Why You Should Remove College Degrees from Job Postings

"Bachelor's degree required." This common job posting requirement is often included in descriptions regardless of duties or responsibilities. In three little words, candidates without bachelor's degrees are deterred from applying for a position. An advanced degree requirement may make sense if you are hiring for knowledge workers but is a questionable tactic otherwise. In today's market, does it even make sense? A Harvard study found that close to 63% of hiring managers struggled to fill mid-level roles while the past year has ushered in a record number of job openings in the U.S. Something needs to change! HR business leaders should pressure-test degree requirements on roles to evaluate whether experience is a valuable alternative and increase the social and racial equity of job applicants.

To pressure-test a degree requirement at your organization, consider what is traditionally valued in the recruiting process. Is it aptitude and experience or a piece of paper touting completion of a four-year degree? If you selected the latter, dig into the connection between degree and success in your field. The truth is that most college graduates end up working in a field outside of their major. In fact, less than 30% of graduates are working in the field they studied in school. This statistic from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York means that careers can be created by paths outside of textbooks. Applicable experience and focused training may equate to a better match for the role. Certifications, boot camps and internships may provide more applicable training than a college degree in another field.

To continue, look at who a degree requirement eliminates from your candidate pool. A college degree comes with a hefty price tag. The cost of a college degree has outpaced inflation, making it largely unaffordable to a large part of the population. Those without a college degree are not necessarily the least qualified but may be those without access to funds to support four years of school and housing. As a result, there is little racial, economic, and social diversity among college graduates. And this trend dates to World War II when educational funds from the

GI Bill were denied to African American and female veterans. Byron Auguste, former deputy director of the National Economic Council during the Obama administration, points out that, "If you arbitrarily say that a job needs to have a bachelor's degree, you are screening out over 70% of African-Americans. You're screening out about 80% of Latino-Latina workers, and you're screening out over 80% of rural Americans of all races." With these startling statistics, employers should only be adding this requirement if truly applicable.

Recruiting trends come and go, and an unnecessary degree requirement is one that employers should reevaluate. A closer look may uncover that experience, or a short course are sufficient to meet the job requirements and this outdated requirement limits the diversity of applicants and employees. HR Leaders should support this initiative by creating programs to support this change in thought process. Potential ideas include offering on-the-job training, apprenticeships and partnership with training institutions that offer education tailored to career paths.

Microaggressions: Discrimination in Disguise

According to a recent Glassdoor study, 61% of participants had experienced or observed workplace discrimination. It could be a combative remark, a snub in a meeting or a backhanded compliment communicating a negative view of someone's race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or age. The term "microaggression" defines these nuanced forms of discrimination as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group." As awareness for this type of discrimination grows, companies have shown increased interest in building employee competency in identifying and countering microaggressions. HR Leaders should be aware that microaggressions can be hidden as compliments or jokes.

Overtly discriminatory behavior is often easier to identify. A racial slur, for example, is front and center. There is little room for interpretation. Microaggressions, on the other hand, may be dressed up as helpful or well-meaning remark. For example, an aggressor may proactively tell an older person how to log onto a technology in a meeting. To an observer, this may appear to be thoughtful. A closer look may uncover that this help was not offered to other attendees and may have left the individual feeling like an outsider in the group. The aggressor may not even realize that their actions singled out this person and enforced a negative stereotype for older workers. Microaggressions are often the result of an aggressor's unconscious bias so they may not be aware of how their actions affect the individual.

Microaggressions may also be delivered as compliments. An example of a compliment gone wrong is, "your English is so good." Think of how offensive this would be for an individual who has spoken English from birth. This may also sound like an employee imitating a colleague's accent. While it may have been done in jest, it may not be received as such. Regardless of the intention, microaggressions can alienate colleagues and leave them feeling alone.

Unfortunately, these transgressions are more common than you think. Due to the subtle nature of these statements, offended victims are sometimes left wondering if they are just too sensitive or uptight.

An isolated microaggression is rare. It is generally indicative of an environment that supports this behavior. Yet another reason why HR Leaders need to proactively educate staff about what microaggression looks like and the steps to take when discrimination is observed. In the case of a microaggression, allies should speak directly to the targeted individual first to identify next steps. Speaking out of turn to the aggressor may disempower the victim from taking action. Focus on the message received versus the aggressor so the victim can voice how the action made them feel. These steps will encourage employees to speak up to discuss how they feel regardless of whether the initial comment was a joke or a compliment.

