

Unmasking Unconscious Bias

Transforming Your Privilege into Empowerment!

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Recognising our own privilege doesn't require feeling guilt or shame. It does require us to take an honest look at the privileges we have, how we interact with others on our 'bad hair days' and determine if we sometimes act 'entitled'. In these moments, asking ourselves 'How could I have been a better human today?' takes courage. Yet, these reflections offer us the opportunity to put our privilege in check, challenge our biases and contribute to a fairer and more equitable world.

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Workplace behaviours frequently reflect unconscious biases and reinforce systemic imbalances.

Take a look at these three classic examples:

1. Hiring managers may unintentionally favour candidates who mirror their own backgrounds.
2. Decisions around promotion may unconsciously align with societal expectations rather than merit.
3. Individuals who fit conventional leadership expectations, often dictated by privilege, receive more opportunities.

Unconscious bias also influences our everyday interactions. Assumptions about competence based on appearance, tone or mannerisms shape how we perceive others. When women speak up boldly, they're labelled as aggressive. When they collaborate, they can be seen as too soft. These snap judgements happen in a flash, yet their impact on confidence, careers and workplace culture can last far longer.

Unconscious bias shapes interactions, perceptions and decisions, in ways that many fail to recognise. These biases influence business environments, leadership dynamics and career trajectories, often perpetuating unfairness without any deliberate intent. Being aware of our own hidden biases enables us to challenge ingrained assumptions and invites inclusivity in both our professional and personal lives.

Bias is not exclusive to any one demographic. Despite facing systemic barriers, women can also hold biases against other women. Stereotypes about women's emotionality, assertiveness or leadership abilities persist and can even be unconsciously reinforced by other women.

By acknowledging and addressing this reality, we create an opportunity for progress and greater unity, rather than division.

Privilege can impact our unconscious bias. Attributes such as race, gender, age, religion, perceived physical attractiveness, health, wealth and sexual orientation affect how we navigate our world. They can vary throughout our lives and shift according to where we are at a certain time. Having an excessive amount of these attributes can tip us into the 'land of privilege' where we're likely to misbehave! It can even unconsciously influence well-intentioned people to come across as, well...jerks! Those with privilege often move through professional and social landscapes with fewer barriers, making it easy to overlook challenges that others may face.

So, what can we do? Here are some strategies to consider:

Spotting unconscious bias starts with a little curiosity and a lot of self-reflection! Tuning into gut reactions and questioning where they come from increases awareness. Pay attention to workplace patterns - who gets mentored, who lands leadership roles, who's handed the mic - all of which reveal the hidden forces shaping the game.

Education is a game-changer when it comes to tackling unconscious bias. Engaging diversity, equity and inclusion training sparks self-reflection and arms people with the tools to challenge their own biases. Keeping the conversation going, talking openly about privilege and systemic inequality, creates a culture of learning, accountability and real change.

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Mentorship and sponsorship programmes open doors and level the playing field. When leaders champion diverse talent and actively support fresh voices, they help shatter old cycles of exclusion and build a future where everyone gets a fair shot at success.

Speak up against bias. It isn't just brave - it's powerful! Shining a light on biased language, hiring practices or workplace norms leads to accountability and pushes real change forward. When people feel safe calling out microaggressions and stereotypes, workplace culture transforms for the better.

Allyship is the secret weapon in breaking down unconscious bias. Championing colleagues from all backgrounds, amplifying underrepresented voices and recognising privilege creates truly inclusive spaces. Even small actions like giving credit where it's due, pushing for fair policies or standing up for equity add up to big, lasting change!

Personal commitment to overcoming bias extends beyond just our professional settings. Actively seeking diverse perspectives through books, podcasts and conversations broadens our understanding. Challenging personal biases in everyday interactions, whether in hiring decisions or social conversations, leads to meaningful transformation.

Calling all people of power, privilege and non-minorities - my invitation to you is the following:

1. Assume bias and microaggressions are happening on a regular basis. Start looking for them in meetings, social gatherings and within your family.
2. Next, imagine how you'd confront that behaviour in a clear and respectful manner.
3. Arrange a time to talk to that person and share your concerns.

Make a request for a change in behaviour. [Watch this short video for my 10 top tips on delivering difficult messages.](#) (<https://bit.ly/ACMessages>)

Unconscious bias may be deeply ingrained, yet it is not insurmountable. The willingness to recognise our own privilege, question our assumptions and that of others, and take intentional actions, creates pathways for empowerment. Every individual plays a role in shaping inclusive spaces where talent flourishes based on merit rather than preconceptions. Choosing awareness over assumption and advocacy over silence is the road to a future where everyone thrives!

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Amy is a communication coach and trainer.

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