

Steps to Becoming a More Fair and Effective Interviewer Across Difference

- 1. Select for the whole person.** Don't over-rely on traditional criteria such as GPA and school rankings. Some individuals who are exceptional with regard to traditional criteria may be missing other important attributes, and vice-versa. To determine a more holistic set of criteria, analyze who is successful in your work environment. What are the qualities they possess? What kind of people do you want to define your organization and help achieve the organization's vision and goals? What are the competencies, skills and qualifications actually needed for the position? Make sure that among those competencies is the willingness to work collaboratively and respectfully with people from diverse backgrounds.
- 2. Design a hiring process that allows for diverse input.** Assemble a diverse group of people (*with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, age, job status, role, tenure, geography, etc.*) to give input regarding what the attributes of an ideal candidate should be and to help evaluate candidates.
- 3. Don't "over-hire."** Diversity and excellence go hand and hand. Be clear about, and hold to, your standards of excellence. Hire women, people of color, LGBT persons or others from historically excluded and underrepresented groups (*one-down groups**) who meet your holistic set of qualifications and not solely because you want to increase diversity in your organization. If there is a person who doesn't meet all the criteria but shows great potential, then only hire them if you are willing to inform them of, and shore up, the areas where they are deficient.
- 4. Don't "under-hire."** Don't bypass talented candidates from one-down groups who meet your holistic criteria because of expressed or silent concerns about whether they can perform according to your standards. Some one-down group members are perceived as risks so, unintentionally, evaluators require additional proof that these individuals are capable despite the indicia they have provided of their accomplishments. Don't let decision-makers default to making an assessment based on traditional criteria rather than looking at what the candidate brings as a whole. Each person should be judged as an individual, not on their group's record of success in the

organization. If someone meets the established grade cut-off or has the level of education needed for the job, then don't raise the bar and ask them to demonstrate greater achievements than other candidates from more traditional backgrounds. And don't yield to tokenism, where the organization is satisfied with, and resigned to, hiring only one or two exceptional candidates from a one-down group.

5. **Engage in interviewing training.** Getting the “right people onto the bus” – employing talented individuals who are aligned with the organization’s mission – is among the most imperative tasks of any successful organization. Everyone who interviews should participate in interview training that includes an emphasis on hiring candidates who are from one-down groups. Translate agreed-upon criteria into questions that can be asked of candidates in the interview. Inform everyone involved in the hiring process of these criteria and questions.
6. **Don't trust your gut!** I know many of us think we know instinctively who would be a “good fit” for our organizations. But all of us have to watch out for our unconscious biases; those for and against individuals and groups. Neuroscience tells us that our minds are good at quick judgments but are not perfect. Our guts can be contaminated with stereotypes and biases. Bias can cause us to offend, exclude or mis-hire. Notice not only when a feeling of discomfort arises in an interaction with a candidate, but also when one of unwarranted ease occurs – these are clues that you may be leaning on your gut. You want everyone who comes into contact with your organization – at all stages of the process – to feel that they were treated fairly and respectfully. Even if you decide not to hire the candidate, he or she may have a friend who you would love to hire. Word of mouth, positive or negative, can have a major impact on your recruiting efforts on school campuses and within your industry.
7. **Don't seek to replicate yourself.** Even though all of us suffer from in-group favoritism – we like and favor those in our own group – diversity demands we expand our understanding of who is valuable. Dig a little more deeply into the candidate’s experiences, especially if they are different than yours. If you don't know about entries on a resumé (associations, articles, group memberships, neighborhoods, countries, etc.), because they are unfamiliar to you, then don't ignore them; inquire about them. These questions may lead to some of the most valuable insights about what makes an interviewee unique, and whether he or she is right for the position.
8. **Share your diversity commitment with all candidates.** Make sure you share information about your diversity commitment and policies with every candidate, not only those from one-down groups. You can't tell what candidates are interested in,

have a sensitivity to, or with which they have an affinity. After all, your diversity program is about making the entire organization better, so everyone should hear about and plan to be a part of moving these values forward. If during an interview, however, the candidate identifies in some way their interests in a diversity-related subject, you can speak about the subject and perhaps also make it possible for them to speak to someone else in your organization who shares a similar identity or life experience. It is great to offer a promising candidate the opportunity to meet such a person. It can make a difference in their decision about what employer they will choose. Make sure you follow up quickly with talented candidates from one-down groups and demonstrate your sincere interest so they know you care about them; there may be many other institutions pursuing them.

** “one-down groups” is a term used to refer to certain groups who have been treated as inferior or “less than” historically in the U.S. system and have experienced less privilege and power as a result.*

Learn more about inclusion in [Vernā’s Blog](#) or in her books:

- [***What If I Say the Wrong Thing? 25 Habits for Culturally Effective People***](#)
- [***Moving Diversity Forward: How to Go From Well-Meaning to Well-Doing***](#)