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Thanks to all the men who asked for such an article, and the men and women who read and immeasurably strengthened it.

# How to be a Good Guy

By Janet Crawford and Lisa Marshall

**A**s two executive coaches who've worked mostly in high tech and the entertainment industry, we've heard requests lately from male (mostly white) clients who've been exposed to the conversation about implicit bias and want to know "How do I do better? How do I *not* be part of the problem? How do I support the women or under-represented minorities who work for me in ways that help us all move past the boundaries of unconscious bias?"

It's a great question. We shared with each other some of the answers we've come up with and then decided it was time to broaden the conversation. So, to all you white male managers and leaders out there, listen up: Here are some of the ways you can be one of the good guys. (And by the way, if you've got other suggestions, we'd love to hear them!)

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**1** NEVER EVER assume your experience and your employee's experiences have been the same.

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Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, famously learned that lesson when he said women should trust karma for raises, hearkening back to advice that had been given to (and worked out well for) him. He received a tsunami wave of feedback that this was not now, nor had it ever been, true for women.

Fortunately, he had the good grace to publicly acknowledge that his advice had been off base and that he had learned from the experience.

So why don't women/members of underrepresented groups have the same experience that you do? Shankar Vendantam, author of *The Hidden Brain*<sup>1</sup>, suggests that men (especially white males) effectively swim with an invisible current of support that the rest of

us don't get. That's not to say white men have all had it easy -- only that women and members of underrepresented groups have all your same struggles PLUS more.

How does that work? Well, ask yourself: when I speak up in meetings, how often am I interrupted? (Women get interrupted, according to a George Washington University study, on average, 2.6 times for every time 2 times a man gets interrupted.<sup>2</sup>) When I have an idea, how often is it ignored, and then repeated by someone else later who then gets credit for it? Women in the business world report that as an every-day experience. How often, when I propose an idea or action, does my leadership respond with "but," rather than "yes, and"? Studies show that African American professional women in mixed settings have their ideas endorsed 26% less than their

<sup>1</sup> Shankar Vendantam, *The Hidden Brain*, (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010), 88-111.

white male counterparts.<sup>3</sup> While women are frequently chastised for being too verbose, research also shows that on average, women speak 25% *less* in professional settings than their male counterparts.<sup>4</sup>

Ask yourself: Do I always worry that suggesting something different could compromise my career or credibility? Women are frequently dismissed as being unwilling to champion big risk, big reward ideas. We hear this belief thrown out casually in conversation as though it's a universally understood biological difference. Recent research suggests, however, that risk taking has more to do with one's perceived power and status than one's genitalia.<sup>5</sup>

Let's break that down. The brain only has so much capacity for risk taking. The more security, support and power you feel *or are afforded*, the more that capacity is freed up. The more you assess you don't belong, the more that capacity is absorbed in monitoring for your own safety.

From a neurological perspective, being different from the predominant group is inherently risky.<sup>6</sup> We naturally feel more confident within the context of our own tribe. When we are already the outsider, swimming against the tide is that much more risky.

In addition, copious amounts of research show that women and members of underrepresented groups suffer a competence penalty. Equal work is judged differently depending on whether the person performing it is believed to be a white male, a female or a person of color.<sup>7</sup> Because of these largely unconscious biases, these groups are afforded fewer chances to fail. The first failure is construed as confirming evidence of these artificially lower estimations of competence. Women and members of underrepresented groups understand all of these phenomena, at either a conscious or unconscious level, and it affects their willingness to propose bold, but risky ideas.

The world of work was built around the sensibilities and preferences of white males, not because they were *trying* to exclude. We design for what we know. But those environments *do* exclude. They don't necessarily feel as natural to groups who came to the party later. They are not as comfortable and welcoming, often in subtle, but profound ways. Take the time to understand the experience of women and members of underrepresented groups. Don't just assume that what works for you, works for them.

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## 2 Understand the difference between mentoring and sponsoring.

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There's a lot of talk these days about a need for more mentoring for high potential female employees. Why do we have a lack of mentorship? There's a frequent reflexive assumption that women should have female mentors. Because of the pronounced underrepresentation of women in top leadership, the pool of potential female mentors is small. Those women who have advanced to high positions of authority are often overburdened with expectations to mentor the entire next generation of female leaders. Worse yet, the potential exposure to networks and perspective for younger female employees becomes limited to the experiences of a singular few role models.

We *need* male leaders to mentor high potential female employees. Mentoring involves showing a junior person the ropes and offering them the benefit of one's experience. We've already seen how that can backfire. Men *can* and *should* mentor female employees, but the conversation should be approached as an exploration of how the male leader's experience applies rather than a blanket assumption that it does.

