



LEAN IN

# 50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

An activity that helps you combat the biases women face at work

TO GET STARTED:

Download our Moderator Guide & Speaker Notes to prepare for your session, find links to necessary handouts, and learn what to say.

Use "Slide Show" mode to click on links in this presentation or right click to access the hyperlink when not in "Slide Show" mode.

How much more likely are men to ask for a raise than women?

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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How much more likely are men to ask for a raise than women?

## ANSWER

This is a trick question. Women negotiate for raises and promotions as often as men do.<sup>393</sup>

How many times more often do men interrupt women than other men?

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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How many times more often do men interrupt women than other men?

## ANSWER

Almost 3 times more often.<sup>49</sup>

You decide to mentor someone because they remind you of yourself.

#### WHY IT MATTERS

Good mentors can make a big difference. Employees with mentors are more likely to get raises and promotions.<sup>172</sup> But because managers and senior leaders are more likely to be straight white men, and because people tend to gravitate toward mentoring others like themselves, women, people of color, and LGBTQ people often miss out on that support.<sup>173</sup> That also means your company could miss out on fostering talented employees.



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## WHAT TO DO

Be aware of this dynamic and let it inform your choices. If you're a white man, you're more likely to be in a position of authority someday.<sup>174</sup> You can make the workplace fairer by being thoughtful about whom you mentor. Consider proactively reaching out to mentor someone from a different background. If you're a woman, a person of color, or an LGBTQ person, you might decide instead to mentor someone like yourself—especially if you remember struggling to find mentors when you were coming up through the ranks. In your case, mentoring people like yourself supports diversity and inclusion.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Because of this bias, we tend to prefer the company of others who are like us.<sup>175</sup> This can lead us to invest more in people who remind us of ourselves, perhaps because we assume these relationships will feel more comfortable.<sup>176</sup>

*Rooted in affinity bias*

A colleague is talking about a woman who landed a big project. They say, "Wow, she got really lucky."

**WHY IT MATTERS**

Getting recognized for accomplishments can make a difference, especially when it comes to performance reviews and promotions.<sup>198</sup> When achievements are attributed to luck rather than hard work or skill, it minimizes them.



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## WHAT TO DO

Ask your colleague, “I’m curious—what makes you think it was luck?” This may prompt them to slow down and rethink their assumption. If your colleague responds in a way that suggests they doubt the woman’s abilities, you might want to press more and ask why they think she’s less competent. Is there a reason? Can they give an example? If not, that speaks for itself.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

We tend to overestimate men’s performance and underestimate women’s.<sup>199</sup> Because of this, we often attribute women’s successes to “getting lucky,” “having a good team,” or other explanations that diminish their achievements, while we accept men’s accomplishments as proof of their abilities.<sup>200</sup>

*Rooted in attribution bias*

You hear a woman being criticized for her leadership style—for example, being called “aggressive” or “out for herself.”

### WHY IT MATTERS

When women assert themselves—for example, by speaking in a direct style or promoting their ideas—they often get a negative reaction.<sup>246</sup> In contrast, men do not.<sup>247</sup> This discrepancy can have a big impact on women’s careers. Ask yourself who you’re more likely to support and promote, the man with high marks across the board or the woman who gets high marks for her performance but is not as well liked.

You hear a woman being criticized for her leadership style—for example, being called “aggressive” or “out for herself.”

## WHAT TO DO

When you hear someone criticize a woman for asserting herself, ask them about it: “That’s interesting. Would you have that reaction if a man did the same thing?” It may also be worth pointing out that being focused and decisive about moving the business forward is what’s expected of leaders.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Because of age-old stereotypes, we expect women to be nice and friendly.<sup>248</sup> When they assert themselves, they go against that expectation—and as a result, we tend to like them less.<sup>249</sup> This “likeability penalty” is often evident in the words we use to describe women, especially those who lead—such as “bitchy,” “demanding,” or “difficult.”<sup>250</sup>

*Rooted in likeability bias*

You see a colleague introduce a senior woman as “the nicest person in the office” without mentioning her job title or accomplishments.

WHY IT MATTERS

When women are described only as “nice,” it can downplay their capabilities and reinforce the stereotype that women are nurturers—as opposed to leaders.<sup>712</sup> This can be particularly undermining to senior-level women.



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## WHAT TO DO

Try to round out the compliment with a reference to the woman’s overall performance. If she recently led a project or is known to be a strong manager, say so. If you believe the woman’s personality is an asset to the company, you can make that point, too. For example, you might say, “Because of her way with clients, we’ve really expanded our customer base.” Just make sure to link it to a positive business outcome.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Because of traditional stereotypes that women are nurturing and communal, colleagues often pay more attention to their personality traits. This means that women’s hard skills, accomplishments, and leadership capabilities often go overlooked, which can slow their advancement.<sup>713</sup>

*Rooted in attribution bias & likeability bias*

A colleague recommends a man for promotion over a woman, saying, "I'm not sure about her long-term commitment. She just got engaged, and I think she wants to have kids soon."

### WHY IT MATTERS

When coworkers make assumptions about a woman's commitment to work based on what's happening in her personal life, it unfairly limits her opportunities—and could cause your company to miss out on a highly committed candidate. It's also illegal in many states to consider a person's marital or parental status as a factor in promotions.



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## WHAT TO DO

Suggest to your colleague that women should decide for themselves whether or not they want to take on new challenges at work. If you’re feeling bold, you can also point out the double standard: “It’s hard to imagine that we’d say that about a man who recently got engaged.”

## WHY IT HAPPENS

When women get engaged or married, studies show that they start to experience maternal bias.<sup>138</sup> People—consciously or unconsciously—start to question their competence and commitment, based on the mistaken belief that women can’t be fully present at work if they have family responsibilities at home.<sup>139</sup>

*Rooted in maternal bias*

A meeting is starting soon and you notice that it's mostly men seated front and center and women seated to the side.

### WHY IT MATTERS

If women are sidelined in meetings, it's less likely that they'll speak up, which means the group won't benefit from everyone's best thinking. Plus, it's not beneficial to sit in the low-status seats in the room—and women have to fight for status as it is.<sup>184</sup>

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## WHAT TO DO

If there are empty chairs at the table, urge women sitting to the side to fill them. If there's no room, acknowledge the problem—for example, ask if anyone else sees that it's mostly men at the table. If it happens often, consider saying to the person who runs the meeting, "I've noticed that it's mostly men at the table and women on the sidelines. Maybe you can encourage a better mix."

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Women typically get less time to speak in meetings. They're more likely than men to be spoken over and interrupted.<sup>185</sup> As a result of signals like these, women sometimes feel less valued, so they sit off to the side.

*Rooted in performance bias*