



Advice from EEO Works LLC
Edward McCaffrey
Contact ed@eeoworks.com
Or call 215/219-6090

Getting From ‘What’ to ‘Who’: Dealing Effectively with Unconscious Bias ©

This training session addresses four topics:

- (1) Does unconscious bias exist?
- (2) If so, how can we measure it?
- (3) Does it affect our behavior?
- (4) Are there techniques we can use to diminish its effects?

Defining the Problem

The session begins by considering the effect on our behavior of the point-of-view we adopt toward some other person. In the opening two slides, we see a human being turned into an object and a six-ton dolphin taking on human qualities. This kind of thing happens inside us. So, the first point is that we begin our examination of bias by looking inward. A lot depends upon the relationship we feel comfortable with. Bias is first located inside our perspective toward the group we believe the other person is a member of. Bias continues as long as the relationship supporting the bias continues. **To address unconscious bias effectively, we need to change our relationship to the object of the bias.**

Getting from ‘what’ to ‘who’ means getting to a relationship where we see the other person more as an individual than as a representative of a group. First, let’s see how easy it is to create a stereotype in our minds. Suppose we are sitting in a training class and, as is always the case, though we came early or just on time, some came late. Step one is to create a group called “those who come late to training sessions.” Step two is to assign characteristics to members of the group --- they are late, they make noise as they enter and so forth. Step three is to judge these characteristics --- they are insensitive to the trainer who spends so much time preparing the opening section of the training; they are indifferent to a cultural rule they should honor (being on time); they rudely interrupt the rest of us by making noise as they enter and get settled; they could easily have organized their life so as to be at the training on time; they are just like those other insensitive people who don’t use their turn signals while driving greenhouse gas factories on wheels and yammering about nothing on their cell phones instead of being aware of what they are doing... and so forth.

Now, take a moment to appreciate the effort it takes us to adjust the stereotype once it is formed. Suppose we notice that Sally, a friend of ours, is among those late. This is a little unsettling because we know she is really not a rude person. At the break, she sees you and happens to mention that she received a last minute phone call from her daughter's school about an upcoming school trip and she just couldn't get out of answering the caller's questions. She regrets being late. How does this affect your stereotype? Not much. Sally becomes an exception. Her reason for being late doesn't cause the group to break up in your mind into a collection of individuals about whom you might reserve judgment until you know more about their individual situation. Now you meet up with Larry, a new employee who seems always to be wearing earphones and nodding to the music playing on his MP-3 player. You make a casual yet subtle reference to the fact that he was late for the training. He laughs and tells you he would rather have missed the whole thing because he had 'real work' to do back at his desk. How does meeting Larry affect your stereotype? His behavior seems much more revealing and confirms your notions about the *kind of people* who routinely come late to training.

The process of creating stereotypes and, as a result, forming prejudices and acting in a discriminatory manner is a normal, human activity. You can't approach each day as if you were just born. You need to navigate life by making assumptions (based on what you learned in the past) about what will happen in various situations in the present. These assumptions bias you in the sense you are no longer neutral.

Much of the discriminatory behavior we exhibit has trivial consequences for other persons. We prefer a certain cuisine, a certain restaurant, a certain dish --- so what? At work, a good deal of our personal bias leads to beneficial outcomes for ourselves and others. For example, through experience we develop the savvy to be able to estimate rather closely how long it will take to accomplish a certain task, what materials and staff will be needed, likely costs and so forth. So, in today's session, we look at common and often beneficial human tendencies at the point where these tendencies cause harm to ourselves, others and the organization we are part of.

The first task of the training is to give you enough evidence to decide for yourself whether there is such a thing as unconscious bias. To do this, we consider the thought process by which a nationally known figure skater (the skater to win the most medals in our history) is thought to be a foreigner by the presumably savvy MSNB employee who wrote the headline in the slide "American beats Kwan." Born and raised in California, Michelle Kwan represents the classic American success story. Her parents sacrifice to provide her with lessons (mortgaging the house etc.); she wins a scholarship; she trains hours a day to become the best. Yet she looks 'different.' In some minds, there is an implicit model of who is an American and Ms. Kwan does not fit this model.

In a similar fashion, the editor at Time magazine who chose to place a mugshot of O.J. Simpson on the cover (rather than a picture of him at the trial or in some other context) clearly slanted the story that appeared later in the magazine but probably did not do so

consciously. [Mugshots are more often used to portray black suspects and can be shown to bias persons who see such pictures as to the guilt of a person.] In addition, however, when he or she first saw the cover picture and felt that the picture needed to be artificially darkened because it did not represent what O.J. Simpson really looked like (*in his/her mind*), at that point we wonder why did this feeling arise? The answer is that it did so because the category “sinister” (“threatening”) is entangled with the category “Black” in the United States. There is abundant evidence for this which I will give a brief summary of here. There is a video game used in police training where the trainee sees a video in which a person appears holding something ambiguous in his hand --- a can of soda, a cell-phone or a gun --- and the trainee must decide whether to shoot at the person or not. The results over many trials consistently show persons were significantly more likely to mistake an unarmed black male as armed and an armed white male as unarmed. Black trainees showed effects basically the same as white trainees. Irene Blair *et al.* have even shown that Afrocentric facial features lead to longer sentences for the same crime among white as well as black convicts. (dark skin color, wide nose, full lips)¹

