Taking Action to Remove Bias from Performance Reviews

SHIRIN NIKAEIN

KATIE MCLAUGHLIN

SHIRIN NIKAEIN
Co-*Founder & CEO*

15+ years leading Product Management, Engineering, Data Analytics, AI
5+ years: HR, DEI, language

USC BS in Electrical Engineering
USC MS in Electrical Engineering
UCLA MBA

Raytheon · TeleSign · beats by dr. dre.
Forbes · UCLA · BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT · Walmart
Google · Microsoft · ACTIVISION
HubSpot · AT&T · Starbucks · BAIN & COMPANY

KATIE MCLAUGHLIN,
Founder, Chief Strategist & Transformation Artist

15+ years coach, facilitator, consultant

25+ startups & tech companies focused on: change management, process improvement, people development

2x Horizon Awards for Trainings

MINDBODY. · Microsoft · wayfair
iCIMS · PURINA · jamf
· AUTHORITY MAGAZINE
VISTA CONSULTING GROUP · TERMINIX
PLANSOURCE · QBI WILD ALASKA SEAFOODS · IAS Integral Ad Science

Agenda

- Connecting: DEI strategy & performance reviews

- Role of empathy & emotional intelligence for better employee retention & experience

- Subtle language differences in quality of feedback

- Implementing practical and scalable changes

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McLaughlin Method

Connecting: DEI strategy & Performance Reviews

86% of employees feel reviews are not accurate

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$1 TRILLION

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Managers impact employees' **mental health** (69%)

more than doctors (51%)

or therapists (41%) —

and even the same as a spouse or partner (69%)

When you promote the **wrong** people, you begin to **lose** the **best** people.

Bias in Evaluations

In a study led by the New York University psychologist Madeline Heilman, participants **evaluated the performance of a male or female employee who did or did not stay late** to help colleagues prepare for an important meeting.
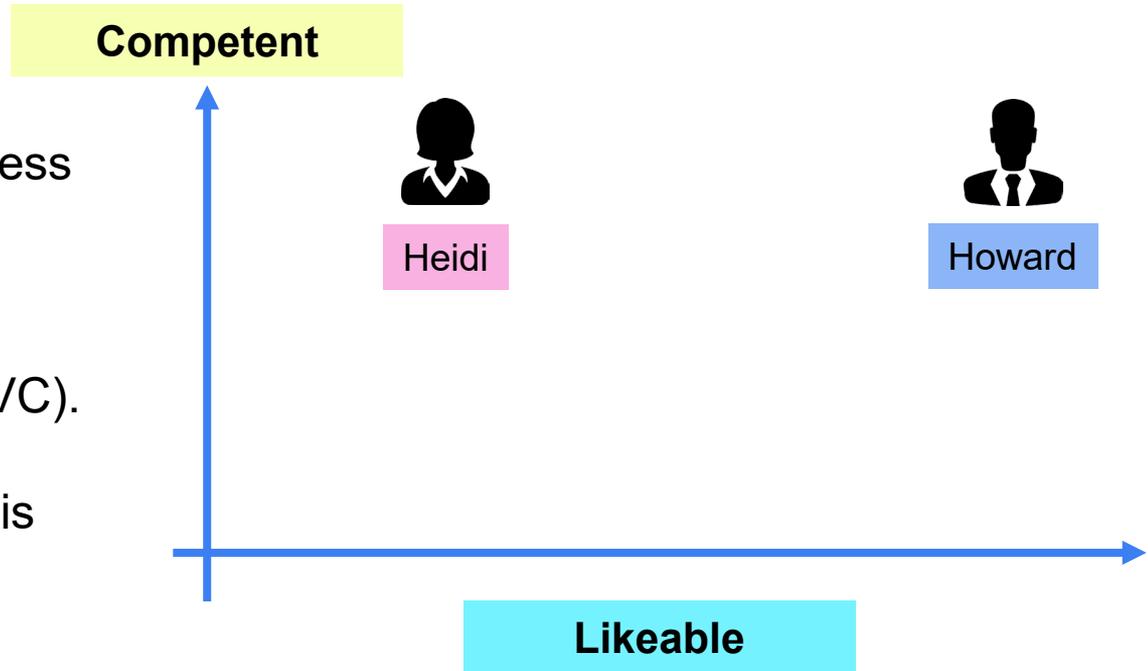
Performance Ratings

+14%

Yes, I'll help!

