Brick walls and glass ceilings

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
INTERMEDIATE | B1-B2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Tick the correct category for each career word.

Word | Barrier | Positive change | Group | Action

1 underrepresented [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
2 systemic [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
3 breakthrough [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
4 advocate for [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
5 uphill battle [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
6 minority group [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
7 level playing field [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
8 push back against [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

2 Correct the mistake in each sentence.

1 Women are underrepresented in this field. _____
2 The problem is systemic of the industry. _____
3 It was uphill of battle for her. _____
4 They advocate to equal pay. _____
5 We need level playing of field. _____
6 She push back on unfair treatment. _____
7 That group is minority in the company. _____
8 It was real breakthrough for equality. _____

3 Choose the more suitable description.

1 For a group with fewer members than expected in a field: underrepresented / dominant.
2 For a problem built into the structure of a system: systemic / isolated.
3 For a difficult, ongoing struggle: uphill battle / easy win.
4 For actively supporting a cause: advocate for / ignore.
5 For fair, equal conditions for everyone: level playing field / rigged system.
6 For resisting unfair treatment: push back against / accept quietly.

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4 Complete the profiles with words from the box.

advocate for | breakthrough | level playing field | push back against | systemic | underrepresented | uphill battle | minority group

Profile A: As a member of an 1 _____ in her industry, she decided to 2 _____ equal pay and better representation.
Profile B: He recognised that the barriers he faced were 3 _____, not just personal, and he began to 4 _____ unfair hiring practices.
Profile C: Reaching a leadership position felt like an 5 _____, but she achieved a real 6 _____ after years of persistence.
Profile D: The company introduced new policies to create a more 7 _____ for employees from every 8 _____.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Beyond individual effort

Career researchers increasingly argue that systemic barriers, rather than individual shortcomings, explain why certain groups remain underrepresented in senior positions despite comparable talent and effort. Informal networks, biased hiring practices and unconscious assumptions about leadership can combine to create an uphill battle that persists regardless of an individual's qualifications. Some organisations have begun to push back against these patterns through structured mentorship programmes and transparent promotion criteria, aiming to create something closer to a level playing field. Critics caution that isolated initiatives rarely succeed without sustained commitment from leadership, since systemic problems require systemic solutions.

1 What do career researchers increasingly argue explains underrepresentation? _____

2 Name two examples of systemic barriers mentioned. _____

3 What can these combine to create? _____

4 How have some organisations begun to push back against these patterns? _____

5 What are these organisations aiming to create? _____

6 What do critics caution about isolated initiatives? _____

6 Rewrite each phrase using the word in capitals.

1 Women are not represented enough in this field. UNDERREPRESENTED _____

2 The problem is built into the whole system. SYSTEMIC _____

3 It was a difficult, ongoing struggle. UPHILL BATTLE _____

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4 Everyone has equal, fair conditions. LEVEL PLAYING FIELD _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 100-120 word account of how a workplace or industry could create fairer opportunities for underrepresented groups. Include specific examples.

[ ] Use at least ten target expressions. [ ] Include polite, precise wording. [ ] Organise the account clearly.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Categories

1 Group 2 Barrier 3 Positive change 4 Action 5 Barrier 6 Group 7 Positive change 8 Action

2 Corrections

1 correct as is 2 systemic in the industry 3 an uphill battle for her
4 advocate for equal pay 5 a level playing field 6 pushes back against unfair treatment
7 a minority in the company 8 a real breakthrough for equality

3 Suitable descriptions

1 underrepresented 2 systemic 3 uphill battle 4 advocate for 5 level playing field 6 push back against

4 Profiles

1 minority group 2 advocate for 3 systemic 4 push back against 5 uphill battle 6 breakthrough
7 level playing field 8 minority group

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Systemic barriers, rather than individual shortcomings.
2 Any two: informal networks, biased hiring practices, unconscious assumptions about leadership.
3 An uphill battle that persists regardless of an individual's qualifications.
4 Through structured mentorship programmes and transparent promotion criteria.
5 A level playing field.
6 That they rarely succeed without sustained commitment from leadership.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 Women are underrepresented in this field. 2 The problem is systemic.
3 It was an uphill battle. 4 There is now a level playing field.

Over to you

Answers will vary. Check range, respectful register and clear organisation.