

Coffee Beans, or What Does Diversity Hiring Mean Anyway?

Short Link: go/coffee-beans

Discussion Group: g/coffee-beans-discuss

PLEASE NOTE: This document is not meant to describe an official Google policy. It is an analogy to help explain diversity hiring.

Imagine a world where there are two kinds of coffee beans that grow naturally. They are the **orange** beans and the **teal** beans. Over time, people have done extensive studies and have discovered that the “best” coffee is made when you mix these beans and when *all* of them are Grade A beans. Further, a certain set of coffee aficionados will spend big money on the “best” coffee, so there are huge incentives to produce this “best” coffee.

Here are the facts about the coffee beans that are important:

- 90% of the coffee beans growing in the wild are **orange**
- 10% of the coffee beans growing in the wild are **teal**
- 50% of coffee beans (both orange and teal, of all grades) are growing along roads where they are easily accessible. 50% of coffee beans (both orange and teal, of all grades) are more difficult to find and effort must be spent looking for them.
- 1% of **orange** beans are Grade A and 1% of **teal** beans are Grade A
- The market for the “best” coffee could easily expand to use all the Grade A **teal** beans.
- A quick, cheap evaluation process can be used to identify Grade A beans. It incorrectly identifies 20% of Grade A beans as a lower Grade and they end up being used for less premium coffees.
- A slower, more expensive process can also be used to identify Grade A beans. It incorrectly identifies only 2% of Grade A beans as a lower Grade.

Given the above facts, what would you do to make the most “best” coffee?

1. You would pick as many easily accessible **orange** beans as you could, and you would use the quick, cheap evaluation process for them.
2. You would spend *more time looking for* the **teal** beans, and you would *spend more time evaluating* them (using the expensive process) to make sure you didn’t throw any away.

That’s what the high tech companies are doing with diversity hiring - they are looking harder for the under-represented groups and they are spending more time/effort making sure they don’t throw any of the good ones away.

Research

See [The Data on Diversity](#) (Engineering Newsletter), longer version in [ACM](#)

