

GUIDE

Understanding and Championing First-Generation Professionals in the Workplace

We empower the world's
most inclusive workplaces.

Trusted Partner to Organizational Change Agents

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**Uncover the Real
Levers to Unlock
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We partner with **450+** corporations, government entities, and nonprofits **globally**.

We guide **~50% of the Fortune 100** and **~25% of the Fortune 500** on their DEI journey.

First-Generation Professionals' Rugged Journey to Successful Careers

In the realm of higher education, the commitment to empowering first-generation students—those pioneering their family's college journey—has been a pursuit since 1965. Remarkably, data from the Center for First-Generation Student Success reveals a noteworthy trend: **a higher percentage of first-generation students, compared to their non-first-generation peers, opt for the workforce over further education**, with figures at 32 percent and 26 percent respectively.

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Yet, the path of first-generation students is not without challenges. **These individuals grapple with issues such as limited access to established networks, fewer avenues for professional growth, and sentiments of exclusion.**

Regrettably, these hurdles often persist beyond graduation, manifesting in the workplace. This subset of professionals is aptly named "first-generation professionals" (FGPs), encompassing white-collar individuals hailing from working-class backgrounds. As they step into professional spaces, feelings of bewilderment and isolation may permeate, further intensified for first-generation professionals of color navigating predominantly White workplaces—a complex intersection can occur.

First-generation Students Can Grapple With:

Limited access to established networks



Fewer avenues for professional growth



Sentiments of exclusion



Slide 3

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Implicit Class Bias in the Workplace

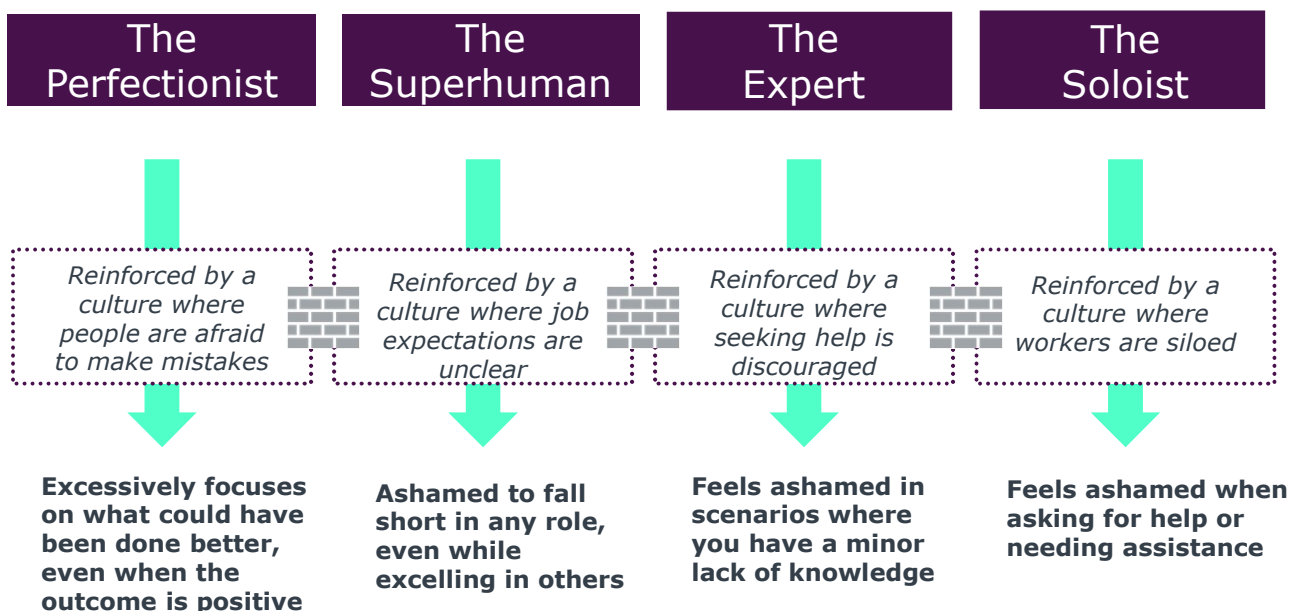
Class bias can hinder professionals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds at various stages of the talent lifecycle. A [Yale University study](#) revealed that [hiring managers often unconsciously rely on social class cues as stand-ins for vital job skills](#). In just 25 seconds of hearing an applicant's speech, participants in an experiment could predict their socioeconomic status, often deeming those from lower backgrounds less capable.