Emotional Intelligence: When a Strength Becomes a Downfall

Emotional intelligence, otherwise known as EQ, has been the soft leadership skill du jour of recent years in corporate America. It is defined as not only the ability to identify emotions, but also anticipate potential impact and behavior because of feelings in yourself and others. Daniel Goleman, the "father" of emotional intelligence, attributed emotional intelligence as a solution to a wide range of leadership issues. And rightfully so! EQ strengthens employees' abilities to build relationships, gain support around an idea and challenge the status quo with grace and tact. However, there are pitfalls to over-relying on a strength or blindly applying it in every situation. Current research confirms that emotional intelligence can lead to lower job performance in specific roles and increased levels of stress.

Many people think self-awareness, emotional regulation and empathy can only lead to positive outcomes. In actuality, a high level of emotional intelligence can interfere with doing a good job in certain jobs or fields. For example, look at a role that has little need for interpretation of emotions. Technical jobs that focus on execution often fall into this category. A coder's key skills revolve around technical skills and know-how. A high level of emotional intelligence can lead to more time spent interpreting and responding to feedback from end-users, regardless of whether it was a part of their role or slowed down their output and productivity. To be clear, there are jobs where emotional intelligence is a superpower. Salespeople and client service professionals are both great examples of using this strength to increase performance. The ability to connect elevates the relational aspects of their job.

Stress is another potential ramification of leaders overusing emotional intelligence. A German study showed that cortisol levels were elevated for an extended period in those with a high EQ. What does this mean in the workplace? It means that employees who are easily able to "read the room" may be carrying an undue amount of tension throughout their day. Emotionally sensitive employees may be sponging up dissent, disagreement, and negative attitudes from their colleagues. This burden leads to a shorter fuse in dealing with staff and may alienate peers

from engaging in what otherwise would be healthy debate. Emotionally saddled leaders may also hesitate giving others critical feedback because of anticipated negative reactions. This "walking on eggshells" environment is not conducive to business success.

EQ is a valuable leadership skill to have in your arsenal. Understanding how and when to wield this skill is *the* work leaders need to practice. Using this skill at random can affect not only your work performance but also your level of stress. A pro tip is to proceed with caution and analyze how emotional intelligence is affecting you and the individuals around you.

Generational Myths Part 1: Generation Z

Today's offices potentially span five full generations ranging from Generation Z to the Silent Generation. A coworker could just as easily be raised with a smart phone in hand as they could have used a typewriter at their first job. Some see differences between generational colleagues as an annoyance ("kids these days!") and many rely on generational stereotypes as fact. The truth of that matter is that generational stereotypes have about as many holes in them as a piece of Swiss cheese. Current research questions the validity of generational stereotypes. This five-part series uncovers top generational myths as a strategy to support a diverse and healthy employee population.

Let's start with the greenest part of the workforce: **Generation Z.** This cohort was born between 1997 and 2012 and the elders of this group turn 25 this year. The top three myths of Gen Z include:

1. **Their interest in workplace flexibility is fueled by the desire for remote work.** Workplace flexibility refers to how, when and where work gets accomplished. Historical literature pegs Generation Z as a group keen to choose when and where they complete their work. A recent survey completed by Annemarie Hayek, President and Founder of Global Mosaic, refuted this prior claim with data. It showed less than a third want a fully remote position. More exciting to Generation Z? Compensation and having their opinions heard by leadership.

2. **Mental health benefits fall into the "nice to have" category.** Generation Z felt the effects of the pandemic mental health crisis and value quality healthcare. The National Institutes of Health study predicts that one third of today's teenagers will experience mental health difficulties related to anxiety. Prior generations may hear "mental health" and think of fluffy wellness programs, but Gen Z sees it as so much more than a webinar on work-life balance. While this attribute is shared with Millennial colleagues, this group is more active in communicating their needs with managers and peers. No shying away from uncomfortable conversations here! Mental health was an ongoing conversation in their youth. For this reason, they are realistic about the hard costs and prioritize therapy and paid time off benefits.

3. **They are uncomfortable with face-to-face conversations.** This generation was raised with technology at their fingertips and social media omnipresent, so many assume they rely on text for all professional communications. This common misconception does not pan out, says Ryan Jenkins, Inc. columnist and generational expert. Data show that 84% of Gen Z favor live communication with their bosses. This group does not hide behind a screen in or out of the office. Generation Z was raised in an ever-changing sociopolitical environment that included school shootings, economic recessions, and increased focus on climate change. Because of this early exposure, they are comfortable activists, and they bring this social awareness to work.

Despite what you may have heard, the majority of Generation Z isn't opposed to working in the office. They prioritize "hard" mental health benefits and prefer live conversations with their managers.

Next up in the series: A look at the misconceptions Millennials face in the workforce.