



LEAN IN

50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

An activity that helps you combat bias against women at work

Bias in reviews and promotions



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50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

An activity that helps you combat the biases women face at work

TO GET STARTED:

Download our [Moderator Guide & Speaker Notes](#) to prepare for your session, find links to necessary handouts, and learn what to say.

Use “Slide Show” mode to click on links in this presentation or right click to access the hyperlink when not in “Slide Show” mode.

PRESENTATION STARTS
ON THE NEXT SLIDE

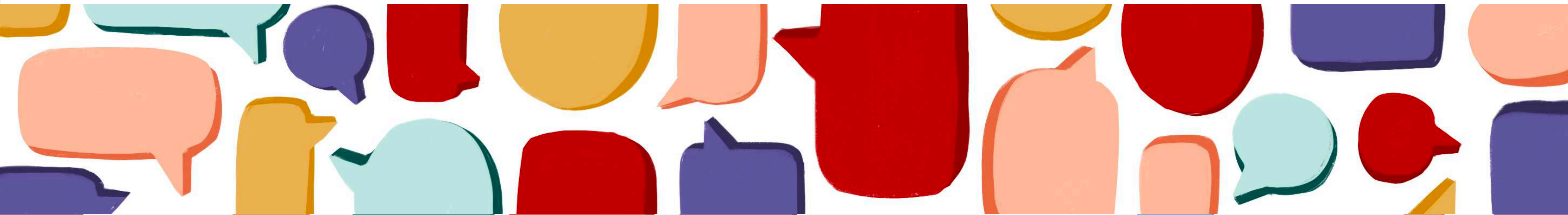


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An activity that helps you combat the biases women face at work

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Welcome

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

LEAN IN

LeanIn.Org helps women achieve their ambitions
and works to create an equal world.

LeanIn.Org thanks our partners for their valuable contributions to this program:



WHY WE ARE HERE

- ▶ Bias—whether deliberate or unconscious—is holding women back in the workplace.
- ▶ It makes it harder for women to get hired and promoted and negatively impacts their day-to-day work experiences.
- ▶ This hurts women and makes it hard for companies to level the playing field.
- ▶ Today, we'll learn concrete steps to address the biases women face head-on.

TODAY'S AGENDA

- 1 Set the tone
- 2 Learn about biases women face at work
- 3 Dive into specific situations and solutions
- 4 Finish with a closing activity

Setting the tone

- ➊ Women face biases due to their race, sexuality, and other aspects of their identity.
- ➋ Intersectionality can be at play in any situation.
- ➌ We all fall into bias traps.
- ➍ Knowing that bias exists isn't enough—commit to take action.

GROUND RULES FOR TODAY

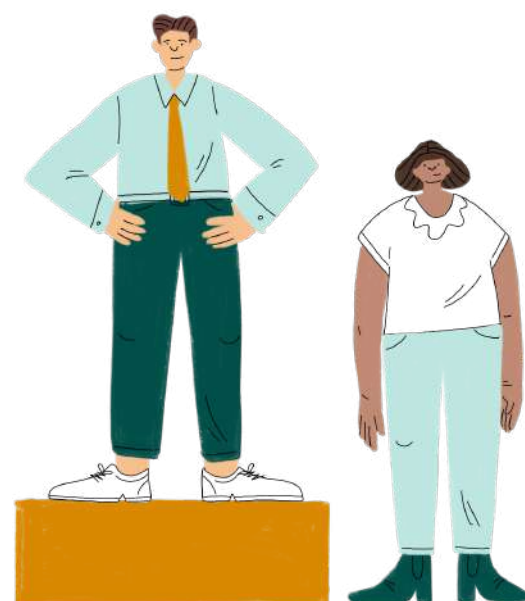
- ➊ Some situations may be difficult to hear.
- ➋ Stories should be anonymous.
- ➌ Give people the benefit of the doubt.

