



Dear DEI, Esq: My Manager is Singling Me Out

Cultural Competence



In this series, [DEI, Esq.](#) is helping individuals who may have experienced or perceived some sort of bias become bias interrupters.

Dear DEI, Esq.,

My manager recently announced that she's putting together a team of lawyers to assist with a major project. It involves an area in which I have a lot of knowledge and experience. So, I think I'm a good fit for the project team.

My manager asked me to provide her with a written memo outlining my experience in this area to assist her in putting together the team, but my male colleagues have not been asked to do the same. I feel like I'm being singled out to prove my worth and this is bothering me. Any advice?

Can really use your feedback,

Singled-out team member

Dear Singled-out team member,

We understand your frustration. What you are experiencing may be an example of the [“prove-it-again” bias pattern](#), a form of gender or racial bias, where women and minorities must prove time and again that they are competent. Try this:

Schedule a meeting with your manager (try to keep an open mind) to understand the reason you were asked to put together a written memo while others were not. It could be that your manager is not cognizant of the fact that she has asked you to do something that your male colleagues were not asked to do. This enlightenment can be an education opportunity for your manager to be more aware

of the requests she is making of the team, which in turn, will require the manager to be more conscious of her biases.

It could also be that your manager wants you to create a written memo to assist with her talking points to advocate for why you should be part of the project team. So, perhaps she doesn't have ill intent. The written memo could be to serve your best interests, so a meeting to understand the "why" behind the request would be helpful.

The meeting can also be used as an opportunity to find out what objective metrics are important for the role; what qualities your manager is looking for; and to remind your manager of all the experience you have in this area such that a written memo is not necessary.

So, not only are you making your manager aware of the unconscious biases resulting from the request, but it also gives you an opportunity to verbally highlight your accomplishments in this area and hopefully increase your chances of making the team. We consider this a win-win approach!

Lastly, let your male peers know that you are interested in the team and highlight for them your recent experience in this area. They can be advocates for you!

Good luck!

DEI, Esq.

[DEI, Esq.](#) is comprised of in-house counsel who share a deep passion for diversity, equity, and inclusion. While the members, Jane Howard-Martin, Connie Almond, Olesja Cormney, Jennifer N. Jones, and Meyling Ly Ortiz, work as employment counsel at Toyota Motor North America, Inc., their views and the thought-leadership expressed are their own and not necessarily the views of their employer.

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Jane Howard-Martin is vice president and assistant general counsel for Toyota Motor North America, Inc. (TMNA) and manages the Labor, Employment, Immigration, Benefits and Trade Secrets practice. Howard-Martin leads the labor and employment practice group that is responsible for providing legal advice and counsel and managing litigation and labor matters for a workforce of 33,993 based in our North America affiliates, including the nine North American Manufacturing Centers (NAMCs), R&D, Finance, and Headquarters functions.

Prior to joining Toyota in 2003, Howard-Martin was a partner with Morgan, Lewis and Bockius, LLP in their Los Angeles and Pittsburgh offices, and previously was a partner at Kirkpatrick & Lockhart in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Howard-Martin has been featured in a number of publications and symposiums. She authored a column on employment issues for USA Today.com, a treatise on Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act and served on the Editorial Review Board of the Pennsylvania Labor Letter. Howard-Martin also appeared as a panelist on MSNBC's "Today in America" on the issue of harassment. She is a frequent speaker on employment law topics at various conferences including those held by the ABA, the National Employment Law Council, and the American Employment Law Council. In November 2020, Howard-Martin received the ABA Honorable Bernice B. Donald Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Legal Profession Award. She is the past President (2009) and currently serves on the board of directors of the California Employment Law Council and is also a board member of the American Employment Law Council. She is also a fellow with the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers.

Howard-Martin earned a BA from Harvard University in 1979 and received her juris doctorate degree from Harvard Law School in 1982.

She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, Gus Martin, who is on the faculty at California State University, Dominguez Hills. In her free time, she enjoys ballroom and hip-hop dancing, trying international recipes, writing historical fiction, and travel.

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Olesja Cormney is managing counsel in the labor and employment group for Toyota Motor North America, Inc., a mobility company headquartered in Plano, TX. She is a strategic counsel and a proactive problem solver, offering an innovative perspective and an agile approach based on her prior business experience. Cormney is honored to be on the board of the ACC Dallas Fort-Worth Chapter.

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Jennifer Jones is managing counsel in the labor and employment group at Toyota Motor North America, Inc. She has over a decade of experience counseling employers on a broad range of labor and employment law issues. As one of the founding members of DEI, Esq., she has a deep passion for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and has authored many articles and participated in many panels on the subject. She also sits on the board of two nonprofit organizations, both with a mission of ensuring that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to quality secondary and post-secondary education. In her free time, Jones strives to be a “fun mom” for her two small children

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Meyling "Mey" Ly Ortiz is managing counsel of employment at Toyota Motor North America, Inc. Her passions include mentoring, championing diversity and inclusion and a personal blog: TheMeybe.com. At home, you can find her doing her best to be a "fun" mom to a toddler and a preschooler and chasing her best self on her Peloton. You can follow her on [LinkedIn](#). And you knew this was coming: her opinions are hers alone.