<sup>2</sup> Adrienne B. Hancock and Benjamin A. Rubin, "Influence of Communication Partner's Gender on Language," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* Vol. 34 no. 1 (2015): 46-54

<sup>3</sup> Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Tai Green, "Black Women Ready to Lead," *Center for Talent Innovation* (2015): 26

<sup>4</sup> Christopher F. Karpowitz, Tali Mendelberg and Lee Shaker, "Gender Inequality in Deliberative Participation," *American Political Science Review*, Available on CJO doi:10.1017/S0003055412000329

<sup>5</sup> Cameron Anderson and Adam D. Galinsky, "Power, Optimism, and Risk Taking," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 36 (2006): 511-536

<sup>6</sup> Mina Cikara, Emile G. Bruneau, and Rebecca R. Saxe, "Us and Them: Intergroup Failures of Empathy," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 20(3) (2011): 149-153

<sup>7</sup> Shelley Correll and Stephen Benard, "Gender and Racial Bias in Hiring," (2006) <https://diversity.illinois.edu/SupportingDocs/DRIVE/Gender%20and%20Racial%20Bias%20in%20Hiring-1.pdf>

More than mentors, however, women and members of underrepresented groups today need sponsors. Sponsorship involves *putting your reputation on the line* to support the career of a junior person. That means going outside *your* comfort zone, and working with people who aren't exactly like you and can't be turned into "mini-me's." It's challenging, and it's enormously rewarding.

What do sponsors do for someone they're sponsoring? Here are a few ideas:

- Publically defend/champion their ideas;
- Invite them to meetings and conferences for exposure. Name them from the front of the room or platform;
- Amplify their voice in meetings, whether or not they are in the room;
- Interrupt people who interrupt them;
- Ensure their opinions are heard in meetings, even when they were reluctant to share them. Just be careful not to put them on the spot. Let women know in advance that you'll be asking for their input.
- Listen for key opportunities and put their name forward;
- Place or suggest them for roles involving profit and loss responsibilities;
- Connect them to key people and resources who/that can help them with their ideas and career (access the old boys

network on their behalf);

- Make sure they get credit for their ideas, and get to lead those ideas into results;
- Invite them to lead in key situations (conversations, meetings, presentations);
- Co-author articles, reports, etc.;
- Coach them to act confident even if they're not feeling confident. (Men do this a lot!) And at the same time, encourage them to be themselves – they don't have to act like "one of the guys.";
- Challenge issues of inclusion so that they don't have to be the one constantly pointing it out;
- Encourage other senior leaders to sponsor members of underrepresented groups;
- Fund mentorship/coaching opportunities for women and underrepresented groups.

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### 3 Create a safe space for failure.

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Women and members of underrepresented groups are often seen as representing for their group, so when they fail, they carry the burden of failing for all.<sup>8</sup> Men who fail get to just fail. It's personal, not global. They learn from it and go on. This is especially true in Silicon Valley.<sup>9</sup> So support women and members of underrepresented groups in taking risks, especially if those risks could have great payoffs. Verify their experience that it's difficult to take risks in their

environment. Strategize with them around how to best step out of their comfort zone.

Then, publically back and defend them while they're taking the risk. If the risky choice fails, highlight what was positive so that they feel empowered to risk again. That means reminding them that they were being forward thinking, innovative and courageous, and that they learned in the process. Share stories of your own failures.

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### 4 Be sensitive to the social context you create in your organization.

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At a personal level, take the time to become aware of your own unconscious biases and assumptions. For example, are you expecting superior emotional intelligence on the one hand, or gratitude and compliance on the other? Don't. Those qualities may or may not exist; it depends entirely on the individual. Ask yourself, if a male or Caucasian individual did the same behavior, would I be evaluating it in the same way? Make sure you're not relegating the "office housework," like note-taking, party planning, and administrative tasks to female members of your team.

At an organizational level, think about the physical environment. Does it reflect only male or upper middle class Caucasian sensibilities and interests? Are the t-shirts you hand out at team and company events only available in a men's large or

<sup>8</sup> Claude Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011)

<sup>9</sup> Kate Loose, "The Art of Failing Upward," *The New York Times Sunday Review*, March 5, 2016  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/06/opinion/sunday/the-art-of-failing-upward.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/06/opinion/sunday/the-art-of-failing-upward.html?_r=0)

# Don't Kid Yourself, You Do Have a Problem

*"If no one has ever complained to me, why should I think I have a problem?"*

This is an unfortunately common question. Here's what you have to consider:

- Feedback attenuates. The higher up you are in an organization, the more likely you'll be shielded from complaints.
- Does no one complain because there's no diversity on your team to begin with?
- Or does no one complain because they:
  - Don't believe they'd be listened to?
  - Think it might be a career-limiting move?
  - Feel it's "obvious" it wouldn't do any good?
  - Are afraid?

