



STOP Hiring Bias:

Your Guide to Fairer, Safer Hiring
– and a Stronger Workforce

Bias can land you in legal hot water – and it can hurt the productivity and morale of your current workers, too. While we all have biases, we can also learn how to challenge them and reduce their impact on how we hire.

In this eBook, we cover:

- what bias is and how it most commonly appears;
- the risks of ignoring bias and the benefits of challenging it;
- where bias can turn into legal trouble for a company; and
- practical tips for beating bias at every stage of the hiring process.

What Is Bias?

Bias is an inclination or prejudice for or against one person, group, or thing (or against another) for reasons that aren't relevant to the decision at hand.

When it comes to hiring, unintentional bias often manifests in one of two forms:

- Unconscious bias includes stereotypes or inclinations that form outside our conscious awareness. Often, it's incompatible with our conscious values, making it even tougher to spot.
- Mirror bias manifests as a preference for people who seem “like us” in some way. Over time, mirror bias can erode diversity in a workplace culture, leading to a lack of creative thinking and innovation.

To make matters worse, mirror bias is often unconscious, creating a “double dose” of bias that can do serious damage to your hiring process.

Why You Can't Ignore Bias

One decision “nudged” by a bias may not seem like much. But over time, biases can nudge decisions into patterns that can cause serious problems for a company.

The results may include:

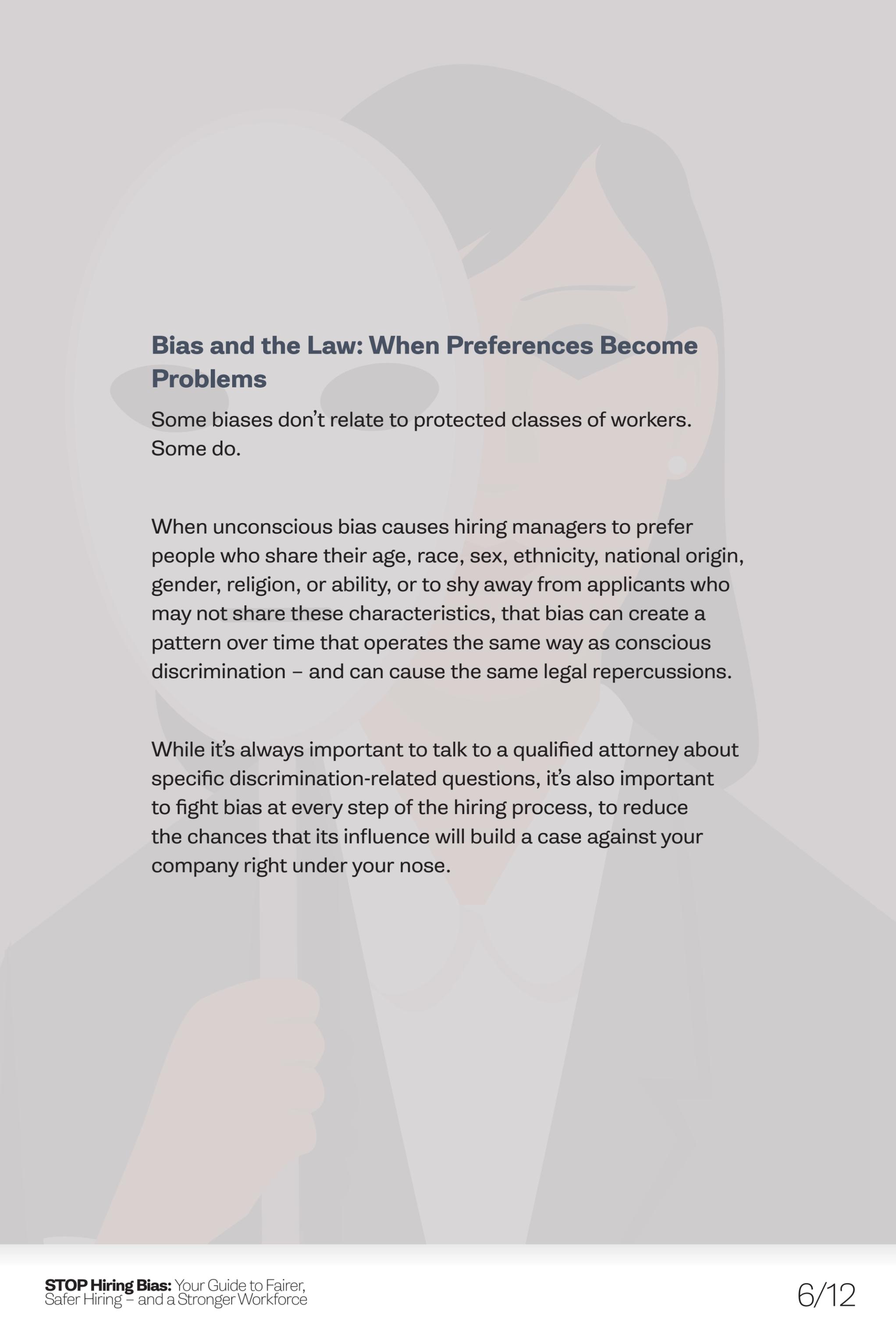
- Marginalizing or under-utilizing talent
- “Flattening” your recruiting/retention results
- Damaging individuals’ performance and engagement
- Undermining innovation, creativity, and growth
- Inhibiting teamwork and collaboration
- Harming your company’s reputation among top talent
- Exposing your organization to potential discrimination lawsuits

Any of these can hurt your company; taken together, they can be a recipe for disaster. Fortunately, challenging bias is possible.

