

# Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias

## Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias Leader's Guide

### Overview:

The three topics covered in *Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias*—**unconscious bias**, **micro-inequities**, and **micro-affirmations**—though distinct, overlap and influence one another.

The first two topics, **unconscious bias** and **micro-inequities**, are problematic for both individuals and organizations. They negatively impact the workplace in terms of productivity and effectiveness, and they negatively impact our well-being at work in terms of job satisfaction, performance, and physical and emotional health.

But the advantage of the *Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias* training program is the positive, problem-solving nature of the third topic, **micro-affirmations**, which can be used constructively to address the other two.

The *Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias* training program is a stand-alone program, which may also be used to fine-tune other, more general, Harassment and Diversity training programs.

## Prepare for the Session:

- Preview the *Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias* program, and consider how the three topics relate to each other in the workplace.
- Read through the Leader's Guide.
- Make sure you have a Discussion Question handout for each participant.
- Remember to use a matter-of-fact, nonjudgmental tone of voice when discussing sensitive concepts.
- Greet participants in a friendly manner.

## Open the Session:

- Introduce yourself and welcome the participants to the training session.
- Introduce the *Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias* program, explaining that it covers *three key topics*: **unconscious bias** (thoughts), **micro-inequities** (actions), and **micro-affirmations** (solutions).
- Ask participants as they watch the program to note how all three topics intersect.
- Let participants know that there will be a short discussion portion of the program, with an opportunity to comment and/or ask questions.

## Present the Material:

- Show the *Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias* program (running time: 8 minutes).
- Review definitions and learning points for the three key concepts as follows:

### Topic 1: Unconscious bias: What is it?

Definition: An unconscious bias is a prejudice we have or an assumption that we make about another person based on common cultural stereotypes, rather than on a thoughtful judgment.

#### Learning Points:

❖ **Unconscious bias is based on pervasive cultural stereotypes.**

These run the gamut from seemingly positive ideas like Asians being better at math to more obviously unfair ones like women being less competent than men.

❖ **Unconscious bias has practical consequences.**

It gives some people an unfair advantage and puts others at a disadvantage. It's responsible for dissatisfaction and lack of productivity in the workplace.

❖ **Unconscious bias is just that—unconscious.**

We may not even realize that it's influencing us. People often *automatically* feel more confidence in others who look like them—others they can immediately relate to, even when they know there's no logical reason to feel that way.

## **Topic 2: Micro-inequities: A big word for small actions.**

Definition: Micro-inequities are subtle, disrespectful actions that reflect our biases. They can be difficult to recognize for both the person acting them out and the target.

### Learning Points:

- ❖ **Micro-inequities are small or subtle slights.**

Sometimes they're hard to pin down. "Did my coworker just roll her eyes at my suggestion, or am I just being paranoid?"

- ❖ **Micro-inequities take a toll on the target.**

Being the target of micro-inequities can be so stressful that targets may start to feel bad physically as well as emotionally. "Why do I get a headache every time I have to work with that guy who never invites me to the lunchroom brainstorming sessions?"

- ❖ **Micro-inequities can result from unconscious bias.**

Do you treat your colleagues in a fair and equitable manner, or are prejudices you don't even think about affecting your behavior?

## **Topic 3: Micro-affirmations: Small gestures, big impact!**

Definition: Micro-affirmations are small, everyday gestures of respect that make the recipient feel included and valued.

### Learning Points:

- ❖ **Micro-affirmations are the antidote for micro-inequities.**

They're one way to address the toll that unconscious bias takes in the workplace, and to make it a happier and more equitable environment.

❖ **Micro-affirmations are just polite.**

Micro-affirmations are really common courtesy consciously practiced.

❖ **Micro-affirmations are easy to do.**

A micro-affirmation can be as simple as saying hi.

**Review L-I-V-E:**

**L-I-V-E is a helpful acronym to remind us to practice simple micro-affirmations at work.**

**Listening**

- Making eye contact
- Paying attention to what others have to say
- Not interrupting

**Including**

- Inviting to participate
- Inviting to socialize
- Keeping in the loop

**Valuing**

- Giving credit where it's due
- Encouraging strengths
- Acknowledging accomplishments

**Engaging**

- Saying hello and goodbye
- Giving equal time to
- Asking for input

## **Start Discussion:**

- Distribute the Discussion Questions handout.
- Read the 4 questions on the Discussion Questions handout to participants, and explain that they will have 5–8 minutes for discussion based on the questions.
- Ask participants to take the handout Quiz.
- Remind participants of the importance of using respectful language and tone of voice when discussing such sensitive issues.
- Have participants form small groups of 3–5 people for the discussion portion of the training.

