

Making the unconscious, conscious

By Sam Ali, Fidelity Central Senior Associate Editor 6/13/2018

Most of us believe that we're unbiased, that we're good decision makers, and that we don't make snap judgments about people and situations based on who we are, the lives we live, and how we were raised.



Rachel Book

Yet, in reality, our unconscious biases influence our decisions in ways we may not even notice and sometimes, can't even control, according to Rachel Book, Fidelity's director of Diversity Recruiting Partnerships and Sourcing.

How we react towards certain people, which aspects of a person we pay attention to, and how much we actively listen to what certain people say are all influenced by our own unconscious biases, she said.

Think about how you choose your go-to people when assigning projects or tasks. Do you automatically assume some people can or can't do something? Are you giving responsibilities to the same people over and over again?

The question is: how do you stop yourself from falling prey to unconscious bias? The first step is simple, said Rachel – make the unconscious, conscious.

"Whenever you're making an important decision, whether its promoting one of your existing team members, or an external candidate, or choosing a vendor, or even buying

a car or a house, it's worth taking a step back and make sure it's an objective decision," said Rachel.



Amy Philbrook

Fidelity has been offering "Interrupting Bias" training sessions for its hiring managers "to help them understand how our brains work and how we're susceptible to bias when evaluating people," Rachel said. But this month, all Fidelity managers (up to 7,000 associates) are being asked to complete a mandatory eLearning on Unconscious Bias, according to Amy Philbrook, Fidelity's new Head of Diversity and Inclusion. The online course is designed to help managers recognize and acknowledge their own biases, recognize the negative effects of bias within their organization, and outline strategies for overcoming personal and organizational bias.

For Amy, unconscious bias training is an imperative for business success.

"Today, the most important skill for everybody at any level of the business to have is the ability to make good decisions and to make them quickly," Amy said. "As we move to a flatter, more agile organization, everyone becomes a decision maker. And what gets in the way of making great decisions is often our biased first-impressions. To me it all comes down to evolving our decision-making practices. How do we identify the gaps in our decision-making processes that allow for bias to creep in and what are some of the changes we can make to combat that?"

If you'd like to learn more about this topic, you can search for the keywords "bias" and "diversity" to access great content on <http://learning.fmr.com>.

In the meantime, Rachel and Amy shared some of the types of unconscious biases that can influence our thinking and some steps we can take to interrupt them.

Affinity Bias	...occurs when you seek out or favor those who share your background, group membership, or experiences.
The Halo Effect	...occurs when you allow a positive attribute to influence your overall evaluation of a person.
The Horns Effect	...the direct opposite of the Halo Effect, when you allow a negative attribute to cloud your overall opinion about a person.
Conformity Bias	...happens when you change your mind based on the majority. If the group is leaning one way or another, you decide to go along rather than voice your own opinions.
Benevolent Bias	...occurs when you make assumptions about certain types of people that at first blush come across as care and concern. (For example, the view that women or people with disabilities are inherently in need of protection and special consideration.)

So, how do you interrupt this type of thinking?

Before making a big decision, first establish your criteria.

Whenever you're making an important decision, you need to first establish criteria for what's important and what you need. Take a step back and figure out what "good" looks like *before* you start evaluating candidates, or cars, or houses so that you know your decision is objective and not colored by specific individuals or preference.

Use trusted friends, family, and colleagues as a sounding board.

If you think you might be subject to bias, consciously seek out friends, family, and colleagues who are different from you and bounce your ideas or decisions off of them and then, be open to any critique.

Challenge your assumptions.

Don't automatically assume that because someone is deaf or hard of hearing, they won't want to go to a concert. Or don't assume that someone has an opposite sex partner. Take a step back and challenge your assumptions about people.

Seek out opportunities to spend time with people who are different from you.

When we spend time with people who are different from you (and "different" can be interpreted in so many ways) you expand your horizons. It opens you up to the opportunity of difference.

Is it possible you have biases without even knowing it? Why not take a test drive and [take an Implicit Association test](#)? The test was developed at Harvard University to try and expose subconscious feelings that may affect the way we relate to people.