



The Long and Short of Hiring

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Do you discriminate in your hiring against the vertically challenged? If so, you might be a heightist. But is that a bad thing?

Currently there is no federal law that protects height discrimination, assuming it is within normal limits and not the result of some disability. And there is apparently only one state, Michigan, that specifically includes height in its list of protected categories. Massachusetts is currently considering such legislation, and at least two municipalities, both in California (are you surprised?) have included height as a protected category: Santa Cruz and San Francisco.

The long and short of it is that maybe your company would do better if you hire taller people. While it may not seem obvious, but statistically speaking, the height of an average American male is usually reported as 5 feet 9 inches. According to various studies, only 15 percent of all American men are six feet tall or more. Yet 42 percent of all American presidents have been six feet or over, 58 percent of CEOs are over six feet tall, and a whopping 90 percent of CEOs are at least above average height.

That leads to some interesting speculation. Are taller men (there are no comparable studies of American women) more likely to succeed, and if so, why? There are no answers at this time, but there is this observation by researchers at the University of Florida and the University of North Carolina: for every inch that you are taller than average, your starting salary will be almost \$800 more than your shorter compatriots. So expect to pay more for taller workers.

If the idea of heightism in the workplace sounds to you like a tall tale, you just might be right. The real issue is this: passing over a better qualified person for either a job or a promotion can lead to questions about what the "real" reason was for the decision. Once applicants or employees start questioning your company's motives, or doubting your honesty in employment decisions, it can lead to other more serious questions resulting in increased turnover, a decrease in loyalty and plummeting morale.

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