Another example of this process of entanglement is shown in the slide where students are introduced to a person and later asked to estimate that person’s height. The students were told one other thing, the status of the person. There was a direct relationship between the person’s announced status and perceived height. Height, ability and status are entangled in the mind of many persons. Tall people tend to make more money, get elected to public office, or get promoted to a leadership position, for example, because these characteristics cluster in our mind. One of the most consistent observations from research into mock employment interviews is that attractive applicants have a far better chance at being hired.(though the size of the effect has begun to diminish over the last decade). We confuse being attractive with being able. There is also a subtler effect to attractiveness --- attractive males are viewed as possessing to a greater degree the attributes clustered with masculinity and attractive females are viewed as possessing feminine traits to a greater degree. The negative effects of this phenomenon arise from the idea that masculine traits (decisiveness, physical strength etc.) are more closely but unconsciously associated with leadership than feminine traits (nurturing, participative style, validating feelings etc.). However, disentangling leadership ability from the masculine style may be part of the diminishing effect of attractiveness when assessing value in applicants noted above.

Still, you might believe that the MSNBC and Time employees were really consciously biased. So, we next consider examples that are harder to discount as merely further manifestations of bigotry. It is simply very unlikely that black car salespersons

¹ Blair, I.V., Judd, C.M., & Chapleau, K.M. (2004) “The Influence of Afrocentric Facial Features in Criminal Sentencing,” 15(10) *Psychological Science*, 674-679. The State of Florida through the use of sentencing guidelines grounded in considerations of the seriousness and repeat nature of a criminal conviction has equalized the sentencing process across race. What Blair *et al.* did was to evaluate the pictures in State files of each person convicted in a given period and showed that whites as well as blacks who have Afrocentric facial features received longer sentences. The shooter bias study referred to is: Carroll, J., Park, B., Judd, C.M. & Wittenbrink, B (2002) “The Police Officer’s Dilemma: Using Ethnicity to Disambiguate Potentially Threatening Individuals,” 83 *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1314-1329.

consciously hold to a higher asking price in the case of a black male customer for the same car they were willing to offer to a white male customer at a substantially lower price. Instead, it is more likely that they share a mindset among car salespersons as to who will pay what in order to buy a given car. (This is an example of the self-fulfilling prophecy problem which we discuss below.) Still not convinced? Consider the white medical students who, it is a safe assumption, are trying to arrive at an accurate diagnosis of the patient but who, as we see, arrive at a race-based diagnosis in a number of instances.

We begin to get a feel for the problems created in an organization by unconscious bias when we realize that all employers seek to hire the best qualified applicant and elicit from that applicant his or her best performance once employed. If all management had to do was uncover which of its employees was guilty of overt, illegal discriminatory behaviors, the problem would be manageable, especially so as societal norms ever more strongly condemn arbitrary bias toward various groups of persons. However, as we are beginning to see, the problem resides in the potential for any one of us to fail to recognize the value of the individual applicant or fail to respect the individual dignity of a coworker for reasons we are only dimly aware of. Hiring for comfort, uncorrected harassment, higher turnover, retirement while still employed, all hurt the organization's ability to prosper and, thus, ultimately threaten our job security.

Thus far, we have been attempting to address prejudice effectively by focusing inward on unconscious processes. Next, we look at other processing errors to which human beings are prone in order to deepen our understanding of the problem. The self-fulfilling prophecy is a phenomenon documented in literally thousands of studies. Essentially, the expectations we have about the other person (e.g., persons who come late to training sessions) lead us to notice behavior better which conforms to our expectations. In an interview setting, for example, it will lead us to ask questions tending to confirm what we expect, rather than probing the applicant by seeking disconfirming information. We gather information selectively in such a way as to support the prophecy or we analyze information selectively so as to support our pre-existing beliefs about the group the person represents in our minds. [Remember the students at U. Cal Berkeley who downplayed the value of the social dimensions of the learning environment in order to diminish one of the perceived benefits of affirmative action but who magnified the same factor in order to reduce the apparent superiority of Asian student academic achievement.]

The skewed information collection process is followed by selective retention of information as well as the greater availability to consciousness of stereotype confirming information when we make judgments about the person such as during a performance evaluation. As an example, there are studies showing that the recall of information about stereotyped persons is subject to error. In one, 6-to-8-year old white participants were shown a picture and read a story about two students --- a helpful, energetic black student and a lazy indifferent white student. Within days, a majority of the white participants had

flipped the race identity of the students.² In another, mock interviews led to non-rationally biased hiring by white study participants but, one week after hiring, the answers given by black applicants were misremembered as less intelligent than that of white applicants (though each had offered identical answers).

In addition, studies demonstrate that our own behavior (which follows from our bias) affects the behavior of the other person, leading them, for example, to have a poorer interview or to engage in less creative behavior on the job (because they feel threatened by the behavior they observe from you).

A second frequently documented phenomenon is called the fundamental attribution error. (FAE) What follows is an example from an EEOC case file involving an allegation of age discrimination in a layoff situation.

The agency's investigation showed that the company was losing business and had to cut its sales force back. The district manager considered what to do and decided to lay two persons off. He then considered each of the six senior salespersons to determine which to let go. He drafted a long memo at the time explaining his decision to his boss. Here are excerpts from the memo:

Regarding the staff reduction,.... the entire staff was evaluated at length and it was determined that Don _____ and Harry _____ would be laid off. The criteria that determined which supervisors was evaluated upon is listed below. All qualifications were accessed at the time of this evaluation.

[We see that the supervisor thinks he knows all his reasons for his ultimate decision. It turns out that a given account --Account X-- was posting a large loss and the company decided to stop doing business with Account X. Two salespersons had been jointly responsible for the account. Cliff (39) and Harry (59).]

