



Dear DEI, Esq: My Bosses Have Antiquated Gender Views

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.,

I just completed one of the biggest presentations of my career to a team of executives! I felt I was well-prepared, knowledgeable on the subject, and presented well.

After the presentation, I overheard two male executives commenting that my responses to some questions were too shrill. I was trying to project confidence, but it looks like it backfired! Now, I guess they see me as too aggressive.

There go my chances at a promotion! How do I fix this?

Please help,

Stereotyped and stonewalled

Dear Stereotyped and stonewalled,

Not so fast! Your promotion opportunities are still viable. We have some solutions for you to consider, but first, let's discuss what you are experiencing.

This may be an example of the [“tightrope” bias pattern](#), a form of gender bias, where women are constantly balancing the push between masculinity and femininity. Masculinity is viewed as having confidence, being smart, and knowing how to lead. However, when women try to exhibit these traits in the workplace, they are met with rejection, and in some cases, described as the horrific five-letter

“B” word. Here are some suggestions to interrupt this bias pattern.

Use your allies or sponsors, particularly any male allies within the executive ranks, to advocate for you and promote you when it matters the most. The executive ally could comment to the male execs about how great you did on the presentation, including your confidence and expertise around the subject matter. This will help show the two male execs that they have antiquated views of women and should check their biases.

Don't have a male ally or sponsor? No worries. You could also practice what Joan C. Williams — a bias interrupters guru — calls gender judo.

Gender judo is the ability to use gender stereotypes to propel yourself forward. Because women are stereotypically viewed as dependent, easily influenced, and submissive, you could use this to your advantage and schedule meetings with the male execs (separately) to ask for feedback on the presentation, including what they thought you did well and where they think you can improve.

Ask open questions with curiosity to understand what informs their perspective. This allows you to not only develop relationships with the male execs, but also helps to bring awareness to them regarding their biases as they try to articulate non-biased constructive feedback.

Best wishes!

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](#)



Vice President and Assistant General Counsel

Toyota Motor North America, Inc.

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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Connie Almond is managing counsel in the labor and employment law group for Toyota Motor North America, Inc., a mobility company headquartered in Plano, TX.

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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.

