



## Tina Varughese

energetic, relevant, thought-provoking, hilarious!

# WHAT IS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS?

## Making a First Impression in Seven Seconds or Less

### WHY THIS TOPIC?

First impressions, positive or negative, are made in seven seconds or less. We all make quick assessments of others without even realizing it. We are not born with bias. Biases are formed by past situations, experiences, background and culture. Unconscious biases typically exist towards gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability (both physical and mental), and weight. Most of us will say "I see people for who they are" but do we? Unconscious biases affect and impact decision making both professionally and personally with real impact. Recognizing, managing and mitigating unconscious bias promotes diversity and inclusion. Diversity and inclusion drives innovation, increases productivity, and stimulates creativity while promoting a healthy, happy, engaging workplace culture.

### THE NEUROSCIENCE BEHIND UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Each day our brains receive millions of bits of information to process and over time our minds have created shortcuts through associations and groupings to process the information faster. When we were cavewomen we made the assumption that all sabre tooth tigers were a threat rather than assessing if the tiger was dangerous. We make decisions that make us feel

safe. Over time our beliefs, our history, our media exposure, our experiences, our culture, our upbringing all influence decision making – but are we making the right decisions?

### PROJECT IMPLICIT

Project Implicit has been studying and identifying unconscious biases for years.

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/>

What unconscious biases do you have?

### UNCONSCIOUS BIASES THAT AFFECT THE WORKPLACE

#### GENDER BIAS

#### MATERNAL BIAS

#### AFFINITY BIAS

##### Gender Bias

There is a gender bias that women are judged on their accomplishments whereas men are judged on their potential. Full time working women earn 26% less than full-time working men in Canada according to StatsCan. Women are 18% less likely to be promoted than their male peers at entry level positions. Women ask for promotions at comparable rates to men, but are not promoted at the same rate.

##### Maternal Bias

Statistically, maternal bias limits women in child-rearing ages from obtaining jobs, promotions etc. There's a strong belief that you can't possibly be a 100% committed employee and be a 100% committed parent. In fact, some managers won't offer a promotion to a deserving candidate because they feel it would take time away from the children. There is a strong stereotype to associate a woman with family and men with career.

Gender expectations around parenthood can also have an impact, with women being more likely to be allowed to work from home or have flexible hours to balance childcare obligations, while men who wish to be active parents often get penalized in the workplace for requesting similar flexible working practices.

##### Affinity Bias

When we relate to individuals because they remind us of ourselves or those we are more familiar with. Organizations will hire under the guise of culture fit when it may unintentionally be a form of affinity bias.



## WHAT IS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS?

### Making a First Impression in Seven Seconds or Less – CONTINUED

#### STRATEGIES TO MANAGE AND MITIGATE BIAS

1

##### **Close Your Eyes; Open Your Mind**

By removing names, addresses, and post-secondary schools it removes potential for affinity bias.

2

##### **Flip it to Test It** – credit Kristin Pressner

Whenever in a situation where potential bias could exist flip and test the theory. Does the Cleveland Indians sound strange to you? How about the Cleveland Caucasians?

3

##### **Summarize**

Acknowledge what your partner has said to show that you've heard and understood. Explain back to them their position. The best chance for change is once they have felt listened to.

4

##### **Mentoring**

Commit to mentoring someone or be mentored to grow your own leadership capacity and mitigate bias.

5

##### **Collaboration**

If unconscious biases are often based on our 'gut instincts' which are formed due to unconscious reaction by collaborating we are not making decisions alone and independently therefore decreasing potential for bias.

#### WHY DOES DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION MATTER?

The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation found that every one-percent increase in diversity in Canadian workplaces produced an average of 2.4 percent increase in revenue. For a company with annual revenues of \$10 million, that would mean an extra \$240,000 per year!

Research from global consulting firm McKinsey and Company shows that American workplaces with more women in top roles were 15 percent more likely to have above-average profitability while ethnically diverse companies are 35% more likely to outperform. Diversity of thought and perspective matters.



#### More information?

Contact Tina Varughese at  
**403.478.0880** or by email at  
**tina@tworksforyou.ca**

