

We all have biases, so we have to actively manage them.

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HR

Pre-empt your inner judge

Normally, my judgments based on intuition/sixth sense have paid off. In my work in executive search, I have almost felt like an astrologer for correctly pinpointing people in the right positions, and making quick decisions about who belongs where and who should do what! But it is a tricky business. It is even harder for leaders because they have to take decisions quickly and as accurately as possible. A good sense of judgment is a good leadership attribute. But where it fails us is when we forget to take shades of grey into consideration. At times, our decisions do go wrong and I have learnt it the hard way that it is important to balance intuition with data and objectivity.

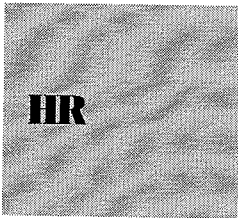
It is all about our ability to hold on to our biases and merge them in mindful manner so that objectivity is not lost.

In a recent blog on the importance of biases in our judgment, I explained how shedding

judgments can help executives develop a sense of purpose in what they do. I am not contradicting this view. We should be as open as possible to different possibilities. But saying or thinking this, and applying it is another matter. For the most part, we claim to be open-minded, but implicit stereotypes and prejudices rise from our subconscious when we are not aware of it and colour our judgment.

Such stereotypes are more detrimental today with more diverse workforces and a multifaceted 'millennial' generation, which is difficult to understand. Applying a one-size-fits-all perception of competence to a twenty-something in a hurry is not the most effective way to uncover the talent in your ranks.

To temper our inner judge and make effective decisions, I have developed a few techniques in my work as an executive coach and headhunter. It is not enough to simply try and keep your biases at bay. They lurk whether we like it or not, coloured by our upbringing, culture, and experience.



Dig deeper

Most people in professional settings, especially hiring managers and leaders, claim to be objective and pragmatic about looking past initial judgments into someone's true character. But first impressions and assumptions still matter a great deal.

As Jean-Francois Manzoni, INSEAD Professor of Management Practice (incoming dean/ president of IMD), has said in an article*, "Even people who look at Boards and CEOs might be tempted to assume at such a high level, discussions and decisions are all about rational facts and figures. The reality, he says, is that in spite of good intentions, human factors often end up playing very significant roles in discussions at the top."

If you are making a hiring decision or having difficulty motivating an employee, it might be best to delve into the target's recent past to get a sense of their path and how they ended up in front of you. People wear their hearts on their sleeves more today than ever before, so there are perfect opportunities to build a personal

profile of the person you are working with. What someone tells you they do in their spare time is usually what they think is expected or accepted. What about personal experiences? What about mistakes they have made in the past? There could be more to a person's actions.

Wrong desires

We often forget the multiple goals organisations follow. While many people will be working in concert, there may be friction along the way on the best ways to proceed. Your desire to succeed and stand out might be shared by others along the path. This can become a source of conflict and one has witnessed managers thinking of another's actions as a personal affront, which warrants retaliation. I resonate with Professor Manfred De Kets, from my experience, "Business leaders who

prefer harem-like management systems are often prone to narcissistic dysfunctionality". They may come across as quite charming, but they know how to manipulate and exploit others for their own benefit. It is well-known that competent and transformational leaders are those able to tune into these sentiments, are those best able to guide teams and organisations to success. When our mind is biased, our eyes become blinded!

Effectiveness is not efficiency

Your ability to make snap decisions about people or their actions may make you work faster, but not necessarily more efficiently. You may simply become a bull in a China shop, smashing people's emotions left, right, and centre, and poisoning the waters around you. As pointed out by Professor George Kohlrieser, IMD, "Think of the mind's eye as a flashlight. This flashlight can always search for something positive or negative. The secret is being able to control that flashlight – to look for the opportunity and the positive. When you do that, you're playing to win."

When good leaders make bad decisions, it is often due to their excessive workload and multitasking orientation. A manager can help himself by carving out downtime or blocking the calendar to review all aspects of big decisions and ponder important moves.

Ultimately, better judgment requires better self-management. This is more than just trying to keep biases and judgments at bay. It is about pre-empting them with ground work and deeper understanding of those around you. Self Awareness with Reflection and the ability to put our false ego behind is what matters.

As author Robert Anton Wilson says, "In conclusion, there is no conclusion. Things will go on as they always have, getting weirder all the time." ■

*<http://knowledge.insead.edu/leadership-organisations/the-support-challenge-tightrope-in-board-ceo-interactions-3975>

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