*"Well, what do I do?"*

First, the realization that you don't fully understand the issues underrepresented groups face doesn't make you a bad guy. It does, however, make you responsible for finding out. If you don't have any diversity, you will have to explore the reasons and what can be done, which is a different article than this one. If you do have some diversity on your team, consider taking these steps:

- Ask. Ask your women and members of underrepresented groups, "Do you feel fairly treated here?" "What could we be doing better?" Then, pay very close attention to the responses. Is the body language congruent? Was there a lot of hesitation in the responses? Did they make eye contact? (Do they usually?) Did their voices drop or grow very loud? Any of these might indicate more exploration needs to be done.
- If that's the case, consider other routes to getting and/or confirming the information you need. Hiring a good organization development consultant is one option. Setting up a well-constructed and anonymous employee satisfaction survey might be another.
- Ask HR to do a pay equity study. And fix whatever issues you uncover.
- Share. Share what you've learned and what you're doing about it. Ask your employees to keep giving you honest feedback, even if it feels hard to say and hear.
- Keep listening and keep sharing. Don't get defensive: this is a systemic issue, and it will take time to fix. We all have to keep doing our part if we're going to lick it.

bigger? Does formal or informal team-building center around sport, happy-hour drinking, gaming, or other stereotypically male interests? Talk to women and members of underrepresented groups about their preferences. What kinds of events do they enjoy? Are there any types of social events where they've felt uncomfortable and why? These are all conversations to have before designing group

events, so that everyone can be comfortably included.

Know that many women or members of underrepresented groups will not answer honestly at first for fear that saying anything about discrimination or challenges will mark them as a victim or whiner. Also, women and members of underrepresented groups themselves may not always be

aware that they are "swimming against the current." It may take an experience of extreme bias or conversely, working for the first time in a group where care has been taken to create a bias-free environment for them to be able to perceive the current they've been swimming against all along.

Finally, be aware of the power differential. If you're the boss, you're, by definition, "one up,"



and they are, by definition, “one down.” Don’t make the people you’re sponsoring always ask for help. Offer it proactively and follow through: Coach them.

For many women and members of underrepresented groups, their experience confirms that it’s not enough to be as good as their white male peers – they have to be better, sometimes much, much better. That means that, as stressful as you may find your job, theirs is much more so. So how do you coach them? Here are some of the things you can (humbly) help them with:

- Encourage them to own their ambitions and say aloud what they’re hoping for in their career;
- Challenge them to think big when they’re tempted by fatigue or fear to play small and remind them that they’re swimming against the current so they know why it feels hard;
- Make sure they see and own their own excellence. Help them identify how they want to be known and for what;
- Simultaneously help them be less perfectionist: some things are worth doing that *aren’t* worth doing well!
- Don’t let them hide behind “I’m not ready.” Again, because women and members of underrepresented groups feel the pressure to represent their groups well, and they know that their competence is not as likely to be recognized equally, they may wait to apply for jobs until they are overqualified.

- Teach them to ask for (even demand) and accept help when it is needed. And help them learn to make bigger asks over time.
- At the same time, discourage them from constantly apologizing or asking for permission. (Often they may not even know they’re doing it – you need to point it out to them.)
- Don’t make assumptions about family care responsibilities and someone’s desire to travel or take roles involving travel. That person may not or *may* want to travel for work, just like they may or may not have the back up to do. Ask, just like you should be asking men (it helps level the playing field).
- Finally, over-compensate: Ask them, their peers, friends, etc. Ask how to help them. Ask them if they’re getting recognized for their work. Ask them what else they need.

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## 5 Avoid making one speak for all

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If the numbers of women or members of underrepresented groups in your organization is small, it’s important not to turn them into representatives of their “category.” Every human being is unique. It’s not fair or useful to expect one person to represent *everyone* in their situation or to speak for all of their gender or race. So don’t appoint women and members of underrepresented groups to diversity councils or send them out to represent the company,

etc. without asking if they want to play these roles. If they are willing, reward and compensate them. It’s hard work. Also, don’t expect your women and members of underrepresented groups to patiently educate everyone around them on how to be a good guy. That’s an intensely emotional and stressful burden to take on, and it’s frankly your job, not theirs! They have enough to do just continuing to perform well in the face of stereotypes and unconscious biases.

