



**CATALYST**

WORKPLACES THAT WORK FOR WOMEN

## Blog

### Can You Spot the Gender Bias in This Job Description?

Catalyzing



by Catalyst

**May 7, 2015** – *The following tips have been adapted from Catalyst's new tool for Catalyst member organizations, Advancing Women in Tech-Intensive Industries: Transforming Organizational Cultures.*

Whether you're an employer posting a job or a job seeker looking for one, it's important to be aware of how certain words in a job description can reflect an organization's culture and values.

For example, the job description below for a Mechanical Engineer at a top firm has many words that are perceived as stereotypically masculine, which could inadvertently deter women from applying. See if you can spot **all 10**.

**Company Description:** We are a top engineering firm dominating the marketplace, boasting many leading clients. We are determined to lead the industry; our success stems from consistently challenging our competition.

**Job Title: Mechanical Engineer**

**Essential Functions**

- Challenge the status quo by creating superior product designs through the development and testing of specifications and methods.

**Knowledge and Skills**

- Superior design skills
- Exceptional conceptual skills
- First-rate technical knowledge
- Strong communication skills
- Proven experience with production planning

**Working Conditions**

- Tight deadlines and multiple priorities, requiring decisive decision making in a fast-paced environment.
- Willing to work outside the standard 9-5 schedule, including early mornings, evenings, and weekends as required by tight project deadlines.
- Ability to work independently in a competitive work environment.

**Education & Experience Requirements**

- Bachelor's degree
- 3-5 years of work experience

**What Do Job Descriptions Really Say?**

Job descriptions play a critical role in recruiting female talent and often provide the first impression of organizational culture. If a company offers flexible work arrangements but instead emphasizes long hours in its ad, this may inhibit qualified candidates from applying, especially those with primary care responsibilities.

Even subtle word choices in a job description can have a strong impact on the application pool. Research has shown that masculine wording of job descriptions, including adjectives like "superior," "competitive," and "determined," results in women perceiving that they would not belong in the work

environment.

### **ANSWER KEY:**

Research has shown that the following words have a masculine denotation.

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Dominant	Boasting	Determined	Lead	Challenging
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Competition	Superior	Decisive	Independently	Competitive
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Research has identified the following words as feminine. Make sure job descriptions have a mix of both.

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Committed	Connected	Cooperative	Dependable	Interpersonal
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Loyal	Responsible	Supportive	Trust	Considerate
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“For objective and unbiased job descriptions, companies need to balance masculine words with feminine ones to convey they value a diverse set of skills,” says [Anna Beninger](#), Director, Research, Catalyst, and author of the new tool.

### **What Companies Can Do:**

“For companies struggling to attract women, editing job descriptions is an easy place to start and has the potential to result in very tangible gains,” Beninger advises. Here’s how:

- **Audit job descriptions for masculine terms and rewrite them focusing only on objective job requirements.** Evaluate what elements of the job requirements are truly “required” vs. merely “nice to have.” For example, does the job have to be based in a certain city? Is it necessary that it involve coming in at fixed times each day? Is prior experience required or a particular skill really needed on the job?

In addition to the job description, organizations have other opportunities to attract women throughout the recruitment process:

- **Require that the panel for every open position include at least one qualified woman candidate.** Check out Catalyst's [\*A Bright Spot Case Study: How Diverse Slate Policies Help Close the Gender Gap\*](#) (available to Catalyst members) for examples of organizations that have had success adopting diverse slate policies.
- **Make sure recruiters are tapping into diverse slates:** recruiters often serve as the gatekeepers to top talent. Train in-house recruiters to recognize potential stereotypes and unconscious biases that can emerge during the recruitment process and impede consideration of diverse candidates. Make sure they are looking for a broad range of experiences and not relying on informal judgments of "fit" (often meant as "feel comfortable with the person") rather than fair and grounded criteria. When working with external recruiters, emphasize the importance of gender diversity to your organization and make them aware of your requirements for diverse slates for each position.
- **Implement a blind resume screening process,** removing all candidate names and potential identifiers to reduce the possibility of unconscious bias.
- **When interviewing candidates, ensure that they meet with an equal number of women and men employees whenever possible.** If a woman comes to interview and doesn't meet any women, that could turn her off from joining the company.
- **Institute targets for diverse hiring at each level of management,** and hold managers accountable for reaching those targets.

"If organizations hope to be on the cutting edge and leaders of their industries, they will have to tap into the *entire* talent pool, including women," Beninger asserts. "With these strategies, organizations can begin to make progress today."

*The views expressed herein are solely those of the guest blogger and do not necessarily reflect those of Catalyst. Catalyst does not endorse any political candidates. The post and the comments are presented only for the purpose of informing the public.*

## 9 Reader Comments

Christina/Chris... says:  
9/24/2015 09:55:24

This article is very argumentative and you can feel the essence of personal frustration from the start.