

Sample Unconscious Bias Debriefs

Busting Unconscious Bias in Debriefs

Personal preferences about a candidate's previous employer, work/life harmony, current team composition, and urgency to fill a role can potentially impact our judgment. While Bar Raisers facilitate debriefs, we all play a role in speaking up when we hear potential unconscious biases.

It is everyone's responsibility to help each other see their own unconscious biases. Personal preferences about the candidate's previous employer, work/life balance, current team composition, and urgency to fill role all impact our judgment. Here is a list of common debrief scenarios. While the Bar Raiser facilitates the debrief, we all play a role in speaking up when we hear potential unconscious biases. Question any examples, statements or concerns that are not aligned to the hiring criteria.

Some factors that can influence hiring decisions include:

- Group think – interviewers aligning with the group or with more senior members of the interview team instead of sharing dissenting or alternative opinions, experiences or examples. Ask for feedback from the most-junior or least-tenured interviewer first, and then work your way to the Bar Raiser and Hiring Manager. Actively acknowledge opinions that are different from the group consensus.
- Focusing on the "reasons not to hire" only without also discussing how the candidate demonstrated the skills for the role.
- A comparison of our own culture to that of others, often viewing our own or similar cultures as the most competent.

Standard Debrief Questions

- Would any of our opinions be different if the candidate were (fill in the blank)? *Opposite gender? Different ethnicity?*
- Have we been as objective as possible? What assumptions have we noticed that we should address?

Debrief Ground Rules

- If feedback about a candidate is vague, or personality based, ask for specificity from the interviewers.
- Make sure all interviewer opinions are heard:
 - Don't allow the discussion to be dominated by the loudest or strongest voices. Consider using a round-robin format where everyone speaks in turn, or just call on those who are hanging back.
 - Write the names of dial-in participants on the whiteboard and actively solicit their feedback, vs. making them guess when to jump in.



What you heard	What to say
<p>“This person isn’t [Your Company] enough”</p> <p>“I just don’t think that person is a good fit”</p>	<p>“For those of us who have been here for a while, we need to remember that we transitioned too. And, the [Your Company] way can be learned”</p> <p>“What makes you say that? What answers did they provide that help you draw that conclusion? Is the fit about a clash with you or existing team members, or [Your Company] as a whole?”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feedback should be objective, job-related and focused on the candidate's demonstration of the job-related knowledge, skills, and experiences required for the position.• Are any of these reasons just different ways of doing or saying things that may seem unfamiliar or uncomfortable? They may not necessarily be less effective or less valuable.• If someone isn't able to share specifics about what the individual said or did to make the interviewer say this, then it is best to try to not include this feedback in the decision process.	

What you heard	What to say
<p>“I don’t think she’ll stay in this role long enough.”</p> <p>“He might just be looking for a way into [Your Company].”</p>	<p>“We're looking for both this role and the long-term hiring decision for the company. We can't guess what someone else is thinking or what they'll do. Do they meet the requirements of the job and raise the bar for the team/ [Your Company]?”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It's natural, and sometimes valid, to want to assess how much a candidate wants the specific role they interviewed for, or how long they are likely to be happy in that role. The hiring team isn't looking for someone who will be bored or looking to change roles in six months. That said, there's a line between reacting to explicit or implicit candidate cues and attempting to predict years into the future.• Also, remember that the goal of the debrief is the best long-term hiring decision for the company, not just this role.	





What you heard	What to say
<p>“She had an intimidating presence.”</p> <p>“He made me uncomfortable.”</p>	<p>“What specifically did they say or do to make you say that? Did other interviewers feel the same way? If so, what made you feel intimidated or uncomfortable?”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask for specifics about what actions or statements prompted these observations.• The “feeling” of being uncomfortable is from the gut and prone to be ripe with unconscious bias. The candidate may remind the interviewer of someone they don't like or makes them feel uneasy.• Data shows that unconscious bias can lead us to interpret the same behaviors differently depending on the race or gender of the person we're interacting with.	

What you heard	What to say
<p>“He wasn't very enthusiastic.”</p> <p>“I just don't see her passion for the role.”</p>	<p>“Did the candidate explicitly say they weren't excited or passionate about the role or [Your Company]? What did the candidate do to make you say that?”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Depending on cultural background, temperament interview nerves, and other factors, people may express enthusiasm and energy in many different ways. Challenge general statements about passion or enthusiasm by asking the group to look at the main point of the candidate's responses, not just how they were delivered.• A more introverted candidate, or one from a more formal culture, may be less demonstrative than an extrovert or naturally informal person. Any nervousness a candidate is feeling may also put a damper on how they expresses enthusiasm or passion.	





What you heard	What to say
"They had a poor communication style"	"What made it poor? Did the candidate frequently interrupt or fail to answer the question? Did they take more time to gather their thoughts than you prefer?"
<p>We often unconsciously prefer those who share our own style of communication, so it's important to understand how this assessment manifested in candidate behavior.</p> <p>Did the candidate frequently interrupt or fail to answer questions? Or did they take more time to gather their thoughts than you prefer?</p>	

What you heard	What to say
"That person wasn't what I expected"	"What makes you say that? How were they different than what you expected?"
"I didn't expect that senior of a candidate to interview in workout attire."	"What did the candidate say that wasn't what you expected?"
<p>When interviewers say this, it is loaded with stereotypes and unconscious bias about what this person was "supposed to be like" and this is used both negatively and positively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I.E., "I didn't expect that senior of a candidate to interview in workout attire." Maybe that person just came in from traveling and wasn't able to change into something different. Maybe the candidate's clothing was in boxes from recently moving and couldn't get them in time. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I'm surprised at how composed and polished she was in anticipating my coding question...who does she know working here?" <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "That person was articulate and I didn't think they would be." People of color are often told they "sound White" or are "articulate". Pay attention to when you make this comment about a candidate. <p>What ethnicity are they? Would you say that a white, male candidate was articulate? This type of cognitive dissonance arises in interviews and debriefs, where we have preconceived ideas about the candidates that turn out false.</p>	





What you heard	What to say
<p>“They went to x university. I don’t know about graduates from that school”</p> <p>“They used to work at Y employer. You know how those people can be”</p>	<p>“Let’s look at how they answered the questions. What specific examples did this candidate provide that make you doubt the candidate? Not all graduates from x school are the same”.</p> <p>“That seems like a sweeping statement. What specifically did the candidate say that gives you doubt in their ability to perform the job?”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many of us have preferences based on our own experience at different companies and with people who attended certain universities. Be aware that this can have a halo (positive) or horns (negative) effect on your opinion of the individual.	

Thank you for making the interview process as inclusive as possible while mitigating bias along the way!