Cliff - Cliff currently is a Key Account Manager calling exclusively on [Account X]. Although it is difficult to evaluate personnel based on [Account X's] sales results, Cliff has performed this function in a very conscientious and consistent manner. The function of the [Account X] store key account managers is a very frustrating and non rewarding position. I concluded that Cliff possesses the talent and sales related skills to perform the position of Key Account Manager for the entire core group of store door accounts other than [Account X]. Cliff will be provided with the training necessary to complete the store door weekly sales planner as [Account X] did not use this system.

[Notice what has happened here. Sales results have been poor but the account itself is blamed for this result and Cliff is praised for trying hard and for being consistent. If only we could all win praise for effort apart from results! Cliff is a consistent loser but by golly he is consistent! Moreover, the decision maker sees something in Cliff, that he possesses skills he has not yet demonstrated. Now we turn to Harry.]

Harry - Harry currently is a Key Account Manager assigned to [Account X]. Due to staff

² Bigler, R. & Liben, L. (1993) "A Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Racial Stereotyping and Reconstructive Memory in Euro-American Children," 64 *Child Development* 1507-18. This study addresses the young age by which cultural stereotypes have been absorbed by children and lists other studies on this point. The second study referred to is: Frazer, R.A. & Wiersma, U.J. (2001) "Prejudice Versus Discrimination in the Employment Interview: We May Hire Equally, But Our Memories Harbor Prejudice," 54 *Human Relations* 173-191.

reductions pertaining to [Account X] store supervisors, it has been concluded that we will have to lay Harry off. While evaluating Harry's performance, nothing stands out as far as any serious negative performance but, I believe that Harry could have been somewhat more aggressive with the [X] accounts. Some of the set backs at the [X] accounts might have been prevented if Harry had not accepted these set backs at face value and improved communications with management somewhat. Harry would be recommended for recall if any increase in staffing is needed in the future."

[It turns out it is possible after all to blame Harry for the sales results at Account X. Looking into the proverbial hindsight crystal ball, the manager did not see potential in Harry but did see failed opportunity on his part to improve communications with Account X.]

You might ask on what basis the manager saw potential in the younger person and failure in the older person. The manager had given them both identical performance ratings before the layoff was needed. Five months before the layoff, the manager stated that "Harry enjoys a good relationship with his customers and is conscientious about increasing sales." In the year prior to the layoffs, a third person (the manager's predecessor) evaluated Cliff and Harry. Harry's appraisal called attention to his good attitude and extra effort. Cliff's appraisal contains the following, however. "Cliff's attitude has shown signs of improvement. Also, his temper tantrums have been fewer and fewer. I feel that he is somewhat lazy by nature but will work whenever we need extra help."

This example highlights a typical aspect of the FAE, failure is attributed to factors in the situation where the emotional distance between us and the other is relatively small but attributed to the person involved in the failure where the emotional distance is greater. Think of how you view the degree of responsibility where a person who is a stranger is accused of shoplifting versus your niece being accused of shoplifting.

The FAE lies at the heart of the in-group versus out-group perspective referred to in the slides about Henri Tajfel's classic study demonstrating how easily we categorize a bunch of individual people into a group. Here is what the choices offered to the students in that study looked like:

A	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
B	1	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	21	23	25

Assuming you had preferred the painting by Klee and were, thus, a "Klee person" (Group A), then notice that you might have chosen to maximize your return by choosing the 19-25 distribution. This is what maximum utility theory in economics calls for because it gives you the most money you can get for your group and yourself. Even if you opted to take less money, you might have landed on the 13-13 distribution because it is equitable. Nope! The 12-11 distribution represents the most you can get for your group while still creating a negative effect for the members of the out-group. That was the dominant choice of the students in the study.

It is hard to appreciate how easily groups are formed in our minds and how extreme the resulting differences in treatment of the two groups by us can turn out to be. In his book *Us and Them: Understanding Your Tribal Mind*, David Berreby offers many chilling

examples of the effects of social categorization of the kind we are considering here. For example, over a period of many years in the Byzantine Empire fans of the blue team and fans of the green team in the chariot races became more and more hostile toward one another. The two groups developed political, cultural and organized crime institutions such that a single outbreak of violence between them in 532 C.E. killed over thirty thousand people.³

Other aspects of unconscious bias include the phenomenon of priming. People have been shown to engage in behavior that responds to unconscious primes like the one in the slide dealing with unscrambling sentences. Since what gets primed is a cluster of associations (as noted above), just the sight of a person using a wheel chair, speaking with a “foreign” accent, displaying the slower gait of an older person or the wheeling gait of an overweight person can stimulate a complex variety of responses. Because what is happening is not consciously available to us for analysis, we really don’t question why we feel more comfortable with one person or another; why critical feedback is easier to deliver to one person or another; why we ask one applicant whether he will accept a lower salary but move to reject another on the grounds that he expects a salary beyond what we offer for that job. There is normally nothing in the situation to force us to question our assumptions.

