Unconscious Bias

acacia EAP
employee assistance program

Before you delve further into this resource, I encourage you to stop, and ask yourself how you would respond if asked, "What is your core belief as to how others should be treated and, by extension, how you treat others"?

Chances are that your response included something similar to with respect, compassion, fairness, and kindness. Of course, this may be true, and it may definitely be what you aspire to do on a day-to-day basis.

But what if you had developed an alternative set of unconscious beliefs that essentially misaligned with this core belief? What would be the consequences of such unconscious beliefs on how you show up and engage with others and the world around you?

What is Unconscious Bias?
Unconscious bias, also known as implicit bias, is the learned beliefs and attitudes we unconsciously develop towards a group of people due to our experiences and environment.

What we read, view on television, where we live, where we went to school, where we work, and who we associate with – all of these sources of input shape the stereotypes that we develop and the judgements that we hold.

No one is immune to unconscious biases. We all hold them; they aid our capacity to process information and make quick decisions throughout our day. They act to prejudice us and the way we engage and treat others, and even shape the preferences we hold, both for the positive and the negative. They may also limit us and the opportunities laid before us.

How can we Reduce our Unconscious Bias?
So how do we lift the lid off our unconscious biases and bring them into the conscious to reduce their influence and impact?

Acknowledge & Accept that Biases Exist
The term unconscious bias is most likely not a new one to many of you but how much do you really know and understand. Start to educate yourself and increase your capacity to recognise biases within yourself and within others.

Reflect & Increase Self-Awareness of Biases
Self-awareness is often the building block from which change is possible. This isn't going to be an easy or necessarily comfortable experience. As previously highlighted, we all generally hold a high expectation of ourselves to be above our biases. Of course, it's important to remember that we are all first and foremost human beings, and, by design, flawed.

But also, as human beings, we possess great capacity for change. The more we are aware, the greater our capacity to exert influence over our biases, and reduce any negative consequences.

Open your Window of Reference
Our environment helped shaped our biases in the first place, so let's use this to our advantage. Challenge what you thought you knew about your world and the people in it by creating opportunities for new experiences.

Go out into the community and connect with individuals from other walks of life, who have travelled pathways different from your own. Don't speak but rather listen; listen to their stories, their experiences, their truths, and their wisdoms.

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Welcome & Encourage Feedback
Without feedback and input from others, you are limited in challenging your unconscious bias. Be curious and seek specific feedback from others. Seek to gain understanding of a perspective other than your own. Ask:

- What are your thoughts on this matter?
- How would you have managed this situation?
- What's your understanding of things?

Feedback is simply information. It is what you do with it and the process of being open and reflective that is important.

Last Words
We all have a responsibility for the decisions we make and the beliefs and assumptions that underpin them. Unconscious bias undermines our potential for growth and the growth of others. A fair and equitable society starts with each and every one of us sitting with some uncomfortable truths and committing to doing something about it.