

Unconscious Bias: Addressing it in the Work Environment



CommunityCoalitionOnRace.org

What is Unconscious Bias?

Unconscious biases are thoughts and actions formed by our brains creating shortcuts to process the countless pieces of information we encounter daily and are informed by media, news, societal norms, and our experience.

- ▶ Similar terms: unintentional bias, hidden bias, implicit bias, cognitive bias, micro-inequities



Biases are shortcuts our brains form based on:

- our own experiences
- things other people tell us
- media portrayals
- institutional influences
- other external influences

We unconsciously associate groups of people with certain traits, characteristics, or generalizations about gender, race, age, or other dimensions of diversity



Types of unconscious bias

Affinity bias: the unconscious tendency to get along with others who are like us.

Halo effect: is an inaccurate judgment of a person or thing based on the perception of one trait that influences the opinion about another, often unrelated trait.

Perception bias: using assumptions about certain groups that make it impossible to make an objective judgement about members of those groups.

Confirmation bias: seeking information that confirms pre-existing beliefs or assumptions.

Group think: trying to fit into a particular group by mimicking others or holding back thoughts and opinions. This causes organizations to lose out on creativity and innovation.



Who has these biases?

- We all have these biases, and because everyone has them, your employees, clients, customers, and business associates experience them as well.
- Becoming aware of biases can lead to changing behavior, which ultimately can make your business more collaborative, inclusive, and competitive.



What Can We Do?

- Combatting unconscious biases is hard, because their influence on our decisions in a given moment doesn't feel wrong: our biases feel intuitively right.
- Unconscious biases are not necessarily in line with our consciously held beliefs. They may even run contrary to our stated beliefs and attitudes.
- We can say that we value equity (and truly believe it), but then behave in ways that are biased and discriminatory

We can break the habit!



What can we as individuals do?

There's still a lot to learn about how to mitigate unconscious bias.

Your unconscious biases exist because your brain forms associations, so it's logical enough to believe that you can train it to form new associations.



What are some Strategies to Identify and Address Implicit Biases?

- Develop an awareness about implicit bias—awareness of unconscious bias can lead to reversals in biased outcomes.
- Challenge current negative biases—consciously contrast negative stereotypes with specific counter-examples.
- Increase opportunities for contact with individuals from different groups to develop meaningful, ongoing relations.



Strategies to Identify and Address Implicit Biases, continued

- See differences—The idea of being colorblind actually negates or minimizes a person’s lived experience.
- Individuate – See the person as an individual rather than a stereotype. This individuation allows you to recognize people based upon their own personal attributes rather than stereotypes
- Take perspective – You can develop a better appreciation for someone’s concerns by considering the perspective of an outgroup member.



Why is this important for businesses?

In a business context, implicit biases could end up leading to any of the following problems:

- Hiring the wrong candidate for a job
- Misunderstanding your customers
- Customer dissatisfaction
- Undervaluing employees and not getting the most out of them
- Causing talented employees to get frustrated and leave



What can businesses do?

- Build an inclusive culture in which people can be their authentic selves, in which there's no need to hide elements of one's identity to fit in.
- Be proactive in defining your company's core values and work to cultivate a respectful workplace.
- State your commitment to building a diverse and inclusive culture in your job descriptions, in your employee handbook, in your business' mission statement.
- Introduce diversity, equity, and inclusion early on in the employee's cycle, beginning with why *you* care about these issues.



Unconscious BIAS SCENARIOS

- Over-attentive Service
- Under-attentive Service
- Presumptive Service
- Variable Policy Enforcement



PAUSE to Manage Uncertainty

- P** Pay attention to what's happening behind the judgments you make. You have to slow down to see what's really going on.
- A** Ask yourself, “Am I making this decision based on a requirement of the business or based on my preference”
- U** Understand other possible judgments, interpretations, and reactions and how those other possibilities might be just as valid.
- S** Search for the most productive way to deal with a situation. In general, what can you do that will open up a relationship (rather than shut it down) to gain more information before making a final judgment?
- E** Execute actions that are consistently inclusive..

Based on Howard Ross's P.A.U.S.E. mnemonic for handling unconscious bias in the workplace:
talentmanagement360.com/how-to-deal-with-unconscious-bias-in-the-workplace/

