RECOGNIZING & CONFRONTING BIAS

ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING TOOLKIT

Introduction

No one likes to think of themselves as biased. That simple fact makes recognizing and confronting bias a difficult topic. But business owners and managers must achieve a comfort level with talking about bias to create a fair and ethical workplace.

Fortunately, there are effective ways to address bias and discrimination without putting everyone on the defensive. This Toolkit discusses ways to determine your own biases and to counteract them. It also shows you how to reduce bias in the workplace through simple measures that focus on shared human experience. Constructively identifying and confronting bias leads to a better corporate culture.

HAVE A BIAS TOWARD ACTION

Indira Gandhi

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Bias Toolkit Flowchart

This Toolkit covers three major steps in identifying and confronting bias to create a more equitable workplace.

1. Find out how to identify & quantify biases.

2. Learn how to talk constructively about biases.

3. Develop systems to combat bias in the workplace.

SHARE OUR SIMILARITIES; CELEBRATE OUR DIFFERENCES

M. Scott Peck

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How to Identify Implicit Bias

What if you hold beliefs about certain groups and don't even know it? You might unconsciously treat people from those groups differently. When you act on beliefs you're unaware of, you are not making the best decisions.

These types of beliefs are called "implicit biases." We pick these up by learning stereotypes about specific groups over our lives. While most of us know about (and work on) our major prejudices, we are unlikely to know all of our hidden biases.

Project Implicit is a Harvard University initiative to help identify implicit biases. Individuals can take bias tests online anonymously The tests are free, and the results are enlightening.

Each test focuses on a different group, such as race, religion, ability, and gender. The tests only require you to sort words or images displayed on-screen using two keys. For instance, a person might be asked to sort old people from young.

After the initial series, the tests add positive and negative words to sort, then combine the two. The test measures how quickly the test taker associates concepts with a group of people.

The tests can lead to great personal growth. Some people are surprised to find they are biased against their own group. Some discover deep-seated feelings for or against unexpected groups. Awareness is the first step to dealing with these prejudices.

Start with taking a few tests yourself, then consider asking your managers and other employees to try a few as well.

Project Implicit is not designed to help you overcome biases. It only assists people in learning about themselves. But knowing about biases is a huge first step toward confronting them.

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Bias Talking Points

Harmful bias thrives on silence. One of the best ways to confront it is by bringing it out in the open. This checklist provides easy ways to bring bias into conversations at work.

- **Bias is human.** We developed the ability to make quick decisions as a matter of survival. It's something our brains do well. But when we apply that ability to discriminate between different people, we need to use our brains to challenge that basic level of thinking.

- **Bias is hard to own.** People want to think that they are fair to others, so it can be painful to acknowledge one's own implicit bias. Remember that bias is a human reaction, and that we have critical thinking skills that can help us check whether our biases are changing our behavior.