Overview: Common types of biases women face at work

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Likeability bias



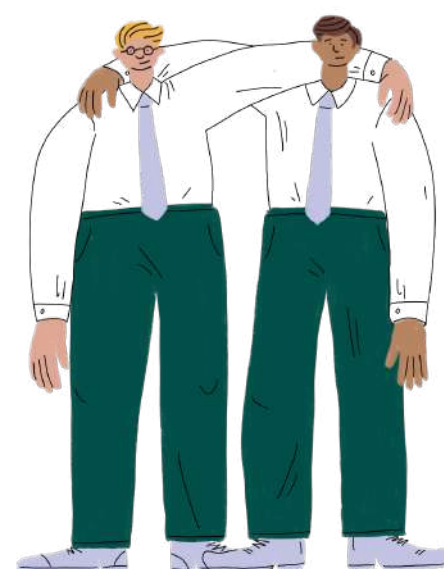
Performance bias



Maternal bias



Attribution bias



Affinity bias



Intersectionality



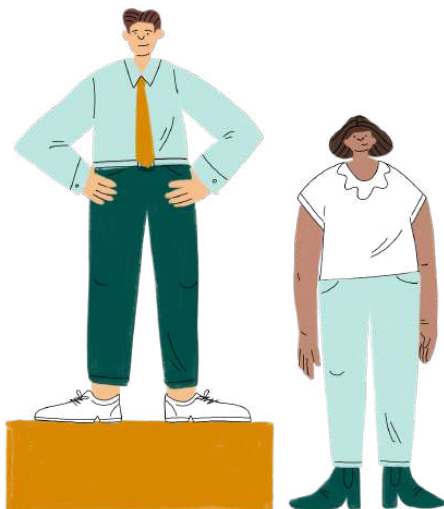
Watch the video:
"Introduction to the Common
Biases Women Experience"

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Likeability bias

Likeability bias is rooted in age-old expectations. We expect men to be assertive, so when they lead, it feels natural. We expect women to be kind and communal, so when they assert themselves, we like them less.¹¹



Performance bias

Performance bias is based on deep-rooted—and incorrect—assumptions about women’s and men’s abilities. We tend to underestimate women’s performance and overestimate men’s.⁹



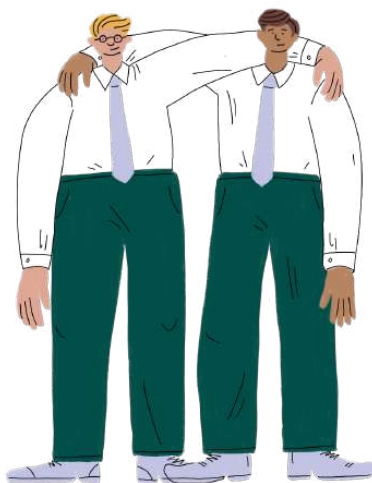
Maternal bias

Motherhood triggers false assumptions that women are less committed to their careers—and even less competent.¹²



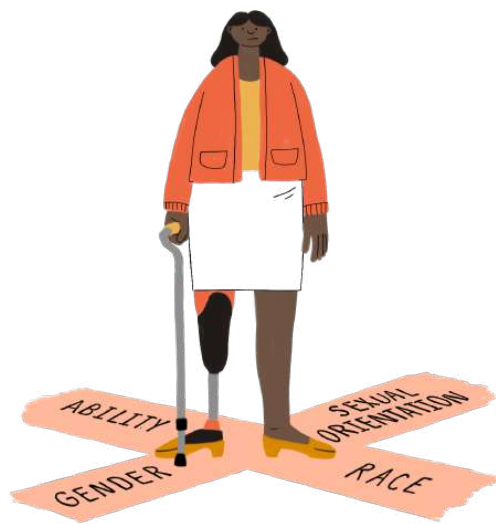
Attribution bias

Attribution bias is closely linked to performance bias. Because we see women as less competent than men, we tend to give them less credit for accomplishments and blame them more for mistakes.¹⁰



Affinity bias

Affinity bias is what it sounds like: we gravitate toward people like ourselves in appearance, beliefs, and background. And we may avoid or even dislike people who are different from us.¹³



Intersectionality

Bias isn’t limited to gender. Women can also experience biases due to their race, sexual orientation, a disability, or other aspects of their identity.

