

## Six Steps to Minimizing Gender and Minority Bias

By Sheryl L. Axelrod

Women and minorities face unconscious bias at every rung up the workplace ladder. Few make it to the top.

As Malcolm Gladwell notes in his book Blink, 58% of Fortune 500 CEOs are not just white and male, but white, male, and 6' or taller. That's well over half the CEOs of the 500 largest companies in the country whereas in the country, only about 14.5% of men (less than 1/7<sup>th</sup> of all men) are that tall.

The notion that white, tall men are more capable than other people is obviously absurd. People have unconscious preconceptions about what leaders look like and as a result, far more tall white men are made CEOs than women, men of color, and shorter white men. In fact, in the U.S., only 3.9% of adult men are 6'2" or taller – less than 1 in 25. However, according to Gladwell, 30% of Fortune 500 CEOs are – nearly 1 for every 3 such CEOs.

A good summary of a study revealing gender bias among Yale scientists is at: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/09/21/study-offers-new-evidence-scientists-are-biased-against-women>. This is a quote from the article:

"[A] new study in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences offers evidence of bias among scientists -- male and female scientists alike -- against female students. The study was based on evaluations by scientists of hypothetical student applications for a lab manager position, with the application materials identical in every way, except that half of the pool received applications with a male name and the other half received applications with a female name. The faculty members surveyed -- 127 professors in biology, chemistry or physics -- were told that their analyses of the applications would be used to help the students. And they were asked to evaluate the students' competence and 'hireability' and to consider how large a salary they would recommend and how much mentoring they would offer the student if hired.

The scientists evaluating these applications (which were identical in every way except the gender of the 'submitter') rated the male student more competent, more likely to be hired, deserving of a better salary, and worth spending more time mentoring. The gaps were significant."

Female scientists were as likely as male scientists to evaluate the students this way. We unfortunately all have some measure of unconscious bias.

In "Managing our Unconscious Biases," Roley Davis wrote in HRmoz:

"Research has now emerged from the University of Wisconsin which has shown that giving people better cognitive strategies not only reduces unconscious bias, but that the bias levels continue to fall after intervention."

See: <http://www.octopus-hr.co.uk/hrmoz/article/managing-our-unconscious-biases.aspx?sthash.G2ybVDuP.mjjo>.

Davis writes we should:

(1) Test our unconscious bias using an Implicit Association Test. While Davis mentions Hogrefe's pricey Implicitly® test, great testing is available for free at Harvard's Project Implicit®. See:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>;

(2) Delay making key decisions about people until we have the time to challenge them. We should ask ourselves: is our unconscious bias playing a role in our decision making? Is the person we're considering truly the best fit for the job?;

(3) Avoid making key decisions when we're tired, stressed, or emotionally drained. In such moments, we are least able to check for possible unconscious bias;

(4) Try justifying our decisions – to others or to ourselves in a mirror. We're more biased when we know our decisions probably won't get challenged, so try challenging them;

(5) Not beat ourselves up over the fact we have biases. Everyone does. Feeling guilty can make it harder to manage these biases. Rather than feeling guilty, we should accept that we have biases and work to minimize them;

and

(6) Get to know people who are different, have different backgrounds, and bring different perspectives. They'll enrich our lives. Plus, the more we see people as individuals, the less likely we'll be to view them through our biases.



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Sheryl L. Axelrod, President of The Axelrod Firm PC, a NAMWOLF law firm in Philadelphia, provides strategic, results-driven advice and representation to companies concerning their general and product liability, employment, commercial, and appellate litigation matters. While only 5% of lawyers are recognized by their peers as Super Lawyers, Ms. Axelrod was not only recognized as a Super Lawyer but rated one of the Top 50 Women Super Lawyers in Pennsylvania for the past two years in a row and selected a 2013 Top Rated Lawyer in Labor & Employment by American Lawyer Media and Martindale-Hubbell.