No

-12%

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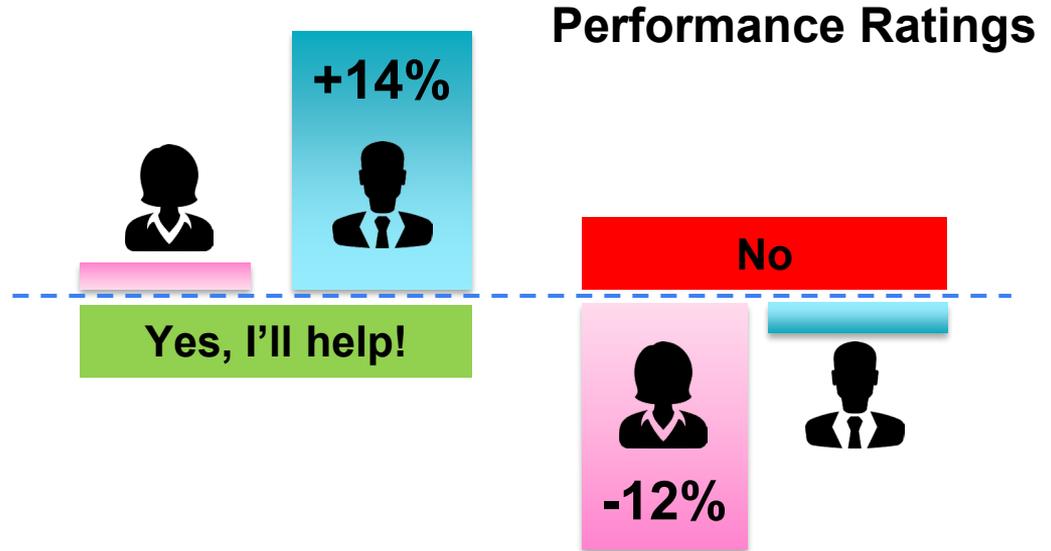
Heidi vs. Howard: The Likability Penalty

Researchers conducted an experiment at Columbia Business School.

A case study described a successful venture capitalist (VC).

Would you hire or work with this person?

Competent

Heidi

Howard

Likeable

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Words used to describe men

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Analytical	
Competent	
Athletic	
Dependable	Arrogant
Confident	
Versatile	
Articulate	
Level-headed	
	Irresponsible
Logical	
Practical	

Words used to describe women

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Compassionate	
	Inept
Enthusiastic	Selfish
Energetic	Frivolous
	Passive
Organized	Scattered
	Opportunistic
	Gossip
	Excitable
	Vain
	Panicky
	Temperamental
	Indecisive

IN DESCENDING ORDER
OF RELATIVE FREQUENCY

Source: Harvard Business Review
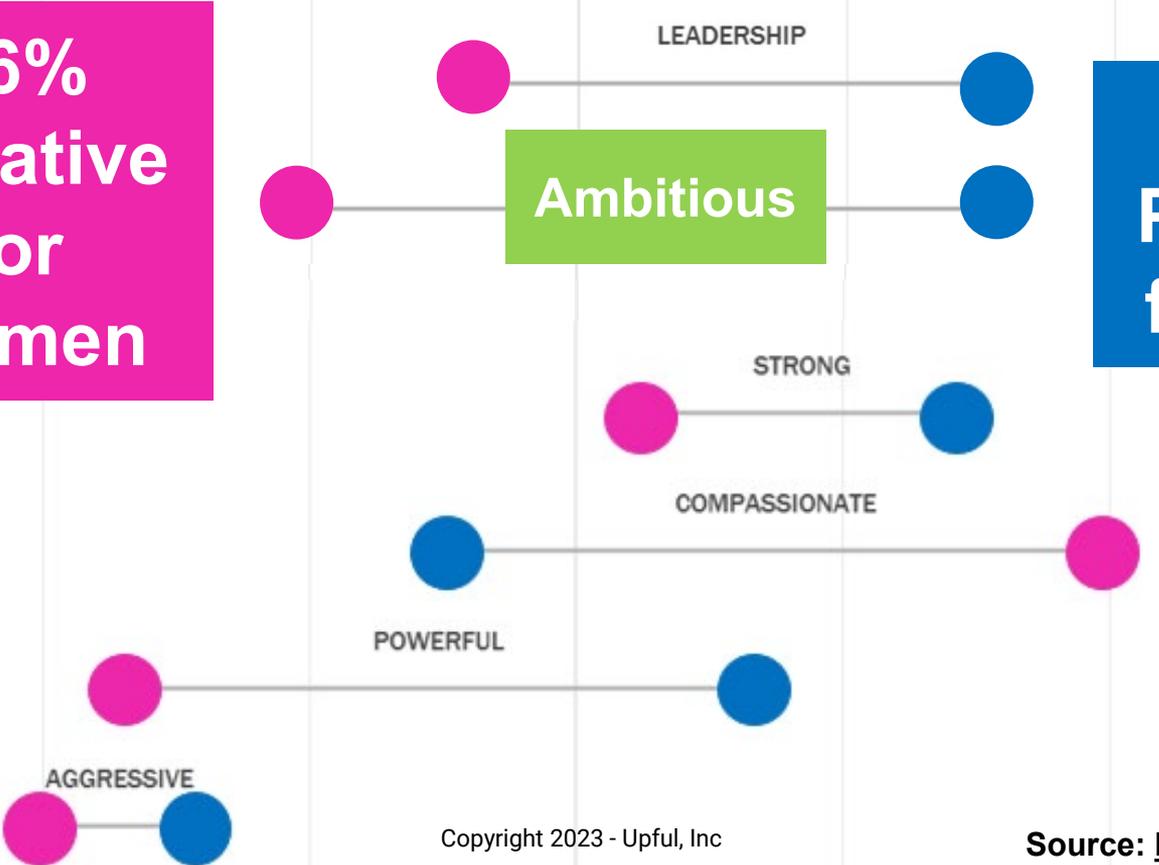
Women & People of Color Receive Biased Evals