Another driver in this situation is the urge to conform. Solomon Asch’s famous 1958 study brought out how powerful the effects of conformity can be. In that study, an experimenter showed a group of 8 persons a picture of a straight, vertical line. Next to the line was a group of three vertical lines, one of which was clearly the same size as the first line. One by one the participants were asked to say aloud which line in the second group was identical to the first line. Since 7 of the 8 were confederates of the experimenter, each announced that a line other than the correct one was a match. The subject of the experiment was usually #6 or #7 to speak out. In the face of the obviously incorrect but voiced alternative, 37 of the 50 subjects agreed with the incorrect answer at least once. 14 agreed with the incorrect answer in 6 or more of 12 trials. Asch repeated the effect in groups as small as 3-4 persons. Interestingly, if just one confederate gave the correct answer prior to the subject announcing his answer, the tendency to conform was reduced by roughly 75%. We will return to the benefits of cognitive diversity below.

So, if the culture or subculture we are part of agrees that certain characteristics are true of a given group of persons, then it requires effort to move to a position different from the group even if we strive to make judgments in a more bias-free manner.

In general, it is useful for you to think of stereotypes as information-discarding tools. Many of the experiences we have in a typical day have some elements of ambiguity in them. It is simply much more efficient to act as though the experience was clearer. We accomplish this by noticing only certain features of the experience, so we can decide how we will react to what makes it through to our internal life from the overwhelming buzz and rattle of sound and motion, smells, and actions going on around us. We do this so

³ Page 25. Little, Brown & Co., New York, Boston (2005) This is a wonderful and accessible book with which to begin your study of the difficult problems associated with tribal thinking.

routinely that the process has been named “gist-thinking” or “intuitive thinking” (as opposed to the slower process in which we analyze and weigh factors in a situation). In fact, the development of our mind during adolescence into adulthood is pretty much all about the development of reasonably accurate “gist-thinking.” Teenagers have received a bad rap for being impulsive. However, they are not truly more impulsive than adults. It turns out they are too analytical. Teenagers in the United States regularly take longer to reply to questions like: Is it a good or bad thing to drink a cup of Drano? Is it good or bad that your hair is on fire? Adults get to the gist of this question instantaneously while teenagers ponder (and then give little weight to the downside of an action which is why they get the impulsive rap).

So, it is clearly beneficial for persons to hone their gist-thinking skills. However, stereotypes feed into this otherwise beneficial process and cause us to strip away information that would, if we were aware of it, have the effect of individuating the other person. Instead, we get right to the heart of the matter which turns out to be the gross characteristics of the group we assign the individual to. Stripped away to a group-conforming abstraction, it is relatively easy to judge the other person from a “what” standpoint without ever really getting to “who” he or she is as an individual.

What We Can Do About the Problem

By now, you might well be saying to yourself: If these tendencies are unconscious, they must be beyond our control. Not only is there nothing we can do but we should not be held accountable for discriminatory behavior stimulated by cultural pressures and biases. Hold on! Stereotypes are impressively changeable and their activation is context dependent. Change the context; change the effect.

Consider the massive and swift change in public perceptions of the Chinese and Japanese after the onset of World War II. Both groups basically switched stereotypes within weeks after Pearl Harbor. Our newfound Chinese allies were no longer inscrutable, lazy and tending toward deception while the frugal, self-sacrificing, hard-working and successful Japanese deeded over these qualities to the Chinese (in the popular mind) at least until the Communists took over once again forcing us to realign our stereotypes.

By far, the most promising approach to undoing the effects of unconscious bias lies in modifying those context dependent factors which can be efficiently altered.

The essence of the approach recommended by EEO Works is this: Unconscious techniques are needed to address unconscious problems effectively. By focusing on what we can do to learn more about the other person (adding rather than discarding information), we will subconsciously manipulate ourselves. It simply doesn’t work very well to tell someone: “Whatever you do, *don’t* make illegally discriminatory decisions when hiring for our company/school/agency!” [Even if balanced hiring can be forced, the study cited above shows the problem will tend to be displaced to post-employment situations like work assignments and performance evaluation so that all balanced hiring achieves is a revolving door.] This is because many times your representatives are not

consciously utilizing an illegal characteristic like race or sex to evaluate an applicant. An interesting example of the value of utilizing unconscious techniques over conscious techniques appears in a study of implicit bias in which the test dealt with insects and flowers. Insects are normally implicitly associated with the negative while flowers have a much more positive set of associations. The subjects of the study were divided into three groups: Some were instructed to try (when taking the Implicit Association Test involving insects and flowers) to act as though flowers were negative and insects positive; some were told to deceive the test by manipulating their responses in a fashion contrary to the usual stereotypes about flowers and insects and the remaining third were required to read a brief narrative in which a thermonuclear cataclysm had devastated the earth. In the aftermath, certain insects had survived, mutated rapidly and become the only reliable food source for humans to use when raising farm animals while flowers sequestered large amounts of radiation and were a source of contamination if eaten. Those enabled unconsciously by the story to recategorize insects and flowers experienced a significant switch in their implicit attitudes toward insects and flowers while the other two groups were unable to budge their implicit associations.⁴

