asian-American peer had been "very quiet."

Unsure whether this sort of thing is happening on your team? Start tracking assignments and airtime in meetings. Use our free online tools (at http://biasinterrupters.org/toolkits/orgtools/) to find out which work done by your group is higher- or lower-profile and who's doing what. For meetings, pay attention: Who's at the table? Who's doing the talking? Is someone taking notes when he or she could be leading the conversation? If you find a problematic dynamic, here are some ways to change it:

1 **Set up a rotation for office housework, and don't ask for volunteers.** "I always give these tasks to women because they do them well/volunteer" is a common refrain. This dynamic reflects an environment in which men suffer few consequences for bypassing or doing a poor job on low-value work, while women who do the same are seen as "prima donnas" or incompetent. Particularly when administrative staff is limited, a rotation helps level the playing field and makes it clear that everyone is expected to contribute to office housework. If you ask for volunteers, women and people of color will feel powerful pressure to prove they are "team players" by raising their hands.

2 **Mindfully design and assign people to high-value projects.** Sometimes we hear "It's true, I keep giving the plum assignments to a small group—but they're the only ones with the skills to do them!" According to Joyce Norcini, formerly general counsel for Nokia Siemens Networks, if you have only a tight circle of people you trust to handle meaningful work, you're in trouble. Her advice: Reconsider who is capable of doing what these important jobs require; chances are someone not on your usual list is. You may need to move outside your comfort zone and be more involved in the beginning, but having a broader range of trained people will serve you well in the end.

3 **Acknowledge the importance of lower-profile contributions.** "Diversity" hires may lag behind their majority-member peers because they're doing extra stuff that doesn't get them extra credit. If your organization truly prioritizes inclusion, then walk your talk. Many bosses who say they value diversity programming and mentorship don't actually take it into account when promotion or comp time becomes available. Integrating these

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contributions into individual goal setting and evaluating them during performance reviews is a simple start. And don't be afraid to think big: A law partner we know did such a great job running the woman's initiative that the firm begged her to stay on for another year. She said she would if the firm's bosses made her an equity partner. They did.

4 Respond to double standards, stereotyping, "manterruption," "bropriating," and "whipeating." Pay close attention to the way people on your team talk about their peers and how they behave in group settings. For example, men tend to interrupt women far more often than the other way around; displays of confidence and directness *decrease* women's influence but *increase* men's. If a few people are dominating the conversation in a meeting, address it directly. Create and enforce a policy for interruptions. Keep track of those who drown others out and talk with them privately about it, explaining that you think it's important to hear everyone's contributions. Similarly, when you see instances of "bropriating" or "whipeating"—that is, majority-group members taking or being given credit for ideas that women and people of color originally offered—call it out. We know two women on the board of directors of a public company who made a pact: When a man tried to claim one of their ideas, the other would say something like "Yes, I liked Sandra's point, and I'm glad you did too." Once they did this consistently, bropriating stopped.

5 Ask people to weigh in. Women, people of Asian descent, and first-generation professionals report being brought up with a

"modesty mandate" that can lead them to hold back their thoughts or speak in a tentative, deferential way. Counter this by extending an invitation: "Camilla, you have experience with this—what are we missing? Is this the best course of action?"

6 Schedule meetings inclusively. Business meetings should take place in the office, not at a golf course, a university club, or your favorite concert venue. Otherwise you're giving an artificial advantage to people who feel more comfortable in those settings or whose personal interests overlap with yours. Whenever possible, stick to working hours, or you risk putting caregivers and others with a demanding personal life at a disadvantage. Joan once noticed that no mothers were participating in a faculty appointment process because all the meetings were held at 5:30 PM. When she pointed this out to the person leading them, the problem was fixed immediately. This colleague had a stay-at-home wife and simply hadn't thought about the issue before.