OVERVIEW: MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are comments and actions that demean or dismiss someone based on their gender, race, or other aspects of their identity.

Some groups of women experience them even more often:

- ▶ Black women are nearly 2.5x more likely than white women to hear someone at work express surprise about their language skills or other abilities
- ▶ Lesbian and bisexual women and women with disabilities are far more likely than other women to hear demeaning remarks about themselves or others like them



Icebreakers

For every 100 men promoted to manager,
how many Black women are promoted?

ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

For every 100 men promoted to manager, how many Black women are promoted?

ANSWER

Only 58 Black women.³⁹²

How much more likely are men to ask for a raise than women?

ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

How much more likely are men to ask for a raise than women?

ANSWER

This is a trick question. Women negotiate for raises and promotions as often as men do.³⁹³

Workplace situations

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Move into your small group or breakout room. Everyone should have a copy of the presentation you will use for discussion.
- 2 Select one person to read the situation and **WHY IT MATTERS**.
- 3 As a group, discuss what you would do in this situation.
- 4 After 3-5 minutes of discussion, read **WHAT TO DO** and **WHY IT HAPPENS**.
- 5 Continue through as many situations as you can in the time allotted.

REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

You're on a team doing performance reviews and notice that a lot of women get feedback on their speaking style.

WHY IT MATTERS

Criticisms like this can prevent qualified women from advancing, which hurts both them and your company.

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You're on a team doing performance reviews and notice that a lot of women get feedback on their speaking style.

WHAT TO DO

When you notice this pattern, point it out. Explain this is a common bias against women and **WHY IT HAPPENS**. Suggest that the group focus on the substance of what people say, not their speaking style.

Longer term, recommend that your company use standardized criteria for performance reviews, which will reduce subjective opinions. Consider recommending anti-bias training for employees involved in the review process. When people understand how bias impacts their decision-making, they are able to make more objective decisions.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Studies show that women often get negative feedback on their speaking style, while men do not.⁵² If women are confident and assertive, they can be criticized for speaking too loudly or often. But if they are quieter, they are more likely to be told that they need to speak more confidently and assertively.⁵³ For some groups of women, no matter how they speak, people project stereotypes onto them: Asian women are more likely to be criticized for being too quiet, while Black women and Latinas are more often labeled angry or loud.⁵⁴

Rooted in likeability bias

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Rooted in likeability bias

You're in a meeting to discuss performance reviews and notice that men are described as "strategic" and "visionary," while women are "hard workers" or "good team players."

WHY IT MATTERS

How we describe people matters—and can unfairly influence performance reviews.³⁹⁷ In this situation, it's not hard to imagine men getting the inside track on promotions and raises.

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WHAT TO DO

Point out the pattern and explain **WHY IT MATTERS**. You can also talk to HR about creating a broad checklist of leadership attributes with concrete examples of what they look like in practice. Expanding the definition of a good leader will help with inclusivity, and using a standardized checklist to evaluate candidates can help remove bias from the review process.³⁹⁸

WHY IT HAPPENS

Gender stereotypes influence the words we use. Even when women and men produce similar results, we often talk about them differently. We tend to use words associated with leadership like "driven," "big thinker," and "visionary" to describe men. In contrast, we often describe women with communal language like "team player," "friendly," and "committed," not words that speak to skill or impact.³⁹⁹

Your company announces its latest round of promotions. Nearly everyone moving up is a man.

WHY IT MATTERS

This imbalance may signal bias in how your company evaluates employees for promotion—which means women may be missing out on valuable career opportunities and your company may be failing to get the strongest candidates into leadership positions. This is a widespread problem in corporate America: on average, women are promoted at lower rates than men, while Black women and Latinas are promoted at even lower rates than women overall.⁴⁰⁰

Your company announces its latest round of promotions.
Nearly everyone moving up is a man.