Upon entering the workforce, a [sense of exclusion](#) can pervade for many first-generation professionals (FGPs). [U.S. Office of Civil Rights](#) data highlights challenges faced, including confusion navigating company culture, a dearth of professional networks, apprehensions about competence, limited access to family advice, and fewer opportunities for skill development. Consequently, FGP growth stagnates, often translating to hindered career progression and [lower earnings](#). In 2019, a [Pew Research Center study](#) unveiled that first-generation graduates had a median household income of \$99,600, whereas non-first-generation graduates earned \$135,800.

Affects of Imposter Syndrome

Some of the core components of impostor syndrome include believing that others have an inflated perception of your abilities, the fear of being uncovered as a fraud, and consistently downplaying your accomplishments. While any professional can have these feelings, it may be inflated amongst first-generation professionals.

Impostor Syndrome Archetypes



Supporting First-Generation Professionals

Recognizing the challenges that often accompany the journey of first-generation professionals, it becomes paramount to cultivate an inclusive culture within your department or organization. Here are essential factors to ponder, aimed at extending meaningful support to this group:

Ensure Support at Each Stage of the Talent Lifecycle

- Create onboarding trainings or skill development sessions that teach effective communication and interpersonal skills.
- Ensure new employees are taught common company terms or seek to “minimize corporate jargon.”
- Use skills development training to address the way communication in the workplace may lead to people from different socioeconomic classes feeling excluded.

Be Patient and Evaluate Potential Class Barriers

- Consider that a team member could have gone through school with little to no mentorship or guidance.
- Possibly having outside stressors or responsibilities that they have not shared with the team.
- Be kind when someone asks to repeat or rephrase instructions.
- If someone is brave enough to ask a question, be understanding and pause for clarification needs.

Foster Inclusive Environments of Belonging

- Using E/BRGs to start thought provoking conversations
- Evaluating how 1:1 meetings can be reformed to create psychological safety.
- Creating channels for questions to be asked in case someone is uncomfortable asking in front of a group (e.g. anonymously, mentor, private messaging, etc.).
- Organizing panels featuring leaders from diverse backgrounds, to share their journeys, insights, and strategies for success.

Additional Resources:

[Three Ways Organizations Can Support First-Generation Professionals](#)

[Every Employee Can Take Part in Improving an Organization’s Workplace Culture—Here’s How](#)

[6 Powerful Managerial Behaviors That Improve Employee Engagement](#)

How Seramount Partners ^{HKO} Are Supporting First-Gen Professionals

These organizations have implemented effective strategies to aid first-generation professionals (FGPs), prominently through the creation of resource groups. These groups provide vital support, offering a platform for first-gen professionals to connect, share experiences, and seek guidance. By establishing these networks, these organizations showcase their dedication to fostering an inclusive workplace that empowers all employees, particularly those navigating their careers as FGPs.



First Generation Professionals Affinity Group

This group is meant to help first-generation employees reach their full career potential and hone their unique skills as well as identify any institutional barriers to success.



First Generation Affinity Group

This group aims to celebrate and support different paths of "social mobility." Mentorship, networking opportunities, and training are offered to members to ensure employees from different backgrounds feel there is a space cultivated for their success.



Young Professionals Network

The ERG is aimed to offer early career employees volunteer opportunities, leadership skills, professional development, and the chance to participate in company initiatives.



Young Professionals Business Resource Group

This ERG aims to offer early career employee opportunities to gain and develop skills alongside other young professionals. Events include leadership workshops, developmental education, and speed networking.