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**Last** The last thing you can do may be the hardest: you have to break with the bro code,

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the unwritten rules that say that (mostly white) men have all the power and that allow males to actively disrespect the women they work with. Scott Adams may have some great insights into tech culture, for example, but his attitude towards females is ugly and shameful, as is that of the trolls who caused the Gamergate scandal. And you need to be willing to say that publicly. [See sidebar for more on how to break with the bro code.]

What will you get for doing all this? Research indicates that you will get far more creativity, much higher quality decision-making and probably make more money to boot! That’s what nearly every study of the impact of having diverse teams has shown to date. Not a bad ROI on being a decent human being!

# Breaking with the Bro Code

For many, this is the most difficult challenge for men who want to be good guys: the willingness to say “that’s not okay” when male colleagues and friends actively or subtly disparage women and minorities. Realistically, it’s uncomfortable to do so; we all want to be part of the group. Here are some ways to begin:

- Be aware that many decades of anti-discrimination efforts have simultaneously a.) not worked and b.) convinced many white males they’re being unfairly treated.<sup>10</sup> Challenge that thinking when you hear it.
- Pay attention: if you see/hear a woman or member of an underrepresented group dinged for doing/saying something their white male counterpart could have gotten away with, say so. And if the woman calls “b\*\*\*\*\*t” on that behavior, support her publicly and immediately.
- Recognize that a lot of men think they’re “truth-telling” when they say “I’m not going to be politically correct here,” when in fact they’re just letting rip with their biases. Challenge them to recognize that if “political correctness” means being respectful to all, regardless of race, gender, age or sexual orientation, that is, in fact, what is expected of them.
- Similarly, when leaders in your organization mutter about being asked to “advance diverse candidates,” recognize what they’re often really saying is “advance unqualified diverse candidates.” It’s hard work to get people to recognize that they’ve conflated “white male” and “qualified,” just as they’ve conflated “female and/or member of an underrepresented group” with “unqualified.” You may have to do some blind resume sharing to make that point!
- Listen to your employee’s experiences; if they’re concerned they’re being treated differently or unfairly, take it very, very seriously.
- Be willing to say, “that’s not cool,” when a colleague makes a sexist or racist remark. If they say, “oh you know, I didn’t mean it” or some other weasel words, call them on that. Be willing to make it very clear that they can’t do that in your organization or in your presence. And drill down: “she’s very abrasive.” How is she abrasive? What exactly does she do? Would you say that if Joe or Sam or Pradeep or Ahmed did it?



- Likewise, make it clear that jokes in that vein are utterly unacceptable. Even at the bar, after hours. And if you think that might make you look wussy and politically correct, check out this video of the former head of the Australian Army detailing his zero tolerance policy on harassment<sup>11</sup>.
- Amplify and endorse what your female and underrepresented group employees say in meetings. Repeat it, if necessary, to make sure everyone heard and knows who said it.
  - Ask: why aren’t we considering so –and-so for this role? Point it out when new job openings come up and the list of candidates is all male.
  - Make sure your male employees know that unconscious bias is just as pernicious as conscious bias and that you expect them to work to become less “unconscious” – and then role model it.
- When you hear men make statements about how hard it’s become to be a white male, challenge their thinking. Yes, sometimes white males *do* lose out to a less qualified candidate because of their race or gender. That may not be fair, but it’s also just a small window into the commonplace injustice that women and members of underrepresented groups have lived with historically and continue to face. In other words, how often in your organization have women and members of underrepresented groups lost out to less qualified candidates who WERE white males? (the latest research confirms this is the reality.)<sup>12</sup>
- Likewise, speak up when you hear women being disparaged as “only having gotten the position because she’s a woman.” Point out that unless the person in question was part of the selection committee, they were not privy to the full set of criteria used to select the most qualified candidate.
- Lastly, speak up when you hear men talking about all the “special advantages” that underrepresented groups get. Help them understand that these programs are efforts to level a very tilted playing field. When you tolerate or ignore such comments, you’re as complicit in the bias as the person saying it.

<sup>10</sup> Tessa L. Dover, Brenda Major, and Cheryl R. Kaiser, “Diversity Policies Rarely Make Companies Fairer, and They Feel Threatening to White Men,” *Harvard Business Review Online*, January 4, 2016. <https://hbr.org/2016/01/diversity-policies-dont-help-women-or-minorities-and-they-make-white-men-feel-threatened>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaqpoeVgr8U>.

<sup>12</sup> Rick Wartzman, “Men Really Are Clueless About Their Female Coworkers,” *Fortune Online*, March 10, 2016. <http://fortune.com/2016/03/10/men-really-are-clueless-about-women-at-work-glass-ceiling-pay-gap/>