



**We don't see things as  
they are**



**We see things as  
we are**

## Unconscious Bias

One of the current buzz phrases is “unconscious bias” but what does it mean and, more specifically, what does it mean in your setting?

Growing up we receive messages about how to be, what to think, and how to act. Our life experience can contradict or reinforce these messages and we make decisions about self, others and life. Our life experience can contradict or reinforce these messages and we make decisions about self, others and life based on limited experience. Some of this process is positive because it means that we don't have to constantly re-invent the world. However, it can also mean that we miss people and opportunities because we are looking through our own frame of reference and therefore may not actually see things as they but instead we see them as we are.

So, how do we change this and why should we? Let's take the last question first because, without answering this, there won't be the motivation to change.

In the workplace being aware of biases is particularly important. There is a tendency to appoint people who are like us, or who are like other people who have worked in the organization before and who were good. When we do this we can appoint people who think like us and therefore creativity and “thinking outside the box” will be limited. By developing our awareness, and being shifting to a more open position we can create an environment which is co-creative, leading to improved productivity. This awareness promotes trust as people feel valued and respected. Not that we always have to agree but we need to weigh up and reflect upon what is being said and be prepared to change our position.

Eric Berne stated:

In order to say Hello, you first get rid of all the trash which has accumulated in your head ever since you came home from the maternity ward

(What Do You Say After You Say Hello, 1974)

In order to do this we need to be aware of what this “trash” is and then be humble and courageous enough to deal with it.

One of the difficulties is that we are often not aware of our own biases. One way to think about this is to tease out what you believe are facts but can recall others challenging you about this, which may indicate that it is a belief you hold, rather than a fact. There is not the space here to explore the whole area of unconscious bias but instead I hope this blog has triggered the willingness to explore this area for yourself, perhaps asking trusted friends and colleagues for their observations of you.

- Are you aware of your own biases?
- Are you open to being challenged by others about these?
- Are you willing to update your beliefs about self, others and life?
- What would you have to give up if you did so?
- What would you gain if you did so?
- Will you?



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