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Is Subconscious Bias Affecting Your Hiring Decisions?

By Chad Brooks, Business News Daily Senior Writer | May 28, 2016 10:38 am EST

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Despite the growing number of diversity hiring initiatives, some managers still fall prey to their own inherent, subconscious biases when evaluating candidates. Without realizing it, they may tend towards hiring people who are similar to them, especially when it comes to their educational background, new research finds.



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A study from the job site [Indeed](#) discovered that bosses who attended a top-ranked college preferred to hire employees who also graduated from a prestigious institution. Specifically, 37 percent of managers who said they went to a top school said they like to hire candidates from highly regarded universities. That compares to just 6 percent of managers who didn't attend a top school.

On the flip side, 41 percent of managers who didn't graduate from a top-ranked college said they consider candidates' experience more important when making hiring decisions. Just 11 percent of managers who did attend a prestigious school said the same.

"It's a worrisome trend that a manager's personal experience and background has such an influence on hiring decisions," Paul D'Arcy, a senior vice president at Indeed, [said in a statement](#). "This type of bias can prevent companies from finding the diverse talent needed for their organizations to grow and thrive."

The research revealed that the bias toward top-college graduates is most prominent among managers hiring for entry-level positions and executive roles. **[See Related Story: [11 Important Qualities to Look for in Your Next Hire](#)]**

Despite their desire to bring in employees from highly regarded schools, most managers agree that going to a highly rated school doesn't translate into being a top performer. Just 35 percent of all of the bosses surveyed said top performers generally come from top schools.

Instead, the managers surveyed said the ability to work well with others, strategic thinking and self-direction are much more indicative of high performance.

This finding "shows that we need to pay more attention to hiring practices," D'Arcy said. "It is often an unconscious bias that leads managers to hire people with similar backgrounds, but that means many talented and qualified candidates are being overlooked," he added.

Where a manager went to school isn't the only bias affecting hiring practices. Greg Moran, founder and CEO of predictive hiring software company [Outmatch](#) (formerly Chequed), believes many hiring managers fall prey to their own subconscious biases about factors such as physical attractiveness, height, weight and charisma.

"Overt bias is exceedingly rare, but unintentional, abstract bias can occur," Moran told Business News Daily in a previous interview. "It's human nature; employers use their gut reactions to job candidates and hire people like themselves that they get along with. This can be dangerous, because employers don't even realize there's bias in their hiring process."

Moran said that, to avoid these types of biases, companies should take time to thoroughly structure and define their hiring process. For example, they can identify and target the key competencies needed for the job, and structure their process around those needs.

An unstructured process causes subconscious bias: "Look at your candidates and ask, 'Can they do the job? Will they do the job? Have they done it before, and if not, do they have the transferrable skills to do it?'" Moran said.

In addition to thoroughly screening candidates based on their qualifications, Moran recommended involving multiple people in the interviewing process (including department heads and executives), conducting reference checks,

and properly training recruiters and hiring managers to recognize all types of bias.

Additional reporting by Nicole Fallon Taylor.



Chad Brooks

Chad Brooks is a Chicago-based freelance writer who has nearly 15 years experience in the media business. A graduate of Indiana University, he spent nearly a decade as a staff reporter for the Daily Herald in suburban Chicago, covering a wide array of topics including, local and state government, crime, the legal system and education. Following his years at the newspaper Chad worked in public relations, helping promote small businesses throughout the U.S. Follow him on [Twitter](#).



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