By way of making a transition to the techniques described below, consider another study in which the authors note that there is little evolutionary reason to suppose that race was encoded by humans as a significant survival tool. Ancestral hunter-gatherers traveled by foot and rarely relocated more than 40 miles away. While encountering differences in sex and age (thus making these categories more fundamental), they could easily have spent a lifetime living with people of the same physical skin-color and other features we associate with race today. On the other hand, living in small groups, it would have been necessary to develop the ability to create and detect coalitions and alliances among people in the small group. To test this theory, the authors hypothesized as follows: “If race is merely a proxy for coalition --- a cue used to infer a person’s alliances --- then it is predicted that.... [t]he strength of race encoding will be diminished by creating a social context in which (1) race is no longer a valid cue to coalition, and (ii) there are alternative cues that do reliably indicate coalitional affiliation.”⁵ Subjects of the study were shown a series of 8 photographs, each of which was paired with a statement made by the person in the picture. Each person belonged to either of two basketball teams which were said to have engaged in a fight during the previous season. The pictures were flashed to the subjects in a sequence to simulate a heated conversation such that each person “uttered” three statements. After a minute had elapsed, the subjects were shown the same 24 statements they had just seen and were asked to associate each with one of the eight persons. In studies 1, 3 & 5 all subjects were shown wearing jerseys of the same color. In experiments 2, 4 & 6 two groups of subjects were shown wearing different colored shirts. In all experiments, half of each group was white and half black. The results? Where the cue as to what “team” a person was a member of was contained in the content of their statements, subjects consistently misremembered who said what and tended to categorize by race but, when the jersey color was available as a cue to what team a person

⁴ Foroni, F. & Mayr, U. (2005) “The Power of a Story: New Automatic Associations From a Single Reading of a Short Scenario,” *12 Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* 139-44.

⁵ Kurzban, R., Tooby, J. & Cosmides, L. (December 18, 2001) “Can Race Be Erased? Coalitional Computation and Social Categorization,” *98 Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 15387-92.

was a member of, categorization was strongly along jersey color and recollection of who said what followed jersey color not race. “If the same processes govern categorization outside the laboratory, then the prospects for reducing or even eliminating the widespread tendency to categorize persons by race may be very good indeed.”(P. 15391)

In other words, give a person something else to use as the basis for decision making and, given the relative inability of a human being to use two or more streams of information at the same time, he or she will tend to use the “something else” instead of the prepackaged decisions made available by cultural bias.

With this in mind, we start by distinguishing things you can do in your personal life as a form of preparation prior to interaction from things you can do when actually interacting with others in real on-the-job situations.

Techniques Affecting One’s Personal Life

Increasing Effective Contacts --- Years ago, it was thought that merely by increasing the number of contacts between members of different groups (as, for example, in school desegregation) the level of bias between them would drop. After experience showed this was an unlikely outcome, it became clear that the type or quality of the contacts mattered. Placing prisons in rural areas and staffing them with white guards certainly created a lot more interracial contact for the guards raised in predominantly white areas but, if anything, the pre-existing level of racial bias among the guards was fortified by frequent contact with persons of another race who were in the low status position of prisoner. So, the phrase “effective contacts” refers to nonsuperficial relationships with persons of a different group where the two of you are of roughly equal status (or the person from the marginalized group is in a higher status). Getting to know (depend on? trust? cooperate with?) such persons increases our ability to distinguish members of the group as individuals and resists the tendency to treat the group as an undifferentiated clump of similar people.

Prior to the Presidential election in 2004 (an election in which political experts expected a close outcome), pollsters frequently encountered the response from ordinary citizens that the election was likely to be a landslide. How could this be so? Think for a moment of your circle of acquaintances. If you are like most of us, you tend to surround yourself with persons who agree with you in many areas of life. So, what happened in 2004 is that persons asked their friends who they were voting for and, sure enough, most were voting for the same person. Hence, the perception of a coming landslide. We certainly don’t want to set out with a checklist and add one person from various groups to our circle of acquaintances as though we were following a recipe. But it is wise to be aware of the benefit of such contacts and pursue them when the opportunity arises.

Don’t Rush Yourself --- There is an eerie quality to this piece of advice. At first glance, it seems unrelated to the mechanics of bias. But reflect, for a moment, on what we said earlier about “gist thinking.” It requires patience and time to add to your impressions of another person by gathering more information before rushing to judgment. The tendency

to cut to the chase is made more attractive by the inertia created when certain stereotypes were internalized many years ago. It takes effort to push these easy stories aside to hear the voice of the individual who is different from us in some salient way. The basic advice is this: Be suspicious of your motives when you feel that you just have to proceed quickly to a decision. Instead, cultivate the habit of saying to yourself: I have the time to make the best decision I can and I will use it. In fact, the time it takes to decide will often not be that much greater but the level of care and attention to the individual facts will likely be significantly greater. In the context of interviewing an applicant for a job, it is even more important. Research consistently demonstrates that many interviewers make up their mind early in an interview and slant the remainder of the interview in accord with this early judgment. So, there is a general tendency to rush to judgment which stereotypes will reinforce unless you act to resist their influence.

Appreciating Cognitive and Cultural Diversity --- Many organizations today strive to achieve diversity in their workforces for a variety of reasons. A case can be made for adding to the cultural savvy of any organization as the world shrinks to a more and more interconnected marketplace but first it is worth distinguishing cognitive from cultural diversity. A long line of research that looks at how small groups function calls attention to the disturbing phenomenon of group polarization. Most of us work in and among small groups so the problem touches us all. Basically, group polarization means that the tendency toward a certain point-of-view applicable to each member of a group tends to polarize in the same direction while discussion about some problem continues until the final position of the group is more extreme than that of most members as individuals.⁶

As part of this research, mock trials have been created and presented to mock juries on videotape. The research tracks the deliberations of the juries to see how they interact and whether they get the verdict right. The general finding is that juries with one or more members who have opinions that diverge from the majority are more likely to arrive at the correct verdict. The members with one point-of-view have to hear, think about and discuss the contrary view with the result that both sides form a richer understanding of the evidence. It is probably more onerous to be a member of such a jury but, if our goal is to get it right, the increased effort is well worth it. So, the basic value of diversity is that it presses us to add information and increase our understanding of situations and people we would otherwise be tempted to judge with little real reflection.