Negative feedback 3,700% more often than men

Personality-based feedback 600% more often than men

Using Empathy & Emotional Intelligence In Performance Reviews

Why Theatre Works

- Fast track our empathy and emotional intelligence skills

- **Universal language** to share and be understood: inclusive of all abilities and identities

- Creates an **objective scenario** to discuss to reduce retraumatization

- Engages **different parts of our brains**

- Builds fun, trust, and safety

- Fosters connection across different groups we might otherwise judge or reject

McLaughlin Method

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Create an Image

Using:
Your Body
Facial Expressions

Consider:
Visible Space
Shapes
Camera Distance

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Create a Larger than Life Image

How you really feel going to YOUR performance review

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EMOTIONS → **ACTIONS** → **RESULTS**
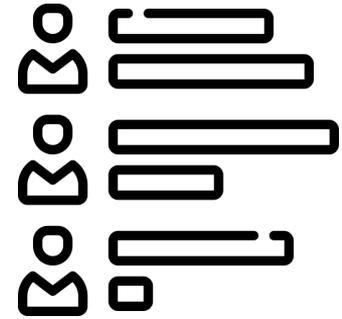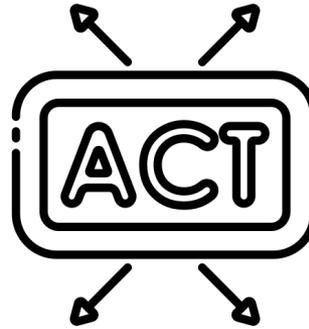
Create a Larger than Life Image

How you WANT to show up in Performance Review

Imbalance of Power & Roles in a Performance Review

Talent / Human Resources

People Managers

Direct Reports

Subtle language differences impact quality of feedback & where bias lurks in performance reviews

Recency Bias

- Your manager is giving you an evaluation for the last 6 months of your time with the company

- Last week, Barbara complains to your manager about your tone of voice in an e-mail/ Slack message.

- Your manager focuses much of the evaluation on that complaint and forgets all the great work you did for 6 months and how no one else complained about you in that time.

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Double Standards

- The VP of IT yells at his team
  - No one says anything about this behavior

- A Junior employee yells at someone
  - Written up, possibly fired…

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Ignoring Context

- Lisa is constantly helping others: with troubleshooting, tasks, how-to's, etc

- Lisa had perfect performance for the last 2 years!

- All of the sudden, Toby complains to Lisa's manager that she wasn't very helpful…

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Lisa needs to be more helpful to her colleagues.