## Discussion Questions:

Can you identify an unconscious bias you've observed in yourself or a coworker?

### **Sample answers:**

1. *"I don't talk to a particular coworker because he has an accent."*
2. *"A man I know won't ask female coworkers questions because he assumes they won't have the right answers."*
3. *"I'm African American, and I just know my white coworkers don't want to get to know me, so I avoid them."*

What might be a practical consequence of this bias?

### **Sample answers:**

1. *I might be missing out on getting to know an interesting person, and he might be aware that I avoid him and feel bad about it.*
2. *The female employees may feel unfairly judged or discriminated against. Their male colleague will miss out on their expertise and experience.*
3. *Assuming that people don't want to know you or you not wanting to get to know others on the basis of race or ethnicity is a loss for all parties. People can only learn from and about each other when they communicate and interact.*

Have you noticed a micro-inequity that shows this bias?

### **Sample answers:**

1. *Repeatedly mispronouncing a person's name.*
2. *Not calling on a particular category of people in a meeting when they have something to contribute.*
3. *Excluding certain people from social interaction.*

Can you think of a micro-affirmation that could be used to counteract this bias?

**Sample answers:**

1. *Asking someone how to correctly pronounce his or her name.*
2. *Asking qualified coworkers for their opinion.*
3. *Smiling and saying hi.*

PREVIEW ONLY



## Quiz Answer Key

1. Unconscious bias is a rare phenomenon.  
**TRUE/FALSE**
2. Smiling at someone can be a micro-affirmation.  
**TRUE/FALSE**
3. Micro-inequities are subtle behaviors that are sometimes hard to detect.  
**TRUE/FALSE**
4. It's difficult and time-consuming to perform micro-affirmations.  
**TRUE/FALSE**
5. Scientists have demonstrated physical evidence of unconscious bias.  
**TRUE/FALSE**
6. Regular exposure to micro-inequities cannot make people sick.  
**TRUE/FALSE**
7. One way to counteract unconscious bias is with micro-affirmations.  
**TRUE/FALSE**
8. Unconscious bias positively impacts productivity in the workplace.  
**TRUE/FALSE**
9. Avoiding eye contact may indicate unconscious bias.  
**TRUE/FALSE**
10. Becoming more conscious of our biases helps us overcome them.  
**TRUE/FALSE**

## Conclude the Session:

1. Reassemble the group.
2. Recap the following key concepts from *Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias*:
  - **Unconscious bias, micro-inequities, and micro-affirmations**—though distinct, overlap and influence one another.
  - **Unconscious bias** and **micro-inequities** negatively impact the workplace in terms of productivity and effectiveness, and they negatively impact our well-being at work in terms of job satisfaction, performance, and physical and emotional health.
  - **Micro-affirmations** are a positive and simple way to address **unconscious bias** and **micro-inequities**.
3. Remind participants to **Listen, Include, Value, and Engage** their coworkers according to the **L-I-V-E** acronym.
4. Take questions.
5. Thank everyone for participating, and express your hope that participants will take what they've learned at the session and work to improve their organization.

***Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias***  
**Handout**

**Discussion Questions**

Can you identify an unconscious bias you've observed in yourself or a coworker?

What might be a practical consequence of this bias?

Have you noticed a micro-inequity that shows this bias?

Can you think of a micro-affirmation that could be used to counteract this bias?

## Quiz

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## Consciously Overcoming Unconscious Bias Transcript

Who would you ask for help with a computer problem?

Which of these coworkers could you rely on to meet a deadline?

Who's the best at crunching the numbers?

The most likely to do *just enough* work to get by?

Which one is the better leader?

Who's more trustworthy?

Do you have an answer to these questions? A gut reaction maybe?

You've never met any of these people, so what is your feeling *based* on?

Social scientists call these kinds of judgments “unconscious biases.”

### **What is unconscious bias?**

An unconscious bias is an assumption that we make—a prejudice that we have—that we may not even realize. It's not something we've thought about and consciously decided on. It's not based on reasoning, sound or unsound.

It's just a feeling we've caught, like the common cold. And like a cold, it can be hard to shake.

Studies have shown that we're all susceptible to cultural stereotypes—about race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, politics, age, personality type, class, and physical attributes.