When we ponder what was said above about the tendency to conform, you can see that cognitive diversity is an effective source for generating better solutions to workplace problems. Hiring persons from a variety of backgrounds (cultural diversity) is often a useful way to begin to create a culture where the uniqueness of each person is valued. In such a milieu, each of us is encouraged to offer our particular piece of the overall answer.

⁶ This phenomenon has even been seen to occur in Federal Courts of Appeal where the three judges in the panel are from the same political party as opposed to a panel where one of the three judges is from a different party. Sunstein, C.R. (2000), "Deliberative Trouble? Why Groups Go to Extremes" *Yale Law Journal* 71-119. Cross, F.B. & Tiller, E.H. (1998) "Judicial Partisanship and Obedience to Legal Doctrine: Whistleblowing on the Federal Courts of Appeals," 107 *Yale Law Journal* 2155-2176. Revesz, R.L. (1997) "Environmental Regulation, Ideology, and the D.C. Circuit," 83 *Virginia Law Review* 1717-1771.

The organization starts by focusing on cultural diversity and ends up stimulating the creativity that arises from cognitive diversity.

Learning to Utilize the Power of the Situation --- Naively, we speak of a person as having a certain character or disposition. As far as it goes, this is true. So-and-so is basically honest; so-and-so is easily irritated and so forth. This approach to understanding what makes people tick, however, underestimates the power of the situation to produce very different behavior from the otherwise honest or irritable. Recall the slide where seminarians were given the task of walking across Princeton's campus to give a talk either on 'The Good Samaritan' or career opportunities for seminarians. Those who made the journey were pretested and determined to have varying opinions on why people were moral, on their preferred religious style and on other matters. In addition, each was told either (1)that they had to hurry to get to the site of the lecture on time; (2)had just enough time or (3)had plenty of time. All happened to walk by a figure slumped on the ground, coughing and moaning in the cold weather. Who stopped to help? There was no correlation between the topic they were about to address (even though you might think 'The Good Samaritan' would prime helping behavior) or their preexisting religious style or opinions. The only factor related to helping was the amount of time the person thought he had to make it across campus on time.

It may seem a little embarrassing to learn how easily we are pushed into different behaviors by factors in the situation which we are hardly aware of. Yet this gives us a real opportunity to address unconscious bias. For example, we know that a job applicant will react on a less than conscious level to unconscious demeanor on our part indicating we are not really interested in what they have to say. So, **if one of you is aware of this type of phenomenon and you are trying to hire the best qualified applicant, regardless of his or her social status**, the person who is aware can **create the situation** and consciously set about creating a warm and inclusive interview which will draw out the applicant and elicit the best the applicant has to offer.

Learning to Utilize "In-Group" Bias Consciously --- In a similar vein, it is shocking to realize how easy it is for us to create groups out of clusters of people and to begin to believe the members of that group are somehow inferior to us (in our group). Nevertheless, this mental glitch gives us an opening we can manipulate for the purpose of seeing the other as an individual. If we consciously emphasize to the other person (whether she is an applicant, subordinate whose performance we are reviewing, complainant, customer, team member and so forth) that you and she are members of the same group, you will draw the other into the group and communication between you will improve. Inclusion in the group enhances trust as well. At first, this might sound a little stilted to your ears but, in truth, whatever situation you are in with the other person, you are in it together and there is some way to highlight that. Make the "Us" as big as possible so both of you can be inside the same group. You will be surprised at how much more you will learn about the other person and, unconsciously, you will change your stance such that you will listen better, share more and judge more patiently.

The theory behind this advice comes from a well known experiment in which two groups of young (10-11 years-old) boys from the Oklahoma City area (all white) were placed together in different areas of a large park. Initially unaware of each other, once introduced to each other, each group quickly cohered into a tight-knit unit with its own ranks, slang, group name and so forth. As part of competitive events, each formed stereotypes about the other, took to playing pranks on the other, refused to eat together and otherwise engaged in group conflict. During the second week, the boys were made to do more pleasant things together (such as watch a movie at night). These social contacts did little or nothing to reduce the tension between the groups. However, in the third week, the researchers created ‘crises’ (loss of drinkable water, dealing with the results of an accident to the camp truck, paying for a sought-after movie) which could only be solved by the groups working together. Pursuing goals bigger than any one group swiftly broke down group conflict and promoted various kinds of generosity toward the “others.” Basically, the key insight was not how easily people group together and look down one upon the other but how “superordinate goals” had the effect of creating a more inclusive grouping across what had been mutually suspicious and hostile behaviors. We can’t do much about the tendency to create “in-groups” but we can create surprisingly ad hoc groups that reduce the negative effects of group thinking.⁷

State the Prophecy --- Human beings respond to what you say the situation is all about and likely to accomplish. A disturbing example of this occurred when the mission management team (MMT) set up to shepherd the flight of the space shuttle *Columbia* met to assess the state of the mission as well as the damage to the shuttle upon takeoff (damage which resulted later in the destruction of the shuttle as it re-entered the earth’s atmosphere). Upon hearing from the engineers working off-site to assess the damage, the MMT leader remarked, “And I really don’t think there is much we can do so it’s really not a factor during the flight because there is not much we can do about it.”⁸ Given this prophecy, the engineers were never able to generate the kind of creativity seen in the response to the problems aboard Apollo 13. In any situation where you can set the goals of the interaction, state an inclusive and positive prophecy. It will affect you and the other person on an unconscious level.

