



Five tips for removing unconscious bias towards female assignees

Is unconscious bias impacting international assignment opportunities in your organization? We all have unconscious biases in one form or another - they're impossible to avoid.

Unconscious biases can show up in the workplace in many different ways; some positive and others negative. They can be based on any number of variables, traits or characteristics that we attribute to people we see or interact with every day.

Some of these are obvious: nationality, social class, marital status, apparent sexuality or age. Others however can be far more subtle: how a person dresses, their physical appearance, how they communicate; it could be where they went to school, what football team they support, even their job function, or area of expertise. Whether obvious or not, all these (and many others) can influence who gets hired, who gets promoted, who gets listened to, and even who gets selected to go on international assignments.

Gender equality is an area that continues to be a significant blind spot and unconscious bias in the workplace; negatively influencing women in many ways, including the number of females that go on international assignments.

After twenty years of tracking, the industry average of female assignees remains around 20 percent. Even companies making gender equality a priority have their fair share of examples where qualified women are being overlooked for international opportunities – due to unspoken assumptions about their willingness to go or fit for the role.

“We cannot change what we are not aware of, and once we are aware, we cannot help but change.”

Sheryl Sandberg, COO, Facebook

Unconscious bias towards women is not just a challenge that comes from men. Women are just as capable of gender-related unconscious bias towards other women, sometimes more so than their male counterparts. If you want to raise awareness around this bias that might be impacting the gender gap in your international assignment program, here are five tips to consider:

1. Selection criteria

Best practice companies require more than one candidate for international assignment opportunities and more than one decision-maker. In larger organizations with strong commitments to Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) goals, the criteria goes so far as to require diversity of candidates. However, this is not possible with all companies. If a HR Business Partner or Global Mobility team member is included in the final selection process and tasked with asking questions about assignee diversity, it helps bring the discussion into the open. Companies with pre-decision scorecards to assess assignee fit can include gender diversity as one metric.



2. Use your data

Companies of every size already have the capability to know how many of their employees are male and how many are female. Most companies can break down employee demographics for each gender to show what types of roles they fill and any gender gaps that exist at different levels or job functions.

Global Mobility programs need to tap into that capability in order to build a story around closing the gender gap. How many assignees are women? Are certain regions more successful at sending women on assignments than others? Are certain critical global career positions lacking gender diversity?

Data gives you a point of focus to draw attention to: where gender gaps exist in the program and where to target specific strategies in order to achieve gender equality goals. Once you have the data, make sure your team is comfortable discussing it and bringing it to the business' attention. This is a great way to elevate the Global Mobility function through formal and informal conversations about assignee gender gap issues.

3. Link Global Mobility to your company's D&I strategy

Does your organization have a D&I strategy? Are the goals and initiatives relating to gender equality a high priority and getting visibility? If so, you are in a great position to link your Global Mobility program to existing initiatives. This is a chance to elevate the Global Mobility program to a more strategic Talent Mobility function. It also gives you some short cuts for rolling out your program's own initiatives – take advantage of company-wide themes, strategies, activities and attach Global Mobility's efforts to them.

4. Find male allies

One way to strengthen an initiative to support increasing female assignees and decrease unconscious bias is to identify male “allies” (also called “champions”) in your organization and get them actively involved.

Organizations with male senior leaders who actively support the recruitment and retention of women in their organizations are moving much faster towards closing the gender gap than those without this critical support.

Your Global Mobility program will benefit from high-level male allies who speak to the unconscious bias challenge, value the international assignment experience's impact on the organization and actively promote the effort to close the gender gap in the international assignee population. Male allies can also serve as sponsors or mentors for female assignees who make it into the program.

Who are the male allies in your organization? Speak with them to identify ways they can advocate for, and actively support, the goals.

5. Promote current and previous female assignees

Giving visibility to women who are currently on international assignments, or have already completed their experience, will help raise awareness around the program – and help women and their managers see this as a viable and valuable opportunity.

Profile these women on your company's Intranet, invite them to speak at global leadership meetings and post their photos and a compelling quote on your Global Mobility page. Visibility and promotion play a big role in changing attitudes, breaking down the unconscious bias barrier and opening possibilities for any employee population that is not always represented in an organization.

Speak to your D&I team to get their input on ways that they use visibility to help change attitudes and behaviors. The marketing team in your organization might have insights, too. Don't be afraid to reach out to other parts of your organization to get creative input on finding new ways to eliminate unconscious bias around female assignees and to promote closing the gender gap.



Conclusion

Unconscious biases are not rare, in fact quite the opposite; they reside in all of us. We believe that unconscious bias is one of the most common barriers to overcome in order to increase international assignment opportunities for women.

This year at Crown World Mobility we are actively working with companies to close the assignment gender gap. These five tips are intended to stimulate creative thinking and present actionable steps to raising awareness around how unconscious bias can be addressed in your Global Mobility program.

A recent PwC study showed that 22 percent of Global Mobility professionals are actively working to increase female assignees in their organizations. Are you one of them?

If you have any questions regarding this article or would like to find out more please contact Lisa Johnson, Global Practice Leader at Crown World Mobility ljohnson@crownew.com.

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