Height plus good looks equals bigger paycheck

by Michael_Kinsman

The average American male stands just a bit over 5 feet 9 inches. And, for every inch a man is taller than that, he can expect to earn $789 more per year.

That means that someone who is 6-foot-2 typically earns $3,945 more per year than someone 5-foot-9, or $157,000 more over the course of a 40-year career.

It is also true that exceptionally good-looking people are more likely to get hired for just about any position when competing against average-looking candidates with the same qualifications.

With apologies to F. Scott Fitzgerald, the tall and beautiful are different than you and me.

That's what Gordon L. Patzer says in his striking new book "Looks: Why They Matter More than You Ever Imagined" (AMACOM, $23).

A psychologist and professor at Roosevelt University in Chicago, Patzer warns us that people do judge people by their covers.

"Good looks make a difference today and they always will," Patzer says. "Popular culture today often admires extreme makeovers that alter the looks of an individual, but our culture itself could benefit from an extreme makeover of other sorts; otherwise, the proverbial playing field of life will never be level for individuals of higher and lower physical attractiveness.

Patzer has plenty of research studies to prove our society treats people with higher physical attractiveness better than others. Nurses treat the healthiest babies best, mothers offer more and better attention to their most attractive children and teachers expect better-looking children to perform well, leading to more attention, less punishment and higher grades.

Can it be any surprise that our employers treat attractive people better than others?

We make laws to cover racism, sexism and ageism, but we have yet to come up with one that addresses "lookism."

"Beauty may run skin deep, but its effects run much deeper," Patzer says.

Patzer reports that hiring-the-handsome is a routine practice among even seasoned human resources pros who sincerely believe they are able to ignore such superficialities as an applicant's physical attractiveness, or PA. That's because they think the person with a high PA is actually better qualified or, if not, will nevertheless turn into a better employee.

There is no logic behind this thinking. In fact, if hiring managers do resort to this it probably says more about them than the job candidate. The relationship between height and pay is well-documented. Taller individuals are known to be earn more in sales and management and they often receive more favorable treatment at promotion time because they are tall.

Patzer says that beauty can be a barrier in the workplace to highly attractive women seeking jobs associated with masculine qualities like strength, endurance and calm under pressure.

That makes as much sense as hiring an accountant based on physical height.

The reality of all this is that an individual's PA level matters in our image-obsessed society. Those with high PA will often reap the benefits over short, fat or ugly competitors just because of what they look like.

Patzer doesn't pretend that our society can eliminate its predilection toward PA. He understands that people get elected to public office, get better jobs and are treated better through each step of their life simply because they possess a high PA.

But he is encouraging everyone to rise above being defined by "lookism," even if they can't avoid being judged by it.

Michael Kinsman can be reached at kinsman2@gmail.com.

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