Add to the Perceived Fairness of “The Situation” --- As you consciously manipulate the situation for the purpose of overcoming the negative effects of unconscious bias, be aware of all the positive effects that will flow from enhancing the perception of fairness in the mind of the other person. In the slide on this topic, the word “heuristic” might put you off. Basically, a heuristic is a sort of strategy or tool used (in this case) to orient to the rapid flow of information coming at you by causing you to make sense of things as you select out what to pay attention to. People have a very basic tendency to look for the

⁷ Sherif, M (1958) “Superordinate Goals in the Reduction of Intergroup Conflict,” 63 *American Journal of Sociology* 349-356. Sherif, M, Harvey, O.J., White, B.J., Hood, W.R. & Sherif, C.W. (1954/1961) *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment*. [Available free from Classics in the History of Psychology --- <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca> .]

⁸ Andrew Surowiecki considers this example in some detail (pp. 173-182) in *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economics, Societies, and Nations* (Doubleday, New York)(2004). NASA’s report on the disaster (“Columbia Accident Investigation Board Report”) is available on-line at www.nasa.gov .

gist of a situation in terms of how fair it appears to be. An important example of this arises from a consideration of something from game theory called The Ultimatum Game. In that game, one person has the opportunity to obtain some money in the following way: He must offer a share of the total amount of money available to a second person who considers the amount being offered (while knowing how much is available to be shared). If the second person accepts the offer, the two share the money as agreed upon but, if the second person rejects the offer, both get nothing. If human beings were all utility maximizers, it would be safe for the first person to offer the second person very little money because the second person would realize that, whatever was offered, it beats nothing (the only other option). The game has been played thousands of times in many different cultures throughout the world with most cultures showing the following result: People routinely reject substantial portions of the total amount and get nothing as a result. The person making the offer has a sense of this such that a 50-50 share is by far the most frequent offer. Fewer than 4% of offers are for less than 20% of the total. Why is this? Because the person making the offer knows that the second person expects a fair share of the total. Basically, while there is variety in what each of us views as a fair share, we all expect equity and will deny ourselves a thing of value if the expectation of fair dealing is not met. People who are insensitive to this dynamic routinely get themselves into conflicts. They do not get the idea that other human beings are not logic engines but, instead, are processing what is happening through how it feels as well.

People look for indications of fairness in many indirect aspects of a situation. Especially where the situation has ambiguous features, they resort to a fairness assessment to decide how to proceed. You can enhance the other person's response to you (as well as affect your own behavior) by consciously setting out to create a "fair" situation. The slides mention a few examples. In addition, consider things like the time allotted for a meeting, the timing/place/comfort of the site, where you place your chair, the tone of voice you use, the effort you go to in order to document what you are saying as well as to explain the reasons for your conclusion, the things you say to signal a willingness to receive feedback, or a willingness to change your mind. All this and more will influence the willingness of the other to open up to you and hear what you have to say.

Show Interest; Be Immediate in Your Demeanor --- You can't fake interest in the other person. Instead, you may find yourself uninterested in the other for reasons you can't put your finger on. If you alter this unconscious stance and show by your body language (more than your words) that you are truly interested in what the other person has to offer, be prepared to discover more than you might have expected about the other. You may just find out who this other person is as an individual. If you do, you will succeed in getting at whatever value they have better than you would otherwise. Look for indications in their body language that you have somehow lost the person's interest and seek ways to alter your demeanor accordingly. The interaction is like a minuet; the two persons influence each other reciprocally.

Be Sensitive to Different Communication Styles (High-Context vs. Low Context) --- When you are interacting with a person (especially in the context of employment interviews or performance-related meetings), there is a broad division between persons who believe it

is possible (indeed appropriate) to rely solely on the content of what is being said in order to communicate successfully and persons who believe it is not possible to communicate successfully until the context of the communication is clear. Most of the world utilizes a high-context communication style so we in the United States can readily get into a situation where we think (because of our word choice) that communication is going well when it is not because the other person doesn't feel (s)he is likely to be understood by you and (s)he certainly doesn't yet know enough about you to begin to listen well to what you are saying. Edward T. Hall first brought out this problem by recounting stories in which he went to meet persons in other countries and sometimes waited days to be seen while the person he wanted to meet was busy trying to figure out "who" he was by learning about his past deeds and other information. In a high-context culture, you interact with people who "know" you partly because they know your parents, their occupations, religion, clan background and so forth. When people from two cultural contexts meet, it is routine to spend a certain amount of time slipping information into the opening conversation in order to orient themselves to who they are dealing with.

Think of a disciplinary meeting. Suppose there has been a theft in a work unit. You are a low context person responsible for investigating the matter. You proceed by interviewing all the persons in the unit to get certain basic information. You are on a tight time schedule. You call a particular African American male into the room where the interviews are being conducted and explain that, at this stage, you are speaking one-by-one to all the members of the unit. You get right to the purpose of the interview by asking an opening series of questions which the person interrupts and begins telling you how he has had to educate his sons about the safest way to respond to a late-night traffic stop by a policeman; how this country has a long history of rushing to judgment about black males whenever passions are running high and so forth. You don't understand why this is happening and keep trying to emphasize efficiency by trying to refocus the interview on just the particular event being investigated. The more you try to cut this kind of high-context information off, the more you amplify the person's concerns about the fairness of the process you represent.

