

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS PRE-WORK

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STEP ONE: Read this article on Unconscious Bias from Jhana by FranklinCovey to better understand what Unconscious Bias is.

Unconscious Bias: What It is and How It Affects Us

"You gave my co-worker a raise, but I deserved it more because I pull more of the load."

This is just one of many complaints Jhana has heard about unfair treatment in the workplace.

Of course, very few purposefully set out to do unfair things. But that doesn't mean complaints are necessarily off base either. So what explains the frequent disconnect between leaders' impressions and those of their team members? There could be many factors at play, from different expectations to a lack of transparency.

And in some cases, one culprit is something called unconscious bias. It's a concept that's igniting more and more conversations in the workplace because of the powerful effects it can have on morale, performance, and overall business outcomes.

What is unconscious bias?

It's more complex than most people realize. Decades of research indicate that our unconscious biases:

- 1. Are often likes and dislikes.** Just as you have preferences for things, like your team or mentor, or aversions to things, like competitors or policies you disagree with, you have ingrained likes and dislikes around people's gender, race, age range, personality, appearance, etc. These unconscious biases have the potential to lead you to reflexively choose one thing over another even though your choice might not be logically "best." Often, we tend to prefer characteristics like our own or those society favors and avoid characteristics that are different from our experiences or what society prefers. For instance, you might feel most comfortable on a team with others who share your interests and views, but is that the "best" team?
- 2. Are the result of 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 timestrapped employees, letting them make quick or instinctive decisions without needing to deliberate every piece of information. But as we rush, we become prone to bias in ways we might find unacceptable if we paused to analyze the subtext. Without thinking, a hiring manager plowing quickly through resumes makes assessments: this school is good, this name sounds successful, this resume's format looks cool.
- 3. Kick in automatically.** Before you have the chance to be deliberate, you might find yourself doing things like: judging a new colleague in five seconds; always delegating an annoying task, like taking notes, to a minority or female team member; or writing up feedback for a direct report in a performance evaluation without using a rubric that you use to develop feedback for all team members.

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4. **Can subvert our conscious beliefs.** Most of us know all too well that stereotypes are problematic: “Younger workers are more creative,” “introverts aren’t good salespeople,” “women who argue points are too aggressive,” “men and Asians are better at handling technical issues.” But here’s the maddening truth: Our awareness of these stereotypes is sometimes all it takes for them to influence our behavior, even if we consciously believe they’re not true! How can that be? It goes back to the automatic nature of unconscious biases. They seep into our actions when we’re not thinking about the good intentions and beliefs that might keep stereotypes in check.

When is unconscious bias riskiest for organizations?

Unconscious biases can show up basically anywhere in the workplace. But they can be especially damaging when you:

- **Hire.** It’s hard to believe leaders would unknowingly reject a resume because of the candidate’s name or reflexively make a decision on a candidate five minutes into an interview. But research finds they do. These and other hiring biases prevent you from building the kind of diverse team that tends to perform better than teams of like-minded people of similar backgrounds.
- **Delegate.** You might inadvertently overlook some employees, such as those who work remotely, for important assignments even when they’re better suited to do them — not only keeping your team from doing its best, but also crippling your remotes’ chances to develop their skills and/or build a case for a promotion.
- **Give feedback.** For example, studies find that women receive twice the negative feedback as men in their performance reviews, which damages their chances for raises and promotions. Women and minorities also receive more vague and less constructive feedback — the sort that would benefit their development.
- **Develop or review client-facing products and/or messaging.** You don’t want to be responsible for one of those tone-deaf products or messages that leaves people wondering, What were they were thinking? Often, a hidden bias was at play — one that snuck past a team’s conscious desire to do right by their clients.

Why should I do something about unconscious bias at work?

There are at least four good reasons to sit up and take the reins from your unconscious:

- **Biases can keep your team from having and sharing a wide range of perspectives.** Yet these perspectives can help your team’s performance — and your company’s bottom line.
- **Biases can limit your expectations of yourself, holding you back in your career.** Maybe there’s a little voice in your head questioning whether the executive track is realistic for you — a voice that gains credibility as the years go by without you ever seeing someone upend the stereotypes that are causing you to doubt yourself.
- **Biases are not what organizations want in their leaders.** The number of diversity-minded companies that take this stuff seriously and want fair, inclusive leaders is growing.
- **Biases unfairly hurt your colleagues.** Experiences of bias compound, causing pay gaps, missed promotions, and relatively sparse recognition for certain groups of people. Affected colleagues can become less engaged, less likely to perform to the best of their abilities, and more likely to leave. Plus, being the target of bias just plain hurts, potentially taking a costly psychological toll.

