

Corbett School District Superintendent Search

Understanding Interviewing Biases - Leveling the Playing Field

There are many issues that interviewers run into when they allow biases to get in the way. These can include:

STEREOTYPING

Forming an opinion about how people of a given gender, religion, race, appearance, or other characteristic think, act, respond, or would perform the job without any evidence that this is the case.

GENERALIZING

Occurs when interviewers assume an interviewee's mannerism is part of their everyday behavior. For example, candidates who are nervous in an interview can be generalized as always nervous. An interviewer might generalize that a candidate lacks writing skills because the last two people hired from the same college had poor writing skills.

SIMILAR-TO-ME

Job interviewers tend to favor candidates who affirm their opinions and decisions and believe they communicate better with people who share their background, language, and belief system. Hiring people based on likeability can lead to a lack of creativity and a loss of critical evaluation in the workplace.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

An interviewer might make a snap judgment about someone based on their first impression (positive or negative) that clouds the entire interview. For example, letting the fact that the candidate is wearing out-of-the-ordinary clothing or has a heavy regional accent take precedence over the applicant's knowledge, skills, or abilities.

HALO EFFECT

When an interviewer allows one strong point about a candidate overshadow everything else. For instance, knowing someone went to a particular university might be looked upon favorably, and everything the applicant says is seen in this light. ("Well, she left out an important part of the answer to that question, but she must know it, she went to XYZ University").

HORN EFFECT & NEGATIVE EMPHASIS

When an interviewer immediately judges a candidate negatively based on a single characteristic. Research indicates that interviewers give unfavorable information about twice the weight of favorable information.

CULTURAL NOISE

Since candidates want the job, they will provide answers the interviewer wants to hear, even if they are not entirely truthful. For example, an applicant might say that they have no problem working in a team setting, when this is not the case. Interviewers should prepare questions that probe for examples, instead of ones that elicit "yes" or "no" answers.

NONVERBAL BIAS

Undue emphasis might be placed on nonverbal cues that have nothing to do with the job, such as loudness or softness of voice, or the type of handshake given.

CONTRAST EFFECT

This occurs when an interviewer compares candidates to each other or compares all candidates to a single candidate. For example, if one candidate seems weak in some skill, others may appear to be more qualified than they really are.

Adapted from Society for Human Resource Management