Mumble Media
Small Enterprise with a Big Strategic Commitment!

BACKGROUND

Mumble Media, a fledgling production company based in Oakland, California, produces non-fiction audio documentaries and fiction podcasts that require extensive audio post-production work. A year after launching their business, the three co-founders were ready in 2021 to make their first-full time hire who would handle editing and sound design. As a legally registered worker-owned cooperative, Mumble Media was – and remains - very mission and goal-focused. Their mission is to build a democratically-operated company with a flat organizational and compensation structure in which every employee has an equal voice and is paid the same hourly rate.

The first hire: What is the DEI goal?

Representation is especially important to Mumble Media because worker-owned cooperatives exist to serve the needs of its workers, and its workers are responsible for designing systems, policies and processes. So, if the members do not represent a variety of backgrounds and needs, then its members risk building a cooperative that excludes certain people, because their needs are not being voiced and addressed. Therefore, in recruiting, selecting and hiring their first full-time employee, Mumble Media sought to ensure that their processes were transparent and designed to uncover implicit biases. Ultimately, the three co-founders of Mumble Media, two men and one woman, wanted a process that drew from a diverse pool, that allowed opportunities

for candidates with non-traditional training (in which traditional is defined as a college degree) and that surfaced and disrupted implicit biases related to race, ethnicity or gender. This was important not only to the mission of their own business, but also because their industry skews white, male, and college-educated, as typically do the applicant pools for jobs like theirs.

What was the process?

Mumble Media's initial step was to articulate goals for their hiring process, including being deliberative, self-reflective, transparent, open to candidates without traditional credentials, i.e., college degrees, and hyper-sensitive to identifying and correcting implicit biases. The co-founders felt they needed assistance in achieving their goals since this was their first hire. So, they hired an outside consultant to help them fine-tune their process and develop a rubric of questions that would be posed to any candidate, allowing them to explicitly compare candidates on key points. After an initial round of screening portfolios and previous relevant work experience for over 300 applicants, they selected a small number of finalists. In addition to in-person interviews that were conducted over video calls, they asked each finalist candidate to complete a standardized editing assignment that would reveal their audio engineering skills and hopefully equalize the chances of those candidates with non-traditional credentials with those with traditional ones. In order to ensure that the candidates could be drawn from

the largest pool possible, including those whose financial circumstances would not allow them to work for up to four hours without pay, they decided to pay each candidate the same hourly rate that the co-founders currently get paid. Furthermore, in order to ensure that implicit biases did not enter into their portfolio reviews and task evaluations, they blinded candidates' names so as not to be influenced by any information or potential bias. What was unique about Mumble Media's hiring process was that they paid finalists the same hourly rate as each of the co-founders. It was a slow process with all three co-founders deliberating over each candidate at each stage. Overall, they were pleased with their eventual hire, an experienced non-binary audio engineer, with both bachelor's and master's degrees.

What Were the Lessons Learned?

- Be patient, as it can take time to change and strengthen innovative processes such as hiring people with competencies rather than traditional, professional credentials.

- Consider paying candidates for their time in completing a pre-assigned task to test their skills so as to enlarge and diversify the pool of job candidates.

- Assess on an on-going basis the effectiveness of your organization's hiring processes and practices. It is not one and done.