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Not Less Committed !

*Challenging bias against
parents and caregivers at work*

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Quick experiment

For each question, put your hand up if

you are usually the person who notices, remembers, organises, initiates, or makes sure it happens.

Not necessarily the person who physically does the task.

Who knows what needs doing?

- Who knows when the toilet paper is running out?
- Who knows what to have for dinner?
- Who knows what needs to be bought?
- Who knows when the laundry needs doing?
- Who knows what needs cleaning, repairing or replacing?
- And who usually notices before anyone asks?

We haven't asked who DOES these things.

We have asked who KNOWS what needs to happen...

Who knows what's coming?

- Who knows when the next doctor's or dentist's appointment is?
- Who knows what the children, or other people you care for, need to take with them?
- Who keeps track of medication, prescriptions or other regular needs?”
- Who remembers birthdays and organises presents?
- Who knows what's happening in everyone's calendar?
- Who is already thinking about what might be needed next week?
- And next month?

That's the interesting part of mental load. The task isn't necessarily happening yet – but someone is already carrying it in their head...

Who is everyone else relying on?

- Who is the person others come to when they don't know what needs to happen?
- Who is the person who thinks: 'If that happens, we'll need to...'?
- Who anticipates a problem before it becomes a problem?
- Who makes a plan B in case plan A doesn't work?
- Who adjusts their own plans around someone else's needs?
- Who is the person who just knows?

Who here sometimes feels like you're carrying a list in your head that nobody else can see?

Who is the person everyone else can rely on to know ?

We **haven't** asked:

- Who **does** most
- Who **cares** most

We have asked

- Who **knows**

Who notices, who remembers, who anticipates, who coordinates...

→ DEFAULT CAREGIVER



Stereotypes & Microaggressions

Towards Parents and Caregivers

Why it matters?

- **Caregiving shapes careers, for almost everyone who carries it.** 93% of all respondents report at least one way caregiving has set their career back, and it shows up even in well-resourced firms with good policies on paper.
- **The heaviest cost is invisible.** The mental load and the hiding of the caregiver self do more damage to careers than hours or job titles.
- **It falls unequally, and it is built in.** On women, on senior women who have quietly stopped asking, on people who care for an adult, and on carers from an ethnic or cultural minority.

Classic Stereotypes

- Form small groups of 4 to 6 people
- Can you think of classic stereotypes that concern caregivers and phrase them like:
 - “Mothers, fathers, care givers are (not) ...”
 - “Mothers, fathers, care givers can (not) ...”
 - “Mothers, fathers, care givers will (not) ...”
- Can you see a difference in classic stereotypes for women and men

Classic Stereotypes

Care givers are stereotyped as:

- Less committed.
- Less ambitious.
- Less flexible.
- More likely to be absent.
- Less available to travel/work late.
- Less interested in promotion.
- More likely to let care affect performance.

Gendered stereotypes

Colleagues might automatically:

- ask the mother rather than the father about a child's schedule, first day at school etc.;
- assume a woman will be the one taking time off when care arrangements fall through;
- assume a male colleague with children and wife (how about a same sex couple?) is available for travel;
- assume a woman who just gave birth is not available for a promotion, and assume a young father is (because as a breadwinner, he needs the money);

Gender disparity in stereotypes: **Women will prioritise care; men will prioritise work.**

Microaggressions

What microaggressions can you come up with if you think about the stereotypes and assumptions that are associated with care givers?

- What do people say or do to a care giver?
 - When a mom leaves at 5 – jokingly “oh, yeah, I forgot you worked part time”
 - “Is your husband babysitting tonight?”
 - “Your wife must be very supportive”
- How about compliments? Can they be microaggressions?
 - “You're amazing for managing all of that.”
 - “I don't know how you do it all!”
 - “You're such a dedicated mum / dad.”
 - “You're very organised for someone with three children.”

Stereotype - Bias – Behaviour - Microaggression

The **stereotype** is the generalised belief about a group.

- *“Parents with young children are less likely to want demanding roles.”*

The **bias** is the assumption.

- *“She has young children, so she probably won't want this role.”*

The **behaviour** is what we do because of it.

- *Don't offer her the role.*

The **microaggression** is often how that assumption leaks out in everyday interactions.

- *“I didn't want to put you under too much pressure with everything you have going on at home.”*



Cognitive biases

How might they affect caregivers — and how can you navigate them?

Group work – Cognitive Biases

- Small groups of 4 to 6 people
- Hand out with the bias and a short description
- Think about
 - How could this bias work against caregivers?
 - How could this bias work in your favour
 - DO - What could you deliberately do to navigate this bias?
 - DON'T - What might reinforce this bias?
- There are no wrong answers! 😊

Recency bias

Recent events weigh more heavily than past performance.