We may not even be aware that some of these prejudices have taken root in us.

On the contrary, we may assume we're too smart to make such knee-jerk judgments about others. But we *do*.

And workplaces that promote diversity, inclusion, and respect are not always successful in meeting those goals.

We so often have well-meaning people and well-meaning organizations, but still something's not right.

So, what's going on?

- **Unconscious bias is based on pervasive cultural stereotypes.**

These run the gamut from seemingly positive ideas—like Asians being better at math—to more obviously unfair ones, like women being less competent than men, and on and on.

- **Unconscious bias has practical consequences.**

It accounts for the fact that most CEOs are men who are above average in height. It gives some people an unfair advantage, and puts others at a disadvantage.

- **Unconscious bias is just that—unconscious.**

We often don't even realize that it's influencing us. But people can *automatically* feel more confidence in others who look like them, even when they *know* it's illogical. And, using brain scans, scientists have demonstrated that we experience automatic biases even when we *think* we don't.

### **Micro-inequities: A big word for small actions**

Micro-inequities are the small ways in which we see bias at work. They're disrespectful actions that are sometimes so subtle they leave the targets wondering if they were *really* slighted or are just being overly sensitive.

They're things like:

- Eye-rolling
- Mispronouncing a person's name repeatedly
- Excluding someone from a social gathering
- Failing to give credit where it's due
- Not introducing someone

When this kind of inappropriate behavior is accidental or thoughtless, it's often the result of that *unconscious bias* we were talking about.

Take someone who feels that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is wrong, but is still uncomfortable with the idea of homosexuality.

He or she may feel that—because they would never *intentionally* discriminate—they aren't biased.

But that person might also avoid eye contact with a gay colleague.

Is that really so bad? Well, here's the thing—

Micro-inequities *are* bad—when you're on the receiving end. They can make the target feel singled out, slighted, and less competent. They can eventually lead to low self-esteem, lack of productivity, and even depression.

- **Micro-inequities are small or subtle slights.**

Sometimes they're hard to pin down. “Did my coworker just roll her eyes at my suggestion, or am I just being paranoid?”

- **Micro-inequities take a toll on the target.**

“Why do I get a stomachache every time I meet with my team leader who never says my name correctly?”

- **Micro-inequities can result from unconscious bias.**

Do you treat your colleagues in a fair and equitable manner, or are prejudices you don't even think about affecting your behavior?

### **Micro-affirmations: Small gestures, big impact!**

So. . . we're all susceptible to unconscious bias, and can easily engage in micro-inequities with our coworkers without even realizing it. Is there a remedy?

Yes! Micro-affirmations are small gestures of respect and inclusion that anyone can make.

And using them is one way to fight *automatic* bias that we may not even be aware of.

Micro-affirmations are a way of becoming more *consciously* fair, more *thoughtful* about our biases, and more *respectful* in our perceptions and dealings with our colleagues.

There are 4 kinds of micro-affirmations that can make our workplace happier and more productive. Listening - Including - Valuing - Engaging. They spell L-I-V-E!

#### **Listening**

- Making eye contact
- Paying attention to what others have to say
- Not interrupting

#### **Including**

- Inviting to participate
- Keeping everyone in the loop
- Being socially inclusive

#### **Valuing**

- Giving credit where it's due
- Encouraging strengths
- Acknowledging accomplishments



## Engaging

- Saying hello and goodbye
- Being friendly
- Asking everyone for their input

- **Micro-affirmations are the antidote for micro-inequities.**

They're one way to address the toll that unconscious bias takes in the workplace, and to make it a happier, more productive, and more equitable environment.

- **Micro-affirmations are just *polite*.**

They are common courtesy, consciously practiced.

- **Micro-affirmations are easy to do.**

It can be as simple as saying hi.

We've seen that we're all susceptible to unconscious bias—thoughtless cultural prejudices and assumptions. So let's make a *conscious* effort to recognize and correct for our preconceptions.

Our biases are often expressed through subtle behaviors called micro-inequities. Small slights that have a big impact on those on the receiving end.

One way to address these challenges is with micro-affirmations—simple, respectful behaviors that affirm the worth of our colleagues and the fairness of our workplace.

It's not that hard to *consciously* move beyond our unconscious deep-seated biases so that we can appreciate the unique qualities of the individuals around us.

And it's not that hard to treat each other with the respect and consideration that we all deserve.

# For more information...

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