

Think Before You Speak

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The uncomfortable truth is that everyone is biased. Stereotypes about groups of people are ubiquitous. Some of these preconceived ideas or feelings operate at a level below consciousness, and these are called implicit or unconscious biases. They are not limited to race, gender, age or sexual orientation, but may also include many other issues, such as physical appearance, accents, the origin of birth, sports or even job functions. The reality is you can be biased about anything.

Unconscious beliefs affect how you communicate with others. Less friendly behaviors and body language are easily picked up and can make certain members of your team less confident and less able to put forth their best self. Ultimately, productivity and revenue will suffer because discriminated professionals will drag their feet and/or look for other options—companies that make them feel truly part of the workforce.

Implicit bias often results in men and women being assessed differently on interviews and job promotions. The Women in the Workplace study by Leanin.org and McKinsey & Company revealed that for every 100 women promoted to managerial positions, 130 men are promoted. According to Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, women account for only 18% of C suite executives and women of color to

only 3%. Decisions you make favoring one person over another for gender or color, or any other unconscious bias, are costly and the reputation of your company suffers.

There is hope. Inclusion and Diversity Training programs are in demand. By 2019, The Future Work Institute says that 50% of employers will be offering training on unconscious bias. Obviously, this is not enough; all companies need to address this issue, but it is a start. Once people recognize and acknowledge their own unconscious biases and can talk about them, organizations can generate solutions. When symphony orchestras started using blind auditions by placing candidates behind screens and drapes, the number of women and minorities in five leading orchestras in the US increased fivefold.

Creating a more inclusive workforce allows people to be themselves. With contributions and ideas valued by everyone, corporations create better solutions for their customers and increase profitability and revenue. When a company is seen as an inclusive company, it will attract more people and will be known as a “Best Place to Work.”

Question: *What additional comments do you have regarding unconscious bias? What has worked for you? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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