



WOMEN'S
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The blind spot

How identifying your unconscious biases can make you a better decision maker and business leader

BY LAURENCE LEMAY

Bias is normal. The question is not if you are biased — we all are by nature. As humans, we are mainly the product of our upbringing and past experiences.

But bias is not a thing we brag about. There is a negative connotation associated with the word, because the majority of people want to be in complete control of their actions and behaviours.

The title of this article refers to the book *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*, which explores hidden biases that we all have from our past life experiences. This “blind spot” metaphor illustrates the portion of our mind that houses hidden biases.

With that in mind, the question isn't whether we have hidden biases. Instead, the question is “to what extent do our unconscious biases influence



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our decisions?”

From a business perspective, unconscious bias may have unintended consequences on corporate culture and may also perpetuate hiring and promoting practices, often evident by the disproportionate number of men in executive positions or sitting around the boardroom.

In an effort to identify and measure unconscious biases, numerous organizations have developed specific tests, such as the Harvard Implicit Association Test. The results of these tests are often surprising to many people.

Fiona Macfarlane, Managing Partner and Chief Inclusiveness Officer at EY, says that “self-awareness is good leadership” and identifying your own unconscious bias is the first step toward becoming a better leader.

According to Macfarlane, you cannot get rid of your biases, but you can interrupt them.

So if you are in a leadership position, where do you start and how do you implement these “interruptions?”

Macfarlane recommends the following four steps to increasing consciousness:

First, measure and collect statistics that could illustrate bias.

Second, identify and under-

stand the causes of key issues.

Third, determine your priority areas.

“Unconscious bias may have unintended consequences on corporate culture and may also perpetuate hiring and promoting practices.”

And finally, implement change through competency and leadership.

We may not control our biases but we can become aware of their existence and consciously aim to align our behaviors with our intentions and corporate objectives.

So, the next time you make a decision, look out for your blind spot — you may be surprised by what you see.

Laurence Lemay is Senior Manager of Business Development and Public Affairs at Ferus. She is also a Member of The Vancouver Board of Trade Women's Leadership Circle Policy Subcommittee. For more info on the Women's Leadership Circle, visit boardoftrade.com/WLC.

The Women's Leadership Circle hosts a panel discussion on unconscious bias Jan. 25 as part of the popular Morning Leader event series. Learn more or reserve your tickets at boardoftrade.com/unconsciousbias.



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