

Resources for Living[®]

Supporting a diverse workplace starts with you

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Today's workforce is becoming more diverse. And that means the workplace needs to adjust. While change can be hard, encouraging understanding and acceptance within your staff is important. Consider these facts¹:

- 34 percent of employees report having more diversity at work than in their personal lives
- 58 percent of employed Americans report seeing or hearing about discrimination or bias at their workplace
- 47 percent of millennials (the fastest growing workplace population) report they consider the diversity and inclusion of a workplace to be important when searching for a job

As a manager, you set the tone for your workplace. So if you want to create an inclusive environment, there's no better place to start than with yourself.

Different kinds of bias

Before we do the work of self-examination, let's take a moment to break down this concept of bias. Technically, bias is negative feeling or opinion about a group. You may have bias toward someone because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, political affiliation or more.

There are two kinds of bias:

- **Explicit bias.** This bias is something that lives in your conscious awareness. This is the bias you know about and show in your behavior. Explicit bias is unpopular. So it tends to be tempered because people don't want to be seen as prejudiced.
- **Implicit bias.** This bias resides in our unconscious but it can still affect our actions. It's a lot harder to recognize and address.

Finding your bias

Almost everyone has some kind of bias. Even when they care deeply about diversity and inclusion. Take, for example, Mahzarin Banaji, a Harvard professor and immigrant who is passionate about issues of racial equality. She developed a test to show whether or not a person harbors unconscious racial bias.

The test told her she was biased. And no, it wasn't broken. (You can test yourself here — www.implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/)²

So, now we've established that you probably have some kind of bias, take a few moments to examine your own beliefs and behaviors. Ask yourself:

- Where do I tend to have bias in my life?
- Which groups make me feel uncomfortable?
- Where does my bias come from?
- How do I show my bias in my daily life?

Addressing your bias

Knowing about your own bias is an important step. Because things outside of your control may influence your behavior without you knowing it. Once you recognize it, you can work to make sure you're supporting a diverse workplace.

Start noticing your reactions to different coworkers, supervisors and employees. Before you talk to someone who "rubs you the wrong way," take a pause. Think about how you might be biased toward him or her. And strive to see the person for who he or she is, instead of letting your brain run on autopilot.

Diverse workplaces are strong workplaces.³ They attract more talent and retain better employees. And managers who are self-aware not only make better managers, they create better organizations.

¹ www.instituteforpr.org/nearly-half-american-millennials-say-diverse-inclusive-workplace-important-factor-job-search/

² www.upworthy.com/this-test-will-tell-you-whether-youre-prejudiced-without-knowing-it-heres-how-it-works

³ www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/news/2012/07/12/11900/the-top-10-economic-facts-of-diversity-in-the-workplace/