

TAKE-5 FOR INCLUSION & DIVERSITY

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

(BY NUCLEAR PROPULSION'S DIVISION I&D CHAMPIONS)

Introduction

Tom works with someone new who reminds him of another person. Unconsciously, the feelings and opinions he associated with the other person begins to influence the way he sees this new person. This is a subtle, but real form of unconscious bias.



This example of an unconscious bias is experienced by most everyone. Upon realization of this bias we have the responsibility to put aside past experiences, and see each person as an individual. Take a mental note to prevent yourself from acting on this now conscious bias, and effectively teach yourself to eliminate it.

A **Bias** is a tendency or inclination that results in judgment without question. Biases are neither inherently positive nor negative. It is simply a function of the mind that is designed to help us quickly chart how to deal with a circumstance. Studies show we all have biases. The question is not “do you have a bias?” but rather “which ones do you have?” Example: If you see a dorsal fin in the water, you probably won’t wait to see if it’s a dolphin or a shark. You’re inclination (bias) will most likely be ‘fight or flight’.

Have you ever caught yourself thinking in a biased way? Did you do anything to counteract your bias?

On the other hand, an **Unconscious bias** is a bias that we are unaware of, and which happens outside of our control. It is a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background, cultural environment, and personal experiences. Example: I have a bad experience with one person, and I let it cloud my opinion of

everyone I believe to be a member of that group.

Most biases do not stem from a place of bad intent, but rather from ill-informed or incomplete stereotypes that we form in our minds through our experiences with others.

Let’s look at a few examples of unconscious bias behaviors (not all-inclusive):

- An attractiveness/beauty bias may cause you to treat people you perceive as attractive more/less favorably than those you perceive as unattractive.
- A similarity/affinity bias may cause you to prefer interacting with people who look like you, or came from the same town or school as you.
- A ‘confirmational’ bias may cause you to see behavior that confirms what you believe to be true.
- A rush-to-solve bias could make you come to the wrong conclusions about something because of your desire to get through a problem quickly.

What can you do to help eliminate your biases?

- Ask yourself “What is causing me to feel/believe this way?”
- Nurture a culture that explores how we come to each decision.
- Open the door to feedback from others.
- Reflect on your beliefs, and keep cultural factors in mind.
- Expose yourself to positive learning opportunities, like ERG meetings or events.

Recap

Everyone has biases. It’s just a matter of which ones you have, and are they healthy!