Hi everyone. Today, while driving past a pizza place, I noticed something: The dude who normally stood at the corner wearing a toga and spinning a giant arrow sign pointing the way to the shop had been replaced by what looked like a cardboard cutout. It was holding the giant arrow, but the sign was hooked to a spinning machine. And I thought, “This is an example of what’s wrong with our world! Artistic sign spinning has been outsourced to machines! Where is the artistry, the finesse?!“ I was so annoyed, I only bought one pizza to bake at home.

Why am I bringing this up? Because unlike many other fields, the nonprofit sector will always rely on human beings. When other professions are replaced by robots in the future, we will still be around. Can you imagine a robot trying to do case management or counseling or advocacy?

Despite our reliance on people, we have a bunch of no good, very bad habits in hiring and in paying nonprofit professionals. I talked earlier about our need to raise salaries. And also the need to reexamine our archaic, inequitable hiring practices such as the overreliance on formal education. And now, we need to dismantle another terrible habit that many, many of us have, one that we don’t think much about, but one that is driving lots of people nuts, perpetuates gender and other inequities, and increases the power imbalance between employers and
employees: Not listing salary ranges on job posting, and putting “DOE,” which stands for “Depends On Experience” instead. Here are reasons why it is so awful, and why we should all agree to put an end to “salary cloaking” immediately.

**It wastes everyone’s time.** If you think not listing salaries will allow more candidates to apply, you may be right. But will they be the right match? Lots of candidates may apply, since they have no clue what you will pay. The top candidate will move forward, not knowing if they can work with this mysterious unknown salary, but ever so hopeful. If they find your salary offer is too low, they may likely decline your offer, trash-talk your cheap organization, and the hiring team must start from square one. It wastes the candidates’ time, and it wastes the hiring team’s time. Why not just list the range, and let people self-select if they will apply or not? It cuts down on the number of applicants, and the ones who do apply will be much better matches because they will know exactly what they are getting into.

**It disregards the fact that people have to support themselves and their families:** Let's be honest with ourselves: Compensation is one of the first things all of us scan for when looking at a posting. The expectation for candidates to not bring up the salary until the end is naïve and irresponsible. We need to live and support our families on these salaries; our payment is not a pleasant bonus we get for saving the world. As a colleague of mine says, “When you don't give a salary range, you're saying that you're only going to hire people who are married to people with professional salaries, young folks still supported by well-off parents, and the independently wealthy. The rest of us can't spend a half-day writing a cover letter and tailoring a resume to your position, only to find out later that we can't live on what you are offering.”

**It perpetuates the gender wage gap.** We all know on average women make only 78 cents for every dollar the dudes make. There are various reasons for this, but one of the reasons is that society rewards men for being aggressive negotiators while punishing women for the same thing. Having a clear range cuts down on the need to haggle, which increases gender pay parity.
It discriminates against people of color: Studies show that similar to women, people of color are also screwed over in the salary negotiation arena. Many people come from cultures where aggressive negotiation is not a norm. (Except maybe at the markets, involving my aunts and some fish). I’ve seen way too many colleagues of color take offers significantly beneath what they should be making. Transparency at the onset will cut down on this.

It drives away potential good candidates: Several of my peers in the field state outright that they will not apply for positions that do not list a salary range. If you aren’t organized enough to figure out your budget in creating a position, and transparent about it, many qualified people won’t want to work for you. And some of us are awesome unicorns who also make delicious naturally-fermented pickles to share with coworkers, so your organization is missing out on yummy probiotics.

It starts a relationship off on a lack of trust and transparency: When you don’t list a salary range, there will be an awkward and distracting tiptoeing dance with a giant gorilla throughout the hiring process. Unless you are ballin’ in the cash-money department, someone will be disappointed. Maybe a candidate will accept your job offer, even though they were hoping it would be more, since, again, they have a family to support. But they may be bitter and resentful. Do you want to start the relationship off that way?

It is inaccurate: There is rarely such a thing as “Depends On Experience” in the nonprofit sector. A candidate may be ridiculously experienced, but you have a budget, and there’s no way you are going to go beyond a certain number, no matter how experienced they are. (In other words, you know your budget, and you won’t budge it) It is only accurate if you attach it to a range: “$45,000 to $50,000 DOE,” for example. Then candidates will know that depending on their experience, they will get somewhere within that range, and no one feels bamboozled. Most candidates will expect the offer to be somewhere in the middle.

For these and other reasons, D.O.E on job postings must D.I.E. As another colleague says, “This is a practice adopted from the for-profit sector, to try to get someone for as little as possible; it's dishonest, ivory-tower, and needs to end. The implication is that hiring committees expect people to apply for a job with no idea what it will pay, as if it were an academic exercise, not a matter of feeding your family.”
Salary history must die too. And while we’re at it, can we put an end to the equally archaic and bizarre corollary practice of asking people for their salary history during negotiation? How is what someone made in a previous job relevant to the current position? Do we care what snacks they ate in their last job too? “I consumed one pound of dried mango from Costco per week, and would appreciate an increase of at least 10% in dried mango as part of my compensation package.” Salary history is a great way to ensure that people who are underpaid—again, a lot of women and minorities—remain underpaid. I have a friend who passed by several jobs that would have paid her three times what she is making; because she loves and is loyal to a small organization, she decided to remain there as ED, earning $45,000. When she finally left on good terms, a bigger org asked for her salary history and then offered $49,500 to be its ED, because that’s a “generous 10% increase” from what she was making, even though the industry average for an ED of an organization of that size is about $60,000. That’s effed up.

So hiring managers, I am begging you, start a professional relationship off right with equity and transparency. Examine why you are not disclosing your salaries on job postings.

Is it because that’s the way you’ve always done it? Well, let’s be more thoughtful, because people’s lives depend on our decisions. Let’s move with the times. If we keep doing archaic stuff, why stop at salary cloaking? Let’s also continue to use leech therapy and codpieces.

Is it because your salaries are so laughably low that you’re afraid to disclose them? Then you need to start working on increasing your salaries to sector averages, while disclosing them so people know what they’re getting into before they spend hours of their lives going through your process. (See, “All right, we need to talk about nonprofit salaries.”)

Is it because you don’t want existing staff at your organization to know what a new team member is making? Why not? If you’re afraid they’ll get upset if the new person makes more than they do, then you need to focus on developing fair compensation plans for ALL staff, current and new, and being transparent about your compensation policies.

We in the nonprofit sector must blaze the trail for equity, and not just thoughtlessly follow the ineffective and inequitable practices we inherited from the business world like a bunch of sign-spinning robots. #DownWithDOE. Tweet that, and let’s start to end this practice. Because every
time we don’t list the salary range in a job posting, says one of my peers, “a unicorn cries.” It also loses its wings. You may be thinking, “But unicorns don’t have wings!” Yeah, well now we all know why.

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