Ignoring Context   - Asking WHY

- Toby could have been over   -using Lisa's time

- Lisa may have tried to help him multiple times already

- Lisa could be over   -worked and burnt out

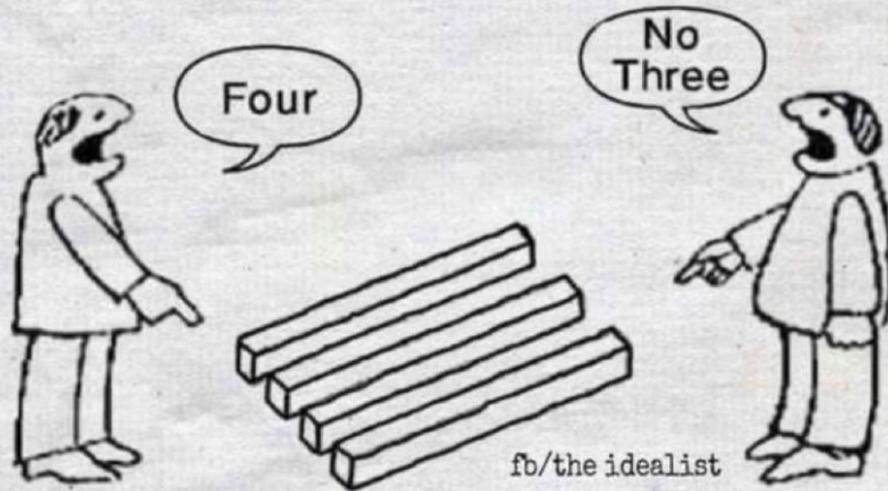- Lisa may have offered to help, but not fast enough for Toby, so Toby complained
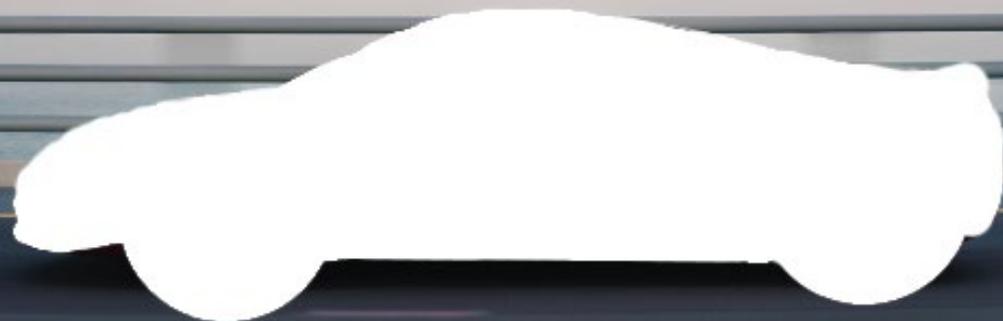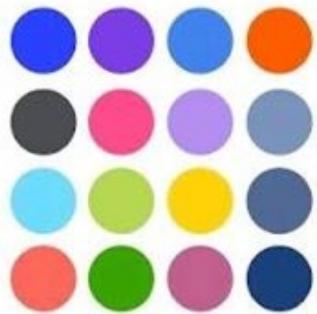
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Confirmation Bias

Confirmation Bias

They are too passive, they need to be more assertive.

Issues with labeling & opinions

- Vague / Subjective

- Overgeneralizations

- Global Labeling

- Not providing specific examples or factual information

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someone's day

Amanda seems paralyzed and confused when facing tight deadlines to make decisions. She's indecisive.

Speculation:
How do you know how she feels or what's going on in her head?

Overgeneralization:
All of the tight deadlines? Or some, or which specifically?