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STEP TWO: Complete two tests of your choosing from Harvard's Project Implicit to better learn what some of your own unconscious biases might be.

[Project Implicit](#) is a series of tests that Harvard designed to test potential preferences, or unconscious (or implicit) biases, about particular groups or demographics. These tests will require you to make quick decisions about images or symbols; then, at the end of the test, it will provide you with information on whether your results indicate a preference for or against your topic, such as skin tone or age.

Your results don't reflect a definitive bias and certainly don't assume that those preferences are impacting your decisions but they do provide some food for thought as you embark on this journey or exploring and understanding bias.

Please choose two in the link above. The tests include:

- Disability
- Native
- Arab-Muslim
- Religion
- Skin Tone
- Race
- Presidents
- Age
- Sexuality
- Gender and Career
- Weapons
- Weight
- Asian
- Gender and Science

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STEP THREE: Spend 15 minutes reading the stories at humansofnewyork.com to explore how we feel when we build connection.

Conceived by Brandon Stanton, Humans of New York began as a photography project in 2010. The initial goal was to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers on the street and create an exhaustive catalogue of the city's inhabitants.

Somewhere along the way, he began to interview his subjects in addition to photographing them. And alongside their portraits, he'd include quotes and short stories from their lives.

Taken together, these portraits and captions became the subject of a vibrant blog. HONY now has over twenty million followers on social media, and provides a worldwide audience with daily glimpses into the lives of strangers on the streets of New York City. Brandon also travels abroad, and special projects include similar stories from every continent.

As you read, identify what emotions each story brings up. Do you have any emotional response to the stories? Empathy, curiosity, interest, frustration, surprise, shock, warmth, happiness, sadness, etc. Is there power in the vulnerability of these people? Is there power in their stories?

HUMANS OF NEW YORK
LATEST STORIES



"We started early in school. Seven guys from my church got together and started practicing in a basement. Michael Armstrong on drums. Robert Burton on lead guitar. James Cloud on bass. Charles Easton on the piano. Then we had our three singers: Wilbur Simmons, Dennis Austin Ray, and me. At first we just sang on the sidewalk. Or even just walking down the street. But eventually we were getting real invitations to perform: parties, barbecues, little shows here and there. Then we got bigger and bigger. Until one night in 1969 we're backing up Bobby Darin in front of 5,000 people at a college in New Jersey. I was only fourteen at the time. It was ecstasy. The next ten years we toured up and down the east

"All of the young people are leaving. You have to say 'goodbye,' over and over again. One of my best friends went to Chile. Another went to Spain. Another went to Argentina to earn money for her mother's cancer treatment. My brother left five years ago. And now I'm gone too. Before I came to New York, I went to pick up some paperwork at my university. We used to have ten classrooms full of people. Now half of them are empty. There are some people who choose to stay. I have a cousin that swears he'll never leave. He says that there's a chance things will work out. But that's very rare for someone our age. The grown-ups stay because they have their whole lives in

"I grew up pretty well honestly. I didn't have bad parents, a little 'helicopter' maybe, but doing the best they could. I was just a bad kid. I don't even remember a lot of my teenage years. I was always popping pills. Just a 'fuck you, parents' kind of thing. When I wasn't alone in my room, I was picking fights with them. I hurt my mother the most because she cared the most. Dad cared. But Mom really cared. Throwing me out wasn't easy for her. But one night I had a really bad Xanax high. I blacked out. Messed up the house. They won't even tell me exactly what I did, but it must have been violent. Because the cops came. The court put an order of protection against me. The last thing I said to my

"There was this interesting piece in The Times a couple weeks ago about people in solitary confinement. And one of the guys said the worst thing is having all that time to think. And that's my problem too. When I'm alone in my apartment, I just start ruminating. About my finances. About my medical conditions. About not taking good enough care of my mom. But as long as I can find my bar, I'm fine. It's just a couple blocks from my house. And when I open the door, and look in, I see the place is full of people like me: people with health problems, retirees with nothing to do, a lot of us are unkempt, unshaven. And everyone has a weakness for alcohol. I get a warm welcome every time I

What do you feel as you read those stories? Why?