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Confirm they're partners

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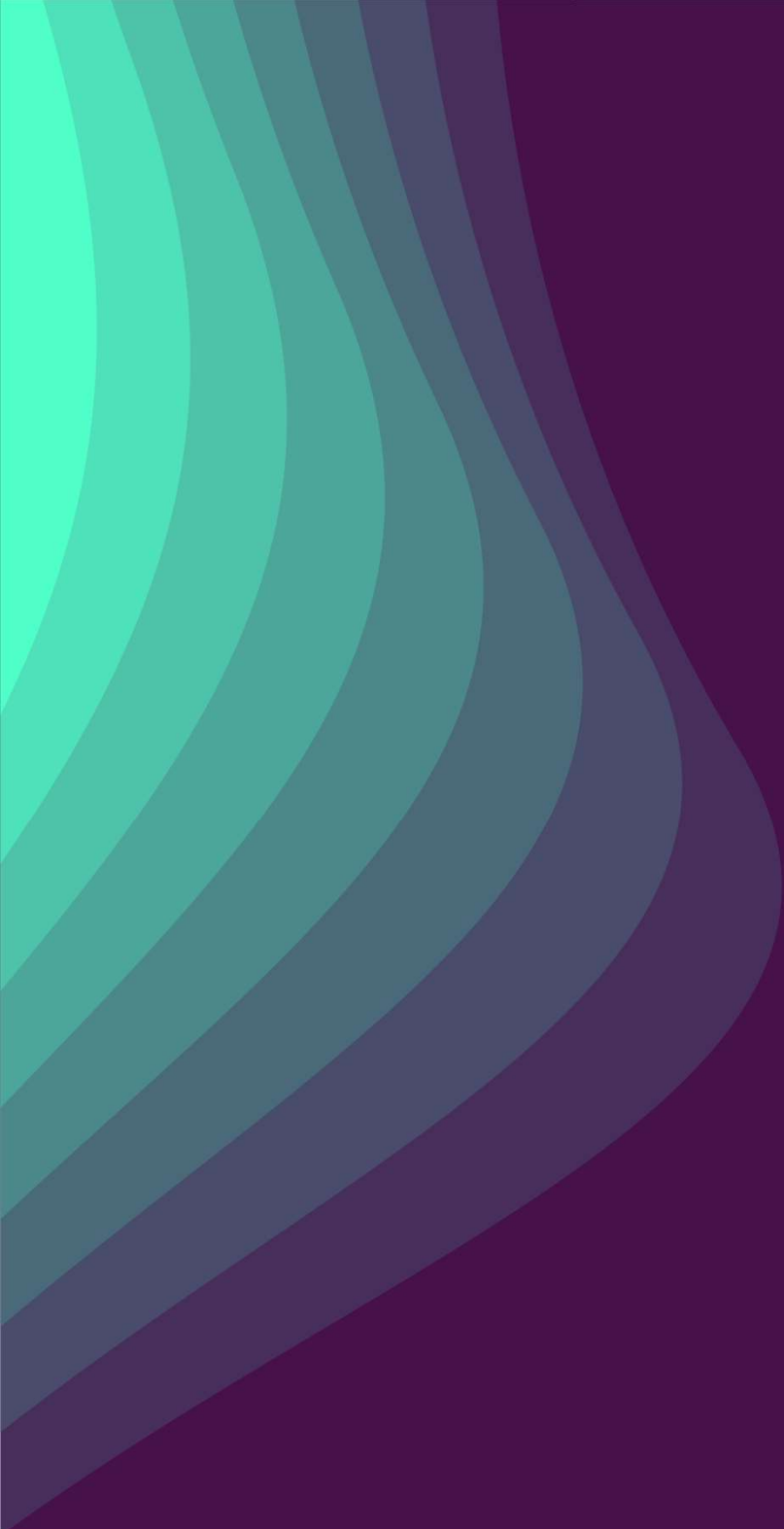
How Seramount Can Help Your Organization Support Historically Excluded Talent

Our DEI Research Partnership Offers Evolving Research And Advisory Services to Support Rapidly Changing DEI Needs And Priorities



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