



# Manage Your Biases

To Better Manage  
Your Team



## We all have unconscious biases.

“You gave my co-worker a raise, but I deserved it more because I pull more of the load.” This is just one of the many complaints employees make when they feel they aren’t getting the recognition, rewards, or opportunities they’ve earned.

Unfair treatment in the workplace is a common issue employees point to when asked how their managers could improve. Very few managers purposefully set out to do unfair things. But that doesn’t mean employees’ impressions are necessarily off base.



# It's time to talk about unconscious bias.



**The concept of unconscious bias is igniting more and more conversations in the workplace.**

What explains the disconnect between managers' good intentions and the impact their decisions have on others?

There could be many factors at play, from different expectations to a lack of transparency. And in some cases, one culprit is unconscious bias.

Because of the powerful effect it can have on morale, performance, and business outcomes, the concept of unconscious bias is igniting more and more conversations in the workplace.

Research shows that our unconscious biases are often likes and dislikes. You have preferences for some things, like your favorite sports team, and aversions to other things, such as policies you disagree with. Similarly, you also have ingrained affinities around people's gender, race, age, personality, appearance, and other attributes.

These unconscious biases can lead you to reflexively choose one thing over another, even though your choice might not be logically "best". And when you make decisions in this way, you may be putting a person or group at a disadvantage without even realizing it.

Often, we tend to prefer characteristics like our own or those society favors. And we tend to avoid characteristics that are different from our own experiences or from what society prefers.



**“We think we see the world as it is, when in fact we see the world as we are.”**

**—Stephen R. Covey**

# Why your good intentions aren't good enough.



**Stereotypes can influence our behaviour even if we consciously believe they're not true.**

Unconscious biases are more complex than most people realise.

## Decades of research indicate that:

- **Unconscious biases result from mental shortcuts that serve a necessary and helpful purpose.** We have so much information flying at us that our brains protect us by filtering out most of it and operating via shortcuts. This can be a blessing for time-strapped managers, letting them make quick or instinctive decisions without needing to deliberate on every piece of information.

But as we rush, we become prone to bias in ways we might find unacceptable if we paused to analyse the subtext. Without thinking, a hiring manager plowing quickly through résumés may make assessments such as, “This school is good”, “This name sounds successful”, or “This résumé’s format looks modern”.

- **Unconscious biases kick in automatically.** Before you have a chance to be deliberate, you might find yourself doing things like judging a new colleague in five seconds or always delegating an annoying task—like taking notes—to a woman or a person of colour. And without

a rubric that helps you develop feedback for all team members, you could write performance evaluations based on purely subjective criteria.

- **Unconscious biases can subvert our conscious beliefs.** Most of us know all too well that stereotypes like these are problematic:

*Younger workers are more creative.*

*Introverts aren't good salespeople.*

*Women who make strong arguments are too aggressive.*

*Men and Asians are better at handling technical issues.*

But here's the truth: Just being aware of these stereotypes is all it takes for them to influence our behaviour, even if we consciously believe they're not true!



**Unconscious biases seep into our actions when we're not thinking about the good intentions and beliefs that might keep stereotypes in check.**

# Four situations where bias matters most.



**Studies find that women receive twice as much negative feedback as men in performance reviews.**

Unconscious biases can show up anywhere in the workplace.

## Unconscious biases can be especially damaging when you:

**1. Hire.** Most managers don't think they'd reject a résumé because of a candidate's name or reflexively decide on a candidate five minutes into an interview. But research finds they frequently do.

These and other kinds of hiring biases prevent you from building the kind of diverse team that tends to perform better than teams of like-minded people from similar backgrounds.

**2. Delegate.** You might inadvertently overlook some employees, such as those who work remotely, for important assignments even when they're better suited for such projects. This tendency not only keeps your team from doing its best work but also cripples your remote team members' chances to develop their skills or build a case for a promotion.

**3. Give feedback.** Studies find, for example, that women receive twice as much negative feedback as men in performance reviews, which hurts their chances for raises and promotions. Women and people of colour also receive feedback that's more vague and less constructive.

**4. Develop customer-facing products or messaging.** You don't want to be responsible for one of those tone-deaf products or messages that leave people wondering, "What were they thinking"? In such situations, a hidden bias is often at play—one that sneaks past a team's conscientious desire to do right by their customers.



**When we understand and address biases, we unleash each individual's full potential to innovate, solve problems, and get results.**



# Four reasons to manage unconscious bias at work.

Your unconscious biases can adversely impact your team members, your organisation, and your career.

Here are four reasons why you should take the reins from your unconscious:

- 1. Biases limit the information available to you and your team.** Diverse perspectives can help your team's performance—and your company's bottom line.
- 2. Biases can limit your expectations of yourself, holding you back in your career.** Maybe there's a voice in your head questioning whether the executive track is realistic for you. And that voice gains credibility as the years go by, and you don't see anyone upend the stereotypes that are causing you to doubt yourself.
- 3. Biases are not what organisations want in their managers.** The number of diversity-minded companies that take equity seriously and that want fair, inclusive managers is growing.
- 4. Biases unfairly hurt your colleagues.** Experiences of bias can compound, causing pay gaps, missed promotions, and relatively sparse recognition for certain groups of people. Affected colleagues can become less engaged, less effective, and more likely to leave. Bias can also inflict deep psychological wounds.

# Addressing bias can improve results for your organisation.

It's a common misconception that we can't do anything about our unconscious biases.

Our brains use biases to compensate for information overload. But that doesn't mean we have to let biased thinking drive our decisions. By identifying biases and building a culture of empathy, curiosity, and inclusion, organisations can unleash the full potential of leaders and employees at every level.

Research shows that inclusive teams and organisations are more innovative and more collaborative. They have higher productivity and lower turnover. And in study after study, inclusive decision-making has been linked to better business outcomes.

**FranklinCovey's Unconscious Bias learning solution** will help you build a culture where inclusive-decision making is the norm, not the exception.

This article and others like it are available through Jhana®, our micro-learning support portal for leaders, which is included in the FranklinCovey All Access Pass®.

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