

GOING THE DISTANCE

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Mosaics and Melting Pots: Recruiting and Advising Multilingual and Multicultural Students

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Small Group Discussion Scenarios with Strategies

Scenario #1 – Law School

You are advising Bin-Bin, a 2L student who tells you that she was born in China and moved to the USA at age 17. She comes into your office looking to embark on summer associate employment search and wants to have her CV and cover letter reviewed. As you sit down with her, you realize that, while her CV and cover letter are mostly in good shape in terms of content, there are a few errors that seem to be second-language related. How do you advise Bin-Bin?

Suggested Strategies for Scenario #1

- Focus on the content of the CV and cover letter, as you would with any other student who had no typos or errors in their documents
 - Discuss, as with any student, how they can make nuanced content improvements in their documents
- Ask the student if they had the time to proof-read the document, and stress the importance of an error-free employment document
 - The errors may not be language related; it could be laziness!
- Highlight where you see some errors and ask the student if they see how they can make a correction. Work through this as your time allows, or refer them to your university's writing centre or peer-to-peer tutoring service
 - If the student is unable to see the error/make the correction:
 - Again, look into other campus resources. Or, suggest the student pair with a native-speaker of English to review and correct their work. As an added strategy, ask Bin-Bin if she knows any students who are learning Mandarin (her native language) that she can embark on a tandem language exchange with

Scenario #2 – Law firm

You are at a university career fair in order to promote your firm for upcoming summer recruitment. The career fair is in a large room full of students. It has very poor acoustics and makes it hard to hear. You notice that at this fair there are a number of diverse students from different cultural backgrounds. You are impressed with a number of the students there. You meet: Fernando, who has an anglophone accent, Miguel, who has a Hispanic accent, Sarah, who has an anglophone accent, Changsheng, who has a Chinese accent, and Ying, who has an anglophone accent. While all of the students were engaging, you have trouble understanding Miguel and Changsheng and notice that perhaps they have not heard all of your words either. How could you ensure the most effective communication?

Suggested Strategies for Scenario #2

- Recognize that, when speaking or listening to second-language speakers, a loud environment reduces the ability for both you and the student to hear and make connections with less familiar pronunciations of some words
- Face the student squarely and enunciate all your words. Do not mumble or cover your mouth with your hands.
- If possible, step away from the crowd so that you can communicate with more ease.
- Be aware of any biases or preconceptions the student's name may bring up. How are you judging Fernando, Miguel, Sarah, Changsheng and Ying based on their names? And their names and accents combined? Question how cultural cues may be affecting your judgement of a potential candidate.

Scenario #3 – Law firm or school

You are conducting interviews (if at a law firm)/ mock interviews (if at a law school) with several bright students. One of the students is a foreign-trained Russian lawyer, Natalia, who is currently completing her second law degree in the USA, in order to be accredited and work in the states. She worked as a lawyer for 3 years in Russia before moving stateside to attend law school for a second time. As the interview progresses, you notice that she has a "strong accent," and that she draws many of her interview answers from her experiences from her Russian law firm and her coursework here in the states. How do you ensure that you are considering Natalia's candidacy without cultural bias?

Suggested Strategies for Scenario #3

- Be conscious that, for a variety of reasons (level of experience, practicing law in a different country), Natalia brings a different story and skillset to the table than a more "traditional," locally-born candidate. In order to assess her candidacy, it's important to first acknowledge her unique situation.
- Accent, intelligibility and comprehensibility are each unique aspects of speech. We may perceive Natalia to have "a strong accent" but that does not mean that her speech is not

intelligible or comprehensible. Ask yourself: is it her speech ability, or *your* listening ability that is causing difficulty in communication?

- In this particular scenario, Natalia comes from another country *and* practicing law in another legal system. Recognize any particular bias that may come with this, such as, “will she fit in at a/our firm/organization?” “Will she bring in habits or practices from Russia that don’t fit here?” “How will she integrate with others at our firm?” With these questions, ask yourself what your firm has to **gain** from the added diversity Natalia would bring.
 - If you find yourself making negative judgements, challenge yourself to pair each negative thought with a counter-thought. For example, if you find yourself worried about her fitting in with the culture of your organization, counter this thought with an idea such as, “She would bring different perspectives and fresh ideas to our team.” Or, if you find yourself worried about people having trouble with her accent, counter with a thought such as, “Do we have any Russian clients and how would they benefit from having a native speaker on our team?”

Scenario #4 – Law firm or school

You are looking through a large pile of student CVs for upcoming recruitment purposes. When going through the CVs, you notice the students’ names and addresses at the top of the CV. How do you ensure that: where the student lives, the student’s gender, the student’s name, and the student’s apparent cultural heritage do not cause bias when reviewing the rest of the content of the CV?

- Cover the student’s identifying header before you look at it (or get a member of your support staff to help you with this). Objectively evaluate the document without knowing who or what kind of person has written the document. Write down notes and thoughts *before* you know who the person is.
- If, when you do see the student’s name and address, you notice that your perspective or evaluations are shifting, notice the direction of your thoughts. Why have your evaluations changed? Are you more or less impressed with the candidate? Are you surprised in any way? Why?
- Learn to recognize your own personal biases and preconceptions. This may be an uncomfortable process, but once these are recognized, they will become easier for you to address and reassess.