

# AGENCY INNOVATIONS RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

## Unconscious Bias in Hiring

“Hidden biases are not a sign of a bad person,” says Zabeen Hirji, CHRO of the Toronto-based Royal Bank of Canada. “Most people have them. Once we accepted that ... it allowed us to talk about these issues in a nonjudgmental way. What’s bad is not trying to understand what your unconscious biases are.” (Wilke, 2014)

### BIAS PATTERNS: Common errors in decision making

#### HIGHER BAR

“Even though her analysis of the situation was accurate, she should have come to her conclusion quicker.”

#### NEW CRITERIA

“Even though he can run macros in excel, he has no experience working with a team.”

#### WORK-LIFE ASSUMPTION

“Now that he is a dad, he’ll want overtime to pay for the added expenses.”

#### UNDUE STYLE CRITICISM

“She is too aggressive; she needs to tone down her enthusiasm for market analysis.”

#### VAGUE PRAISE

“She is really sweet.”

### BIAS BLOCKERS: How to redirect bias in the moment

#### Reference Original Criteria

“While speed might be worth considering, we agreed that analytic accuracy was the most important criteria.”

#### Block Use of New Criteria

“We agreed that running macros in excel was most important. Let’s focus on that in this discussion.”

#### Express Emotion

“I’m concerned about whether we’re being fair talking about his child here.”

#### Ask if a Similar Comment Would be Made About Someone Else

“Hmmm...would that be an issue if Frank behaved in a similar way?”

#### Disregard Ineffective or Biased Criteria

“That information does not seem to be helping us make the decision. Let’s stick to evaluating her performance.”

#### Agree to Importance of Criteria

“Can we agree to focus on our top criteria, one of which I interpret to be analytic accuracy?”

#### Ask for Clarity

“I’m not sure I follow what you’re saying. Could you help me understand?”

### DO TODAY

*Ask yourself the following questions: Do I typically hire the same type of person? When I say a candidate is not the right fit, what do I mean? What do my interview panels and slate of candidates look like and do I speak up if they are not sufficiently diverse?*

### DO THIS MONTH

*Send this flyer to your next hiring panel and have a conversation about decision criteria before the interviews start.*

### DO THIS YEAR

*Re-write job postings to have more inclusive terms and phrases with a tool like <http://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com/>*

*Bias Blocker is a workshop developed by Dr. Julie A. Kmec, Professor, Department of Sociology at Washington State University. If you have any questions about these best practices or would like more information on this topic you can contact Dr. Julie A. Kmec at [jkmec@wsu.edu](mailto:jkmec@wsu.edu).*

## AGENCY INNOVATIONS FEATURE

# Diversity at the Department of Licensing

Meghann McCann recently took time out of her schedule to discuss diversity at the Department of Licensing (DOL). “I kind of bristle when people talk about our DEI initiative. It’s not an initiative, it’s an imperative.” Over the last year major steps have been taken at DOL to move DEI from a value on a strategic plan to something you feel when you walk in the door.

July 1, 2018 marked the first day for Teresa Berntsen as the Director of the Department of Licensing. A few weeks later Meghann joined her as Deputy Director. The Agency had lost the trust of employees and the community. It became clear that they needed to do some soul searching and focus on repairing those relationships.

They began by asking employees a simple question. Why do we exist? The answers they received were far from the old mission of license, regulate and collect taxes. People talked about helping someone celebrate a name change or gain their independence. The final answer to the question was to help people live their lives. If that was accepted as DOL’s purpose then leadership had to make sure their people could do that. They needed the knowledge, skills and abilities to serve everyone who walks through their door.

From that basic understanding, they enlisted the help of experts to create a DEI Plan, develop DEI behavioral expectations, a clear business case, tool kits and trainings for all DOL employees. They had to address concerns about DEI being a fad, that it would ask them to change their faith or that it didn’t apply to them. Management support, consistency and communication were key in alleviating those concerns.

Every supervisor attended a three day course that

covered topics like implicit bias, micro-aggressions, privilege and how to have tough conversations. Even after such an intensive training, many supervisors didn’t feel ready. They were concerned that they would make a mistake. The management team continued to emphasize that the new behaviors were expected and that’s what it takes to be a leader at the DOL. “As we learn, we find out that there is more to learn. It is a journey and a process. As we get better, we see more opportunities to improve”, Meghann says. “We accept that there will be mistakes and we also accept that some amazing things are going to happen.”

They looked at the communities around the 57 locations they serve and began to reach out. They currently have more than 100 individuals and community groups that are helping them grow and learn on this journey. They made a long term commitment by hiring three community outreach coordinators and three people to start an equity and inclusion office for DOL. These resources help them understand who is not at the table and how can DOL reach them.

It is a (sometimes) messy process. It has brought up some hard emotions and experiences, especially in the beginning. Employees are now four out of the five modules through the training program and things are beginning to click. People are starting to understand what is expected. They still struggle trying to measure the work with hard data. Yet leadership has received plenty of positive feedback from employees and customers. Meghann sees a future state where DEI is embedded deep within their culture and systems. DEI is more than an initiative, this is how DOL does their work.



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### STATEWIDE RESOURCES

- <https://ofm.wa.gov/state-human-resources/workforce-diversity-equity-and-inclusion>
- DES Courses
  - Diversity and Inclusion
  - Understanding the Diverse Workforce
- Countering Bias in the Interview ([King County Video](#))

### INDUSTRY RESEARCH

- Dana Wilkie (SHRM): [Tips for Rooting Out Hidden Bias](#)
- Harvard Project Implicit: [Implicit Association Test \(IAT\)](#)
- Gartner CLC: [Overcoming Biases to Advance the Underrepresented Workforce](#)
- Lynda.com: [Confronting Bias: Thriving Across Our Differences](#)