Global Labeling:
Indecisive

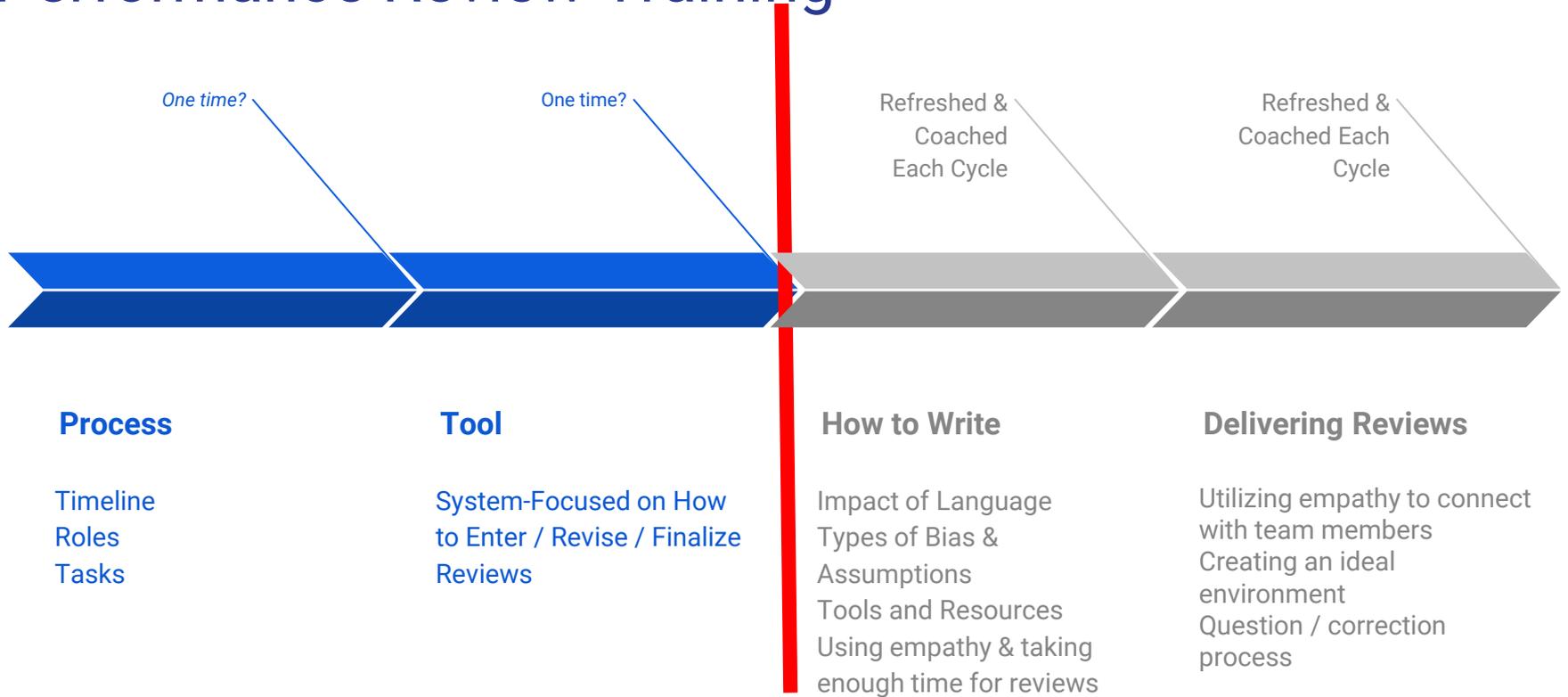Amanda seems paralyzed and confused when facing tight deadlines to make decisions. She's indecisive.

Tom seems hesitant in making decisions, yet he is able to work out multiple alternative solutions and determined the most suitable one.

Categories of issues with language

- Speculative / Assumptive

- Personality based feedback vs work product

- Microaggressions

- Cultural Differences

Practical and Scalable Actions to Implement

Performance Review Training

One time?

One time?

Refreshed &
Coached
Each Cycle

Refreshed &
Coached Each
Cycle

Process

Timeline
Roles
Tasks

Tool

System-Focused on How
to Enter / Revise / Finalize
Reviews

How to Write

Impact of Language
Types of Bias &
Assumptions
Tools and Resources
Using empathy & taking
enough time for reviews

Delivering Reviews

Utilizing empathy to connect
with team members
Creating an ideal
environment
Question / correction
process

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Best Practices to Evaluate Feedback

Ask yourself

- Is there any factual info or is it just opinions?

- What assumptions are being made?

- Is this expected behavior or necessary for the role?

- What's the context? Where is the info coming from?

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Re-think & Redesign your PR process for DEI

- Anchored in clear goals / okrs / values

- Defined, intentional expectations for roles and timelines

- More frequent feedback, real -time – nothing should be a surprise in the "formal review"

- Written required (not just verbal)

- Self -evaluations – for comparison & validation

- Collecting anonymous feedback on managers

Quality Check & Expectations of Reviews

- Talent / HR review for quality, bias   -free, specificity: feedback & coaching for managers

- Manager is not single source of truth

- Clarifications / grievance process for employees

- Constructive feedback is for growth but not always used against the employee in compensation

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Continuous Improvement & Support
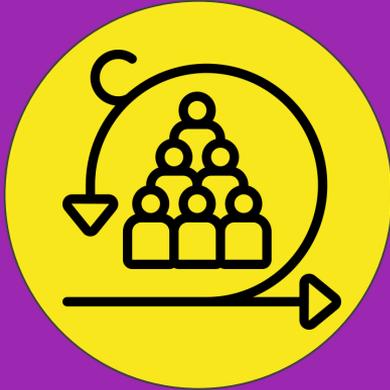
Experiential
Training &
Repetition

Coaching for
Behavior
Change

Empathy
Builds Trust &
Consistency

By Removing Bias in Performance Reviews:

Improve Manager Excellence, Employee Experience, and DEI Impact

Reduce Discrimination, Retaliation, Lawsuits, & PR Issues

Saves HR Time, & Reduces Costs from Turnover

Feedback Survey