



Vernā Myers Consulting Group, LLC

## 10 HIRING AND INTERVIEWING TIPS TO MOVE DIVERSITY FORWARD

1. **Select for the whole person.** Don't over-rely on traditional criteria such as GPA and school rankings. Some individuals who are exceptional with regard to traditional criteria may be missing some other important attributes, and vice-versa. To determine a more holistic set of criteria, analyze who is successful in your work environment. What are the qualities they possess? What kind of people do you want to define your organization and help achieve the organization's vision and goals? What are the competencies, skills and qualifications actually needed for the position? Make sure that among those competencies is the willingness to work collaboratively and respectfully with people from diverse backgrounds.
2. **Design a hiring process that allows for diverse input.** Assemble a diverse group of people (with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, age, job status, role, tenure, geography, etc.) to give input regarding what the attributes of an ideal candidate should be and to help evaluate candidates.
3. **Don't "over-hire."** Diversity and excellence go hand and hand. Be clear about and hold to your standards of excellence. Don't hire women, people of color, LGBT person or others from historically excluded and underrepresented groups ("one-down groups," a term used to refer to certain groups who have been treated as inferior or less than historically in the U.S. system and have experienced less privilege and power as a result) who do not satisfy the holistic set of qualifications solely because you want to increase diversity in your organization. To do so is to set up the individual you hire to fail and to contribute to the assumptions by some that the organization has lowered its standards for candidates from one-down groups. If there is a person who doesn't meet all the criteria but shows great potential, only hire them if you are willing to inform them of, and shore up, the areas where they are deficient.
4. **Don't "under-hire."** Don't bypass talented candidates from one-down groups who meet your holistic criteria because of expressed or silent concerns about whether they can perform according to your standards. Some one-down group members are perceived as risks so, unintentionally, evaluators require additional proof that these individuals are capable despite the indicia they have provided of their accomplishments. Don't let decision-makers default to making an assessment based on traditional criteria rather than looking at what the candidate brings as a whole. Each person should be judged as an individual, not on their group's record of success in the organization. If someone meets the established grade cut-off or has the level of education needed for the job, don't raise the bar and ask that they demonstrate greater achievements than other



candidates from more traditional backgrounds. And don't yield to tokenism, where the organization is satisfied with and resigned to hiring only one or two exceptional candidates from a one down group.

5. **Engage in interviewing training.** Getting the “right people onto the bus” – employing talented individuals who are aligned with the organization’s mission –is among the most imperative tasks of any successful organization. Everyone who interviews should participate in interview training that includes an emphasis on hiring candidates who are from one down groups. Translate agreed-upon criteria into questions that can be asked of candidates in the interview. Inform everyone involved in the hiring process of these criteria and questions.
6. **Focus on job-related criteria in the interview.** Don't get personal in the interview conversation, especially when interviewing candidates from one-down groups. They often experience these types of questions and find them extremely off-putting. You can have an individualized, pleasant conversation, without asking personal, invasive questions based on your curiosity or assumptions. There are some questions you only have a right to ask after the person is hired and you have made the effort to establish a mutually respectful relationship.
7. **Don't trust your gut!** I know many of us think we know instinctively who would be “a good fit” for our organizations. But all of us have to watch out for our unconscious biases; those for and against individuals and groups. Neuroscience tells us that our minds are good at quick judgments but are not perfect. Our guts can be contaminated with stereotypes and biases. Bias can cause us to offend, exclude or mis-hire. Notice not only when a feeling of discomfort arises in an interaction with a candidate, but also when one of unwarranted ease occurs – these are clues that you may be leaning on your gut. You want everyone who interviews with your organization to leave the interaction believing they had a fair and respectful exchange. Even if you don't want to hire the candidate, he or she may have a friend who you would love to hire. Word of mouth, positive or negative, can have a major impact on your recruiting efforts on school campuses and within your industry.
8. **Don't seek to replicate yourself.** Even though all of us suffer from in-group favoritism – we like and favor those in our own group – diversity demands we expand our understanding of who is valuable. Dig a little more deeply into the candidate's experiences, especially if they are different than yours. If you don't know about entries on a resume (associations, articles, group memberships, neighborhoods, countries, etc.), because they are unfamiliar to you don't ignore them; inquire about them. These questions may lead to some of the most valuable insights about what makes an interviewee unique, and whether he or she is right for the position.



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9. **Don't make assumptions about the interviewee.** Assumptions such as where and how someone grew up, what they experienced, likes and dislikes, are usually stereotypes about groups. If you lead with questions that are rooted in stereotypes, you may offend the candidate and lose the opportunity to bring a talented person into your organization. Take your cue from interviewees. If they bring up concerns about gender issues or speak about their humble background, this is a signal that you could engage a conversation around these subjects. But even then, be careful to seek information rather than assuming.
  
10. **Share your diversity commitment with all candidates.** Make sure you share information about your diversity commitment and policies with every candidate, not only those from one-down groups. You can't tell what candidates are interested in, have a sensitivity to, or with which they have an affinity. After all, your diversity program is about making the entire organization better, so everyone should hear about and plan to be a part of moving these values forward. If during an interview, however, the candidate identifies in some way their interests in a diversity-related subject, you can speak about the subject and perhaps also make it possible for them to speak to someone else in your organization who shares a similar identity or life experience. It is great to offer a promising candidate the opportunity to meet such a person. It can make a difference in their decision about what employer they will choose. Make sure you follow up quickly with talented candidates from one down groups and demonstrate your sincere interest so they know you care about them; there may be many other institutions pursuing them.

See more about these tips and others in Vernā's new book, *What If I Say the Wrong Thing? 25 Habits for Culturally Effective People*. Order at [www.movingdiversityforward.com](http://www.movingdiversityforward.com). For more information about VMCG's services contact us at 443-438-7060 or [info@vernamyersconsulting.com](mailto:info@vernamyersconsulting.com)