EXAMINING OUR UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND PERCEPTUAL LENS

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This presentation was adapted from a presentation given by Eduardo Gonzalez Jr.
Cornell Cooperative Extension NYC

“Examining Our Unconscious Bias and Perceptual Lens”
WORKSHOP GOALS

- Become more aware of unconscious bias & perceptual filters in order to minimize their impact on the workplace

- Brainstorm strategies for applying diversity awareness, understanding, and skills.

- Turnkey with staff and colleagues
ACTIVITY

HOPES & CONCERNS

What are you hoping to get from this presentation?

What are some of your concerns regarding this presentation?
To reach others, we have to first know ourselves. And to contact the deeper truth of who we are, we must engage in some activity or practice that questions what we assume to be true about ourselves.

--Adapted from A.H. Almaas
WORKING AGREEMENTS

- Listen and observe with attention.
- Ask clarifying questions.
- Experiment with suspending judgment/knowing as best you can.
- Keep our discussions confidential when it is merited.
- Invite humility while cultivating curiosity.
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Culture is not good or bad. It just “is.”
- What may be considered “just the way it is” is often culturally influenced.
- Our view of the world is shaped by values, perceptions, assumptions and expectations.
- The more people know about their culture, and the more they know about other cultures, the better the communication will be.
- The way one does or sees things, when coupled with the way others do and see things, can lead to new improved ways of doing and seeing things.
- Being different is “OK” and differences can be recognized, acknowledged and cherished.

Adapted from The Diversity Training Activity Book: 50 Activities for Promoting Communications and Understanding at Work by Jonamay Lambert and Selma Myers, © 2009, AMACOM.
**Forms of Resistance**

1) Participating in other workshops that left us feeling “blame or shame”
2) Taboo about discussing diversity in mixed groups
3) Denial of prejudice
4) Thinking dichotomously
5) Myth of meritocracy
6) Inability in our dominant identity to see ourselves as a member of a group and part of a system
7) Learning and being taught to deny, pretend and minimize the extent and impact of being members of marginalized groups
Recall an incident that occurred early in your life in which you felt different from people around you.

1. What happened?
2. How did you feel?
3. How did this incident influence the choices you made or make about the future?
Unconscious Bias Studies

Job Interview

Pay Scale

Performance Reviews
Conscious Beliefs

Unconscious Beliefs
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

- Our natural people preferences
- Biologically we are hard-wired to prefer people who look like us, sound like us and share our interests.
- “Social categorization“ is the process whereby we routinely and rapidly sort people into groups.
- This preference bypasses our normal, rational and logical thinking.
- We use these processes very effectively (we call it *intuition*) but the categories we use to sort people are not logical, modern or perhaps even legal.
- Simply put, our neurology takes us to the very brink of bias and poor decision making.
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS BEHAVIORS

- Affinity Bias
- Unconscious Self-Perception and Performance
- “Confirmational” Behavior (seeking out or looking for behavior that confirms what you believe to be true)
DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY
ACTIVITY

CULTURE QUESTIONS

Identify one or more values or behaviors that you learned from your cultural background.

Are there values or behaviors at your table that may conflict with one another? Why?
ACTIVITY
OUR DECEIVING MIND

Impressions, reactions, surprises, revelations, etc.?
How many F’s?

Finished files are the result of many years of scientific study combined with the experience of several years.
How many F’s?

Finished files are the result of many years of scientific study combined with the experience of several years.
Symbol in the middle?
SYMBOL IN THE MIDDLE?
PERCEPTION IS CONTEXT DRIVEN
### ROLES

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Magazine look</td>
<td>• Everybody else</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**ACTIVITY**

**GROUP IDENTITY**

What are some of the things that you have heard or learned about “people like you”?

What’s hard about these things?

What’s true about “people like you”?

Which of these things would you like to see eliminated?
OUR MIND’S FILTERS

What we see

What we don’t see

Perceptual Identity/Diversity

Distinctions

Interpretation

What we hear

How we solve problems

Norms and Expectations
Perceptual lens

Shaped throughout our lifetime by:

- **Cultural Learning** (norms, language, values, behaviors, practices)
- **Historic Group Learning & Cultural Narrative** (experiences, stories, history, thematic beliefs)
- **Individual Learning & Narrative** (individual experiences, trauma, & history)
- **Social & Institutional Learning** (patterns of historic behavior in relevant institutions)
IDEOLOGY
Our book of rules – “Just the way it is.”

SCHEMA
Shape the things we see and don’t see.

BACKGROUND
Frame of reference through which we see the world.

Howard Ross – Diversity, Inclusion and the Unconscious Mind: How Does What We Know About the Human Brain Impact the Way We Do Diversity Work in the 21st Century. NYS SHRM Diversity and Inclusion Conference October 6, 2013
In Professor’s Model, Diversity = Productivity

Identity diversity among intelligent people on a team contributes more to effective problem-solving than a team comprised of best-performing, intelligent people without identity diversity.

Scott E. Page
Political Science & Economics Professor
University of Michigan
January 8, 2008
Unconscious Bias in the Workplace

Recruitment

Hiring

Mentoring

Performance Reviews

Audience

Supervisory Decisions

Marketing
ACTIVITY
SOCIAL & INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING

Name an institution that you have been a part of that has shaped the way you see or do things.

What did you learn from that institution?
RETRAINING THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND

- Develop and nurture “constructive uncertainty”
- Develop the capacity to use a “flashlight” on ourselves to help identify a bias; this in turn will help you appropriately act on it
- Understand and redirect beliefs, don’t try to suppress them
- Explore awkwardness or discomfort by asking ourselves, “What is triggering me in any particular situation?”
- Create opportunities for positive exposure

Adapted from resources developed by Howard Ross for presentation at NYS SHRM Diversity and Inclusion Conference, October 2013
TAKING ACTION

1. What can you do immediately to minimize the impact of your unconscious bias/hidden lens?
2. What can you do to promote your personal and professional skills in this area? What’s the benefit? What’s the cost of not doing so? To/for whom?

Adapted from *Trainer’s Diversity Source Book: 50 Ready-to-Use Activities from Icebreakers through Wrap Ups* by Jonamay Lambert and Selma Myers, © 2005, Society for Human Resource Management
RETRAINING THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND

- Create and nurture an organizational culture in which we inquire not only into the decisions, but how we make them.
- Create constant processes for getting feedback (Especially Data!)
- Reduce your level of guilt, which will only shut you down; instead take responsibility (Tim Wise)
- Keep cultural factors in mind.

Adapted from resources developed by Howard Ross for presentation at NYS SHRM Diversity and Inclusion Conference, October 2013
QUESTIONS, REFLECTIONS & APPRECIATIONS
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