The Benefits of Challenging Bias

The good news is that unconscious bias can be challenged with conscious effort. Decision makers who choose to fight unconscious bias in the hiring process may see positive changes like:

- **Better decisions.** Research from the Kellogg School at Northwestern University found that diverse groups (formed by challenging mirror bias) outperform more homogeneous groups by organizing the tensions caused by diverse backgrounds into “more careful information processing.”
- **Better reputation.** 67 percent of job seekers say they won't apply to a company with gender-based pay inequities. Other signs of bias are similarly disdained by top candidates. When a company publicly fights bias, it attracts better talent.
- **Better performance.** Companies that consciously fight gender bias in hiring outperform their peers by 15 percent; those that consciously fight racial and ethnic bias outperform by 35 percent, according to McKinsey & Company.



Bias and the Law: When Preferences Become Problems

Some biases don't relate to protected classes of workers. Some do.

When unconscious bias causes hiring managers to prefer people who share their age, race, sex, ethnicity, national origin, gender, religion, or ability, or to shy away from applicants who may not share these characteristics, that bias can create a pattern over time that operates the same way as conscious discrimination – and can cause the same legal repercussions.

While it's always important to talk to a qualified attorney about specific discrimination-related questions, it's also important to fight bias at every step of the hiring process, to reduce the chances that its influence will build a case against your company right under your nose.

Beat Bias: Sourcing

Job descriptions have come under fire in recent years after studies revealed that the language used in them can reveal or trigger unconscious gender biases. To help ensure that neither the hiring manager's biases nor the candidates' biases affect the decision to apply:

- Make sure the description contains the job's essential duties and responsibilities – the day-to-day “to-do” list for the position.
- Align the job description's “to-do” list with rubrics or forms used in screening and interviewing candidates in order to maintain consistency and gather data useful in determining whether the candidate can do the job up to the company's standards.

Beat Bias: Recruiting and Candidate Intake

Fair hiring starts with fair recruiting. To reduce bias at the candidate intake stage:

- Implement best practices from the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) to widen and diversify your candidate pool.
- Carefully word job postings to ensure that your practices do not disproportionately favor or exclude any group.
- Cast a wider net. Use a variety of recruiting tools, including job boards, job fairs, social networking sites, your company's website and internal job postings. Diverse recruiting tactics appeal to a broad group of potential applicants.
- Resumes can trigger unconscious biases not only by displaying names, but also in how they are laid out, edited, or phrased. To minimize potential bias:
 - Create a customized application that organizes information according to a standardized format.
 - Consider using a system that assigns a unique identifier to each resume in place of a name.

Beat Bias: Screening

Phone screening opens up the possibility that an interviewer will build a mental picture of an interviewee while speaking to them – and then make decisions based on that mental picture, rather than on the information they’ve gathered.

To beat bias in screening:

- Use a score sheet to keep resume screening focused on valid, relevant selection factors.
- Create a standard list of questions and ask every question to every candidate.
- Focus on screening for competencies, rather than life experiences or education.
- Remind interviewers to delay “fit” or hiring decisions about applicants until after sufficient information has been gathered.

Beat Bias: Interviewing

Interviewing makes it easier to see how a candidate thinks, speaks, moves, and acts in the “real world” location of the office or workspace, but it also offers a wealth of information that can feed our unconscious biases.

To beat bias in interviewing:

- Regardless of experience, train everyone in your organization who interviews candidates to improve consistency and objectivity. Educate them on the dangers of hiring bias (awareness is the first step in eliminating it).
- Carefully structure interview questions, to avoid asking anything that’s potentially discriminatory or could feed interviewer bias.
- Follow a structured interview format, and ask the same core set of questions of all candidates.
- Use a standard candidate evaluation form, which has the added benefit of making it easier to compare candidates directly on skills and experience.
- Combine the standardized form with a panel interview, then compare results.
- When evaluating candidates, require interviewers to back up their “gut feelings” with evidence.
- Make hiring decisions as a group, to minimize the impact of any form of individual bias.

For certain positions, interviewing from behind a screen or in a similar format may also be an option. Research shows that hiring in professional orchestras, for instance, began to include more women and ethnic minorities when candidates played their audition pieces from behind a screen.

Beat Bias: Reference and Background Checks

It's easy to assume references and background checks won't awaken your biases, since the goal is to get information from outside sources. Nonetheless, these sources may also cause unconscious changes that impact your decision-making.

To beat bias in reference and background checks:

- Create a standard form. References are typically biased in favor of the candidate, so asking standard questions can help you contextualize the reference's information, keeping both their and your biases in check.
- Outsource the work. A recruiter or a company specializing in background checks can gather information and report only what is both legal and relevant, helping you screen out irrelevant information.

Beat Bias: Perspective

Finally, to beat bias, don't be afraid to step outside your own head.

A recruiter's perspective can help you:

- Create sound policies to help hiring managers evaluate candidates based on skill, not on unintentional biases.
- Align job descriptions, interview questions, and other screening tools to improve results.
- Build a strategic recruiting plan that helps you reach more diverse candidates.
- Stay compliant with laws regarding illegal hiring discrimination.