7 Equalize access proactively. Bosses may meet with some employees more regularly than others, but it's important to make sure this is driven by business demands and team needs rather than by what individuals want or expect. White men may feel more comfortable walking into your office or asking for time. The same may be true of people whose interests you share. When Emily Gould Sullivan, who has led the employment law functions for two *Fortune* 500 retail companies, realized that she was routinely accepting "walking meeting" invitations from a team member who was, like her, interested in fitness, she made a point of reaching out to others to equalize access.

DEVELOPING YOUR TEAM

Your job as a manager is not only to get the best performance out of your team but also to encourage the development of each member. That means giving fair performance reviews, equal access to high-potential assignments, and

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promotions and pay increases to those who have earned them. Unfortunately, as we've noted, some groups need to prove themselves more than others, and a broader range of behaviors is often accepted from white men. For example, our research shows that assertiveness and anger are less likely to be accepted from people of color, and expectations that women will be modest, self-effacing, and nice often affect performance assessments. One study found that 66% of women's reviews contained comments about their personalities, but only 1% of men's reviews did. These double standards can have a real impact on equity outcomes. PayScale found that men of color were 25% less likely than their white peers to get a raise when they asked for one. And gender norms stunt careers for women. PayScale found that when women and men start their careers on the same rung of the professional ladder, by the time they are halfway (aged 30–44), 47% of men are managers or higher, but only 40% of women are. These numbers just worsen over time: Only 3% of the women make it to the C-suite, compared with 8% of the men.

Take these steps to avoid common pitfalls in evaluations and promotions:

1 Clarify evaluation criteria and focus on performance, not potential. Don't arrive at a rating without thinking about what predetermined benchmarks you've used to get there. Any evaluation should include enough data for a third party to understand the justification for the rating. Be specific. Instead of "She writes well," say "She can write an effective summary judgment motion under a tight deadline."

2 Separate performance from potential and personality from skill sets. In-groups tend to be judged on their potential and given the benefit of the doubt, whereas out-groups have to show they've nailed it. If your company values potential, it should be assessed separately, with factors clearly outlined for evaluators and employees. Then track whether there's a pattern as to who has "potential." If so, try relying on performance alone for everyone or get even more concrete with what you're measuring. Personality comments are no different; be wary of double standards that affect women and people of color when it comes to showing emotion or being congenial. Policing women into femininity doesn't help anyone, and—as courts have pointed out—it's direct evidence of sex discrimination. If that's not motivation enough, evaluators can miss critical skills by focusing on personality. It's more valuable, and accurate, to say someone is a strong collaborator who can manage projects across multiple departments than to say "She's friendly and gets along with everyone."

3 Level the playing field with respect to self-promotion. The modesty mandate mentioned above prevents many people in out-groups from writing effective self-evaluations or defending themselves at review time. Counter that by giving everyone you manage the tools to evaluate their own performance. Be clear that it's acceptable, and even expected, to advocate for oneself. A simple two-pager can help overcome the modesty mandate and cue majority men (who tend toward overconfidence) to provide concrete evidence for their claims.

4 Explain how training, promotion, and pay decisions will be made, and follow those rules. As the chair of her firm's women's initiative, one lawyer we know developed a strategy to ensure that all candidates for promotion were considered fairly. She started with a clear outline of what was needed to advance and then assigned every eligible employee (already anonymized) to one of three groups: green (meets the objective metrics), yellow (is close), and red (doesn't). Then she presented the color-coded list to the rest of the evaluation team. By anonymizing the data and pregrouping the candidates by competencies, she ensured that no one was forgotten or recommended owing to in-group favoritism.

All the evaluators were forced to stick to the predetermined benchmarks, and as a result, they tapped the best candidates. (Those in the yellow category were given advice about how to move up to green.) When it comes to promotions, there may be limits to what you can do as an individual manager, but you should push for transparency on the criteria used. When they are explicit, it's harder to bend the rules for in-group members.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE is crucial, but it doesn't happen overnight. Fortunately, you can begin with all these recommendations *today*. ⬡

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