

## Combatting bias. How to make sure your recruitment process is objective?

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**Companies fail to choose the candidate with the right talent for management positions 82% of the time. Why? Because of biased hiring process. How to make sure that this doesn't happen to you?**

The executive search process should be bias-proof. Non-HR specialists will argue with that statement. As executive search

specialists, it is our job to create an objective and transparent hiring process. However, it is easier to say than done, and not many recruiters have the nerve to admit it. Hence the confession of Kristen Pressner, Global Head Human Resources at Roche Diagnostics, was a meaningful moment for people who live from hiring. "Let me just get this out there. I have a [bias against women leaders](#). No one can be more surprised about this than me. I'm a woman leader," Pressner acknowledged at TEDxBasel in 2016. During her speech, she told the story of spotting and becoming more self-aware of her bias. And the moral of this story is simple: there are no saints, even among recruiters. Besides, as statistics show, the problem with bias in hiring may be more significant than we think.

### Bias in hiring and dreadful statistics

Why should recruiters avoid biases during the hiring process? Well, the answer is quite simple. Acting with a bias, HR specialists won't hire the best possible candidate for a specific position. But how often is this happening? **According to Gallup, companies fail to choose the candidate with the right talent for management positions 82% of the time. That means organisations pick the best manager just once in every five hires.**

As Ryan Pendell wrote for Gallup: "On the other side of the interviewing table, much of the anxiety for job hunters comes from not knowing which hiring bias is going to be the one that keeps them from getting a job they are qualified for." This hits the nail on the head! Being educated about a specific phenomenon doesn't necessarily mean that the person is capable of reflecting their own behaviour. Especially that there are dozens of different types of biases. Some of them are quite easy to avoid at the early steps of the [recruitment process](#). We can refuse to know the age, gender, or race of candidates or assign some duties to AI (and hoped that the algorithm is not biased, too!). But when there is a time for the first face-to-face interview, recruiters are on their own. However, some biases are just trickier than others! IMSA Search Global Partners distinguished three biases that are not so visible but meaningful and powerful when it comes to the executive search process.

### Three biases that can spoil every hiring process:

1. **Affinity bias:** We are much more likely to gravitate towards people who are similar to us. No harm in everyday life, but a big problem during the hiring process. The fact that we like a candidate because of the school we both attended or the hobby we share doesn't mean that this person will be a good fit for the position. It is undeniable and straightforward, but spotting that recruiter actions are driven by affinity bias can be challenging. It is easy if you already know where you made a mistake.
2. **Confirmation bias:** A person is looking only at the information that proves their previous hypothesis. Inconvenient, especially if supported by affinity bias. Recruiter likes the candidate a little more because of the irrelevant fact e.g.; they are from the same town. From that point, the specialist is unconsciously looking for information that strengthens his or her previous statement and ignores all contradictory facts.
3. **Framing bias:** Choosing candidates based on the immediate context rather than the candidates themselves. In some executive search process, time is crucial. However, when a specialist is under time pressure, problems may appear. For example, when under pressure to fill a position, managers may hire a subpar candidate out of fear and seeing this as better than hiring no one.

Everyone has a bias. No matter how much we try and how much we learn during our lifetime, in the deepest corners of our minds, we are all driven by unconscious inclinations and prejudices. Still, the only way to fight with our weaknesses is to be honest with ourselves and "flip it to test it." As Kristen Pressner pointed out during her TED talk: "Just mentally flip whoever you are dealing with for someone else to test yourself." If something feels weird after the flipping, you may be operating with a bias. Simple method, but the ultimate tool in fighting bias. To be adapted ASAP.