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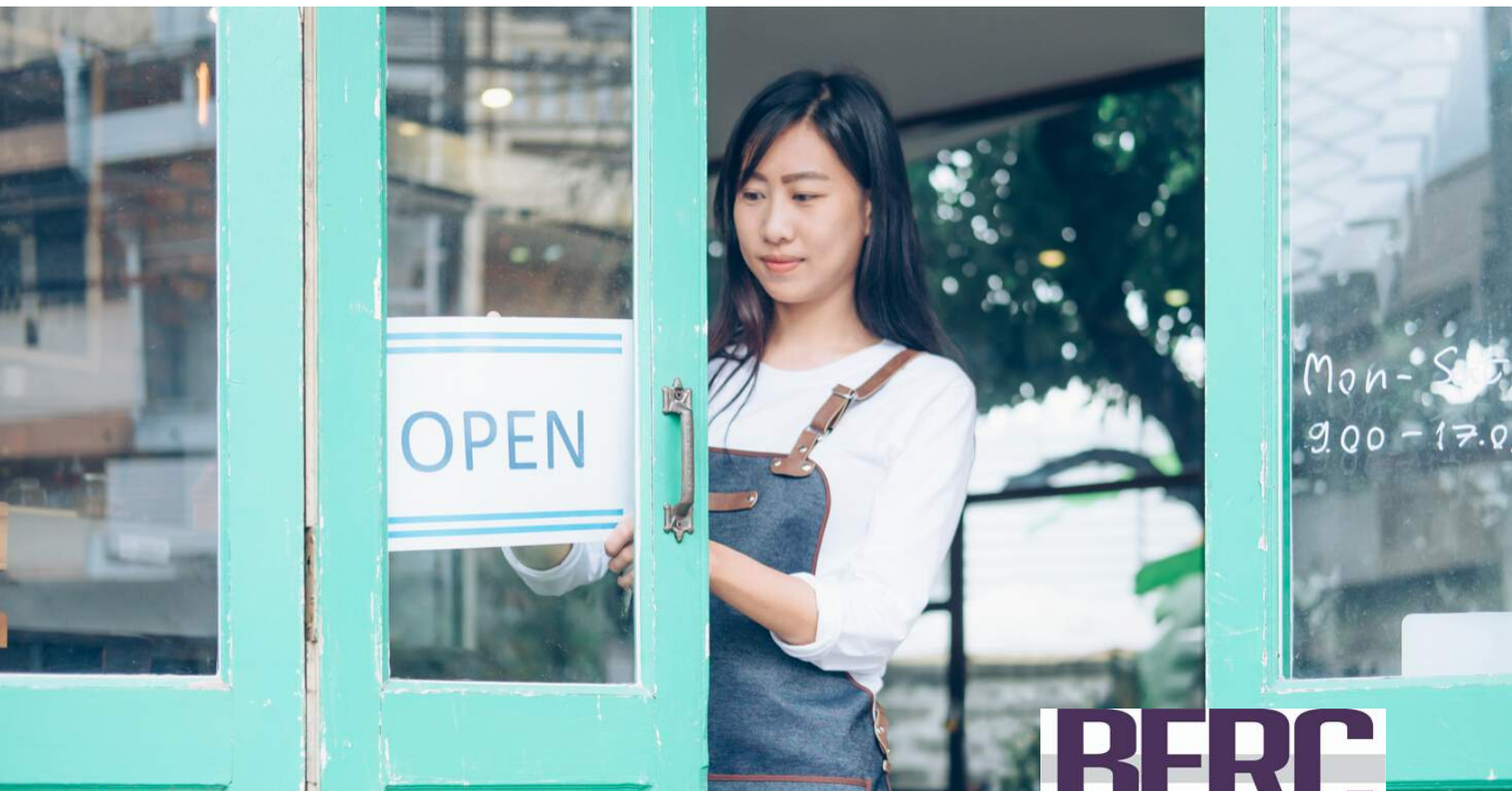
- **Shaming isn't constructive.** As you become more aware of implicit bias, you will want to call out instances of bias in the workplace. But avoid the urge to shame anyone by labeling them (as racist or bigoted, for instance). Labeling causes immediate defensiveness, and when someone feels defensive, they are not open to new information. Remember: bias is human and hard to acknowledge, so be kind.

- **Act as a guide.** If someone indicates bias by expressing a stereotype or other statement, neutrally ask for clarification. ("What makes you say that?") When asked to explain bias, the person may realize their bias on their own.

- **Focus on the behavior.** If you need to speak with someone in depth about bias, remember that you have biases too. Don't make it about the individual. Educate about why particular language or behavior demonstrates bias. For instance, someone using "lame" for anything bad may not have thought about how the word sounds to someone with mobility challenges. Talking about the issue in terms of word choice rather than personal flaws makes the conversation clearer and more effective.

Confronting Bias

Your business can confront bias by building "anti-bias bias" into your culture and systems. Here are some steps you can take to avoid biased language and decisions.

1. **Code of Conduct/Code of Ethics**

   Your company's code of conduct can declare biased language and behavior unacceptable, raising awareness of the organization's values and expectations. See our Code of Conduct Toolkit for more info.

2. **Tone from the Top**

   Show your company that you "walk the talk." Lead by example by gaining awareness of your own biases to act more equitably in business decisions. Review "How to Walk the Talk" from the Toolkit library.

3. **Employee Hiring, Onboarding, and Training**

   An anti-bias approach can be emphasized during the search process. By including company values in job postings, potential applicants will self-select out of corporate cultures where they know they cannot thrive. Onboarding and regular training emphasizes what the company expects of its employees. Include performance on ethical issues as part of reviews, further ensuring that employees are aware of organizational standards. See "Hiring for an Ethical Fit" in our Toolkits.