-	Recent absences or caregiving challenges overshadow a year of contributions
+	A recent success can refresh someone's perception of your contribution.
DO	Keep a record of achievements throughout the year
DON'T	Rely solely on memory during evaluations
<i>Make achievements and impact visible close to important conversations.</i>	

Proximity bias

We tend to favour people we see more often or who are physically closer to us.

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| - | Flexible, hybrid or part-time caregivers may be less visible and therefore less likely to come to mind when opportunities, recognition or promotions arise. |
| + | Consistent visibility—physical or virtual—can make your contribution more salient and keep you in people's mental shortlist. |
| DO | Be visible around outcomes: contribute in meetings, share progress, celebrate wins, maintain relationships and make your availability clear. |
| DON'T | Don't feel you need to be physically present all the time just to prove commitment. |

Replace physical presence with purposeful visibility.

Confirmation bias

We notice and interpret information that confirms what we already believe.

-	Negative stereotypes become self-reinforcing: f.e. if someone thinks caregivers are less committed, an early departure may confirm the stereotype while excellent work goes unnoticed.
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+	Once you're established as capable and reliable, subsequent evidence may be interpreted through that positive lens
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DO	Establish your professional identity early; keep demonstrating it.
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DON'T	Leave assumptions unaddressed (address them with facts and results)
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Create a positive story first—and consistently reinforce it.

Affinity bias

We tend to feel more positive towards people who are similar to us.

-	A manager without caring responsibilities may unconsciously find it easier to connect with—and therefore advocate for—someone whose lifestyle resembles their own.
+	If you share a caregiving experience, values or other meaningful connections, it can create rapport and trust.
DO	Create common ground beyond family status (interests, values, professional exp.)
DON'T	Assume your work will speak for itself while others build relationships around you.

Find and build authentic point of connection (similarity ≠ family situation)

Presenteeism bias

We tend to mistake physical presence, long hours or constant availability for commitment, productivity and ambition.

-	A caregiver who leaves on time, works remotely or has predictable boundaries may be perceived as less committed—even when their results are the same or better.
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+	Visible effort may be rewarded
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DO	Be visible at key meetings and highlight business impact & results
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DON'T	Measure your value by hours worked and don't put the spotlight on your absence (nor the reason for it)
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<i>Be deliberately visible, not constantly available.</i> <i>Make your impact visible and be present for the moments that matter.</i>

Attribution bias / Fundamental Attribution error

We tend to explain our own behaviour through circumstances but other people's behaviour through their character

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A care-related absence can become evidence of a character flaw.

+

When people understand the context, they may interpret behaviour more generously and distinguish circumstances from capability or commitment.

DO

Explain relevant circumstances briefly and return to the solution (“I need to leave at 4 today, and I'll be back online at 7. The project is on track for Friday.”)

DON'T

Over-explain, apologise excessively, or let a constraint become the main story about you.

Give context when it genuinely changes interpretation, without over-explaining, then make the solution and your impact visible.

Halo affect (opposite of Horn effect)

One strong positive characteristic influences how we perceive the whole person.

-	A positive stereotype about caring can paradoxically undermine perceptions of ambition.
+	Being seen as responsible, organised or empathetic can spill over into perceptions of competence and trustworthiness.
DO	Make your expertise and strengths visible. Let people see both your capability and your caring responsibilities.
DON'T	Don't rely on “They know I'm good” or “My work speaks for itself”.

Build a strong, visible professional reputation around qualities you want associated with you.

Stereotype bias

Expectations about a group influence how we perceive and respond to its members.

-	The dynamic where mothers and caregivers are perceived as less committed, less capable, less available, or less ambitious, regardless of past performance.
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+	Positive stereotypes might enhance perceptions. This bias may also lead to additional flexibility and support.
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DO	Say what you do want: “I'd like to lead this project.” “I'm interested in promotion.”
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DON'T	Let others decide what you want based on your caregiving status.
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Challenge limiting assumptions by explicitly communicating your preferences and ambitions.



Key Take Aways

What you need to remember...

5 key take aways for caregivers

- 1. KNOW THE BIAS**
So you can navigate it.
- 2. SHOW YOUR IMPACT**
Make your contribution visible.
- 3. BE THERE WHEN IT MATTERS**
You don't need to be everywhere.
- 4. DON'T MAKE YOUR “CARE GIVER TASKS” THE STORY**
State the constraint. Give the solution. Move on.
- 5. LEAD WITH WHAT YOU WANT**
Don't let your caregiving status define your ambition.

THANK
you



Managers

How to mitigate your potential biases

A practical DO and DON'T for managers

Evaluate outcomes, not
visibility

DO

DON'T

Equate office presence with
commitment

Ask employees about their
aspirations

DO

DON'T

Assume caregivers want less
responsibility

Review performance over the
entire year

DO

DON'T

Focus on recent absences or
accommodations

Offer opportunities to
everyone

DO

DON'T

Pre-filter opportunities
based on family status

Measure impact and results

DO

DON'T

Measure dedication by hours
worked



Hand Outs

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+	
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DON'T	

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