WHAT TO DO

If you're involved with reviews, seize the opportunity to make the process more fair. Suggest that your company set detailed review criteria up front and then stick to them.⁴⁰¹ Consider using a rating scale (say, from 1 to 5) and ask reviewers to provide specific examples of what the employee did to earn each score.⁴⁰² You can also suggest that your company set diversity targets for promotions, then track outcomes and monitor progress, which can also help move the numbers.⁴⁰³ If you're not part of reviews, you can still make these suggestions to your manager.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Multiple forms of bias may contribute to a workplace in which fewer women are promoted. People tend to see women as less talented and competent than men, even when they're equally capable.⁴⁰⁴ Because of this, women are less likely to get credit for successes and more likely to be blamed for failures.⁴⁰⁵

Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias

In a meeting about promotions, someone questions whether a Latina candidate has the skills for a manager role.

WHY IT MATTERS

If your Latina colleague is in fact qualified for the promotion, this comment is a problem. It could lead to her being ruled out unfairly, which would be a loss for her and the company. Moments like this contribute to a bigger problem: For every 100 men promoted into manager roles, only 71 Latinas are.⁴⁰⁶ This “broken rung” on the ladder to leadership means there are too few Latina managers to promote into senior roles.

In a meeting about promotions, someone questions whether a Latina candidate has the skills for a manager role.

Intersectional card

WHAT TO DO

Ask your colleague for concrete examples of why they think she lacks the required skills. If he doesn't offer much evidence, say so: "I don't see a problem with her skills." You can also check her skill set against the list of criteria for the role. If she meets all or most of the criteria, that can help settle the matter. Establishing clear criteria for performance reviews and promotions can help minimize biased decision making.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Latinas face several layers of bias regarding their skills. As women, they are often stereotyped as less competent than men. As Latinx Americans, they tend to be stereotyped as less intelligent than white people.⁴⁰⁷ And as Latinas, they tend to be stereotyped as very family-oriented and more suited to supporting roles, even if they are qualified for more senior positions.⁴⁰⁸

Rooted in performance bias

REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

A colleague recommends a man for promotion over a woman, saying, “I’m not sure about her long-term commitment. She just got engaged, and I think she wants to have kids soon.”

WHY IT MATTERS

When coworkers make assumptions about a woman’s commitment to work based on what’s happening in her personal life, it unfairly limits her opportunities—and could cause your company to miss out on a highly committed candidate. It’s also illegal in many states to consider a person’s marital or parental status as a factor in promotions.

A colleague recommends a man for promotion over a woman, saying, “I’m not sure about her long-term commitment. She just got engaged, and I think she wants to have kids soon.”

WHAT TO DO

Suggest to your colleague that women should decide for themselves whether or not they want to take on new challenges at work. If you’re feeling bold, you can also point out the double standard: “It’s hard to imagine that we’d say that about a man who recently got engaged.”

WHY IT HAPPENS

When women get engaged or married, studies show that they start to experience maternal bias.⁴⁰⁹ People—consciously or unconsciously—start to question their competence and commitment, based on the mistaken belief that women can’t be fully present at work if they have family responsibilities at home.⁴¹⁰

Rooted in maternal bias

A manager describes a woman who reports to her as “overly ambitious” when she asks for a promotion.

WHY IT MATTERS

When a woman is criticized for competing for a promotion, it can have a negative impact on her and on the company as a whole. She may miss out on the chance to grow at work. Other women may hear the message that they shouldn't ask for promotions. And the company may miss an opportunity to advance a talented team member and make her feel valued.

A manager describes a woman who reports to her as “overly ambitious” when she asks for a promotion.

