



EXECUTIVE VITALITY™: AN IMPLICIT BIAS – BODY WEIGHT

“Yes, you can still be fired for being fat,” screams the headline on a recently published article on the landscape of laws and attitudes toward obesity and work. Body weight is a personal issue. But it has also become an employment, legal, and leadership issue.

[Research has found](#) that there is a deep-seated and unconscious weight bias in the U.S. that affects people’s decision-making process. Do you recognize this bias in yourself as a leader?

The prevalence of obesity in the U.S. is around 40%; in Japan, around 4%. That U.S. statistic increases the likelihood that your ideal job candidate is overweight. Would you recognize an obese person as your ideal job candidate? What other associations do you make about weight? It is important that you understand your biases.

We aren’t advocating for obesity. There is no judgment either way. What we are asking is, “Are you aware of any biases you might have about employees’ or candidates’ weight? What is it? What is your organization’s relationship with employees’ weight? How might such a bias impact your leadership, or your hiring and promoting practices?”

Perhaps your bias about weight could be legitimate because of the correlation between weight and health. Is it possible for an employee to be healthy and obese? Possibly, depending on age, cardiovascular health, blood glucose levels, and other factors. Having said that, there is a correlation between increased weight and increased health risks, particularly stroke, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, chronic pain, diabetes and other conditions.

What does this mean from an executive vitality and leadership point of view? We at EXCN recommend that leaders follow two tracks simultaneously. For **your own executive vitality** as it relates to weight, we always recommend:

- Track your health values over time. Monitor your weight, but recognize that weight, in isolation, does not a healthy executive make.
- Understand nutrition. Do you know which of the main macronutrients has the most calories per gram? Which is second? Do you know what the main macronutrients are? Some say they are fat, salt, chocolate, and alcohol. Partly right. They are fat, protein, carbohydrates, and alcohol.
- Engage in enough physical activity to maintain strength, flexibility, balance, energy, and weight.

Help your employees with their vitality and do everything possible to **combat the impact of implicit weight bias on decisions** you make. Here are our five tips:

1. Examine your personal bias about weight and how it might be influencing decisions you make.
2. Ensure your organization has methodologies that guarantee the best talent for the position is hired, e.g., “blind” hiring.
3. Ensure promotional practices are fair, equitable, and based on leadership qualities and skills.
4. If possible, consider instituting a fitness center, and include health screening, health education, weight management, and anti-stress programs.
5. If your organization has a cafeteria, ensure that healthy choices are abundant.

How can you promote wellness in your organization? What changes in policy, practice, or training could you implement in your organization to maximize talent management and increase awareness of implicit bias? What can you do to improve your own balance of weight and health?

Further reading

- [Weight Discrimination Remains Legal in Most of the U.S. | Bloomberg](#)
- [Ending Weight Bias in the Hiring Process Starts with Being Conscious of It | shrm.org](#)
- [Does Metabolically Healthy Obesity Exist? – PMC | nih.gov](#)
- [Health Effects of Being Overweight and Obesity | Healthy Weight, Nutrition, and Physical Activity | CDC](#)