This is what you need to understand in order to enable communication to flow: The African American male is signaling that he wants you to understand his context. From his perspective, he may well feel threatened by an investigation which you view as a neutral fact-finding process. He is well aware of police profiling (as well as ample historical evidence of phenomena like lynchings and beatings) of persons from his race. You are not likely to be able to "talk him out of" his concerns by saying that you are opposed to any kind of kangaroo court or that you will do a conscientious investigation. But you will make headway if you give the person time to explain his context to you, react with interest and give some indication that you are sympathizing. Once the other person has been able to establish the context within which he feels he is being interviewed, the interview can proceed.

Be Sensitive to Different Information Processing Styles --- There are a variety of ways to describe this phenomenon but I will use the approach made famous by Ned Herrmann to

give you a concrete illustration.⁹ Imagine a golf foursome. One of the players favors a logical/analytical style. He takes lessons, gets measured for and buys properly fitted clubs, looks at golfing instructional videos and practices his swing as often as he can. If he hits a bad shot, get ready to hear about how he probably failed to tuck his forearm in to his body or other technical tales involving blood-curdling topics like moments of inertia, club-face angle and the like. The second player favors the organizational/planning style of information processing. He is glad to call you two or three times before your Saturday tee-time to remind you to be there. He knows the rules by heart and keeps more than one pencil ready in order to record the correct score. The third player favors a different way of filtering what's happening which Herrmann calls the intuitive/interpersonal style. He is keenly aware that player #1 feels bad because, apparently, he has hit a bad shot. It is hard for #3 to feel good unless #1 feels good so #3 will try to mollify #1. Finally, player #4 leans on the visionary/synthetic style. He loves to walk on the new-mown grass, feel the warmth of the sun and enjoy the experience itself. If he comes upon his golf ball in a fairway divot, it is no problem for him to simply nudge the ball to a better spot because the purpose of this outing is to enjoy the game of golf. What you need to understand is, **they are all playing the game of golf** but the experience couldn't be any different for each. Herrmann's basic insight is that the most effective persons are those who work on the information processing style(s) they dislike in order to develop a more balanced approach to what's happening around them.

When we interact with others, we can benefit from Herrmann's insight by noticing the style the other person is leaning on and respond to it. Once the other sees you are attuned to her, then the sharing of information improves. You build on the bridge already in place by moving on to other types of information in the situation. Of course, you are unconsciously manipulating yourself (by taking the trouble to focus on the individual you are with) at the same time as you set out to manipulate the other --- to your mutual benefit.

Validate the Other's Emotional Scale --- This point sums up what was said above about the emotional aspects of human communication. If you are to learn the most you can from the other person, you need to move away from information-discarding techniques like the invocation of stereotypes about the group(s) the other seems to be a member of and utilize information-adding techniques to help the person become an individual in the situation which you create. The effective interviewer, negotiator, investigator, team-member realizes that it is necessary to address the other person's feelings in order to move on to the idea portion of the interaction. The essential message is that you understand the other person's fear, or unmet need to be included in the group, or anger or whatever. You "get" the other person. This doesn't mean you agree with the other person or feel the same way. It means that it is OK for the other person to be who (s)he is. As long as the other person feels that (s)he must be a different person when interacting with you, the quality of the interaction will suffer.

Get the Other to Visualize the Situation --- Especially where you are negotiating or in a situation involving some level of conflict, it is wise to understand the difference between

⁹ *The Whole Brain Business Book* (McGraw-Hill, New York)(1996).

a rational approach and a reasonable one. The rational approach is sensitive to the principle you believe is involved in the situation. Consistency with the principle becomes the important value in the situation. While in the rational mode, we are capable of destroying villages to save them or burning people at the stake to save their soul. The reasonable person recoils from such an approach. Inconsistency and adjustment of the principle to one or more factors in the situation is not frowned upon but, instead, is utilized to resolve conflict. Deviations from principle are not viewed as destroying the principle but as reasonable applications of principle to the situation. The principle may surely capture part of the truth of a situation but only part. The best solution may be one which captures other truths and recognizes that the situation is more complex than, often, we can put into words.

The reasonable person is comfortable with the idea of giving weight to the concrete details of the individual situation. His or her approach tends to avoid the abstract, word-driven analysis of what is at stake in a situation in favor of solutions that are “irrational” but effective. It is often the case that the parties to a mediation agreement, newly negotiated collective bargaining agreement or other settlement can rightly reflect on what was agreed to afterwards and find items they scratch their heads at, thinking “How in the world did I think that was OK?” Nevertheless, in the dynamics of the situation, what was agreed upon was reasonable and we can abide by it accordingly.

The essential idea here is that two individuals can often “see” a solution better than they can explain every logical step to reach it. This is the value of getting the other to visualize where (s)he would like to end up. You will find that both of you can see each other in such a vision. Money or other specific items in a conflict which can be sticking points when viewed as ends-in-themselves can be integrated into a broader goal as means to achieve the goal. As means, they become much more elastic because we realize we are moving toward the shared vision. That is, we sense we are making progress without sticking to a particular value for a particular item in the conflict.

Summary

So, we have explored the concept of unconscious bias and some of its effects on our behavior. If we truly seek our own best interest, we need to do a good job of incorporating the other’s best interest in our understanding of the situation. Rather than rely on the stories our culture has told us about others, we strive to give them the opportunity to tell us their own story. To achieve that goal, EEO Works recommends you use some of the same mental bugs that created the stereotypes you have relied too much upon in the first place but now use them to create better situations, more inclusive groups, more fully realized individuals --- and make better decisions.

COPYRIGHT 2007, EEO Works LLC. All rights reserved. May be reprinted with permission.