WHAT TO DO

Prompt your colleague to explain her thinking. For example, you can say, “Generally, I think we like ambition as a company. Why does it bother you in this case?” You can also suggest that there may be a double standard at work by saying something like, “How do you feel when a man on your team asks for a promotion?” And if you think that women at your workplace are often criticized when they seek promotions, this would be a good opportunity to say so.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Because of stereotypical expectations that women should be selfless and giving, they can face criticism when they appear to be “out for themselves”—for example, when they compete for a bigger job.⁴¹¹ By contrast, we expect men to be driven and ambitious, and we tend to think well of them when they show those qualities.⁴¹²

Rooted in likeability bias

HIRING

A colleague advocates for a man with strong potential over a woman with proven experience.

WHY IT MATTERS

When a more experienced candidate is passed up in favor of someone with less experience, your company can miss out on valuable wisdom, talent, and skill. And in this case, the woman loses out on an opportunity that she's well suited for.

A colleague advocates for a man with strong potential over a woman with proven experience.

WHAT TO DO

Point out how experienced the woman is for the role and note the value of proven experience over potential. You might also take a moment to explain **WHY IT HAPPENS** and **WHY IT MATTERS**.

Longer term, it's worth recommending that everyone on your team aligns ahead of time on clear, objective criteria for open roles, then uses them to evaluate all job candidates. This minimizes bias by making sure that every candidate is held to the same standard.⁴¹³

WHY IT HAPPENS

Research shows that people often hire or promote men based on their potential, but for women, potential isn't enough. Women are often held to a higher standard and need to show more evidence of their competence to get hired or promoted.⁴¹⁴

Rooted in performance bias

In a meeting about promotions, someone says an Asian coworker needs to work on her communication skills before she's ready for the next level.

WHY IT MATTERS

This comment may unfairly rule her out for a promotion, which could mean that your company won't fully leverage her talents and will miss out on her unique perspective.

In a meeting about promotions, someone says an Asian coworker needs to work on her communication skills before she's ready for the next level.

Intersectional card

WHAT TO DO

If communication skills aren't key to this promotion—for example, it's a technical or internal-facing role—say so.⁴¹⁵ If communication skills are important, ask for examples of how she can improve and suggest sharing the feedback directly with her. If your colleague can't offer good examples, push back. You could explain that vague feedback can open the door to bias and say you're concerned that this woman is being unfairly judged for no good reason.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Women receive negative feedback on their communication style much more often than men do, no matter how they communicate: they're too quiet, too loud, too gentle, too assertive.⁴¹⁶ This dynamic can be exacerbated for Asian women because of stereotypes.⁴¹⁷ Research shows that Asian women tend to be typecast as too quiet and submissive, so people tend to assume they lack strong communication skills. And when they do assert themselves, this defies our expectations that Asian women will be quiet and gentle, and so they tend to be criticized as "abrasive."⁴¹⁸

You're on a review committee and several members argue against a woman's promotion because she is not "seen as a leader," even though her team delivers outstanding results.

WHY IT MATTERS

The review committee may be making incorrect—and unfair—assumptions about the woman's abilities. Additionally, if the review committee uses a narrow definition of leadership, they may unfairly exclude a lot of people, like this woman.

You're on a review committee and several members argue against a woman's promotion because she is not "seen as a leader," even though her team delivers outstanding results.

WHAT TO DO

Point out that the woman's team delivers superb results, and suggest that their performance speaks to her leadership. You can also ask them to explain the attributes she lacks. When people are asked to justify their thinking, it can help reduce bias in decision-making.⁴¹⁹

As a longer-term solution, suggest creating detailed metrics for performance reviews, including clear expectations for leaders. This way, all employees will be evaluated based on a more complete definition of good leadership and using the same standards, which reduces bias in the review process.⁴²⁰

WHY IT HAPPENS

Both women and men more readily associate men with leadership.⁴²¹ This bias is so strong that when women work on teams, their contributions are often attributed to the team as a whole. In contrast, when men work on teams, they are more likely to be seen as taking a leadership role.⁴²² The bias affects different groups of women in different ways: Asian women often aren't seen as assertive enough to be leaders, while Black women and Latinas can be stereotyped as not talented enough for leadership roles, and Native American women contend with both these stereotypes.⁴²³

Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias

When discussing a potential promotion for a woman who uses a wheelchair, someone says, “I’m not sure she can handle a more senior role,” without offering further explanation.

WHY IT MATTERS

The comment is vague and lacks evidence, which means it’s more likely to be rooted in bias. If it sways the team, it could mean this woman misses out on a promotion she is well qualified for. That hurts everyone, since teams with more diversity—including employees with disabilities—tend to be more innovative and productive.⁴²⁴

When discussing a potential promotion for a woman who uses a wheelchair, someone says, “I’m not sure she can handle a more senior role,” without offering further explanation.

Intersectional card

WHAT TO DO

Ask the person to explain what they mean: “What parts of her qualifications don’t meet the criteria?”⁴²⁵ Basing evaluations on concrete criteria instead of gut feelings is fairer and can reduce the effects of bias. If you believe she merits a promotion, advocate for her. To help avoid bias in the future, you can talk to HR about using a set of clear and consistent criteria for promotions.⁴²⁶ You can also ask if your company has targets to recruit and promote more employees with disabilities.⁴²⁷

WHY IT HAPPENS

Research shows that people with disabilities face especially strong negative biases.⁴²⁸ In particular, women with disabilities are often incorrectly perceived as less competent than their coworkers, and their contributions may be valued less.⁴²⁹ They also get less support from managers than almost any other group of employees.⁴³⁰ This means they often face an uphill battle to advancement.

REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

In a meeting reviewing annual performance, a coworker asks how a woman could have possibly brought in so much new business—but doesn't show the same skepticism about the men.

WHY IT MATTERS

Underestimating or over-scrutinizing women can diminish their standing at work and lead to them being overlooked for promotions and choice assignments. If it happens often, it may point to bias problems at your company.

In a meeting reviewing annual performance, a coworker asks how a woman could have possibly brought in so much new business—but doesn't show the same skepticism about the men.

WHAT TO DO

Ask your colleague if they have a reason to question this woman's performance: "She's clearly getting great results. Why are you doubting her?" If their answer suggests that they are discounting the woman's performance unfairly, you can explain that women's accomplishments tend to be questioned more often than men's.⁴³¹

WHY IT HAPPENS

People often question the basis for women's achievements. They assume that women did well through luck or outside help, rather than with their own skills.⁴³² As a result, women are often asked to prove themselves repeatedly, while men are not.⁴³³

Rooted in attribution bias

REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

You're on a review committee and a woman with an excellent track record is up for promotion. But the group is nervous about giving her the opportunity, since no one feels like they know her well personally.

WHY IT MATTERS

When you rely on personal relationships to decide who gets promoted, you may overlook the most qualified candidates.

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WHAT TO DO

Encourage the group to consider the woman's full profile, such as her business results and her effectiveness as a manager. Ask why knowing someone personally is important for promotion. When people are asked to clarify the evaluation criteria they're using, they tend to make fairer decisions. If they push back, remind them that her personal relationships probably don't have anything to do with how well she does her job.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Research shows that we tend to gravitate toward others like us and may even avoid others who are different. Because most leaders are white men, this dynamic can benefit white men and disadvantage women, particularly women of color.⁴³⁴ In addition, social outings can sometimes exclude women, which makes it harder for them to network with colleagues and senior leaders. For example, evening events may be difficult for parents to attend. On other occasions, women might not be invited at all.

Rooted in affinity bias

Closing activity

SUMMARY: STRATEGIES TO COMBAT BIAS

When bias occurs, there are a number of ways to respond, some of which you discussed today. Below is a summary of the strategies you can use to combat bias.

- ▶ Speak up for someone in the moment
- ▶ Ask a probing question
- ▶ Stick to the facts
- ▶ Explain how bias is in play
- ▶ Advocate for policy or process change

“My One Action to address bias against women in the workplace is...”