



6 Ways to Help Your Organization

Be More Inclusive

A Guide for Leaders and
Employees at All Levels

FranklinCovey



Anyone can contribute to a culture of inclusion.

Systemic issues—like lack of diversity in hiring, bias in promotions, and apathy about diversity, equity, and inclusion—can feel insurmountable. But we each have a part to play in making progress. The strategies in this guide can help you make an impact.



Whatever your role, it takes courage to stand up to bias and advocate for a welcoming and fair culture in your organization. But courage alone won't ensure that you actually make a difference.

1. Model and support inclusiveness.

It feels good to support diversity, equity, and inclusion and think, “I’m an ally.”



Focus less on changing others' behaviors and more on changing your own.

But beware of the common trap of thinking that just because you're in favor of reducing bias, you're doing all you need to.

Some diversity experts suggest that the most effective way to address unconscious bias is to focus less on changing others' behaviors and more on changing your own.

So, where in the course of your work could you be more vigilant about disrupting bias-prone behaviors? Maybe you could reconsider the people you ask for input on projects, those you choose to invite to meetings, or how you word email messages.

As with any skill, identifying bias and becoming more inclusive takes ongoing exploration and practice. When you find a tactic or approach that works for you, share it with others to spread your positive impact. [\(See #4 for tips on how to enlist allies.\)](#)

2. Talk with people who have been the target of bias.

One of the most powerful ways to understand the impact of unconscious bias is to hear the personal, real experiences of people you know. Just about everyone has a story.



To understand the impact of unconscious bias, listen to the personal experiences of people you know.

We heard from a woman who was patronizingly asked to be a “booth babe” at an industry conference, and a business development rep who saw a huge increase in responses to his email pitches after changing his name from Ta’Darrell to Darrell.

Simply hearing these stories doesn’t fix things, but it does give you the opportunity to show empathy and support. And these conversations will raise your awareness of the kinds of behaviors you should watch out for in yourself and others.

While it’s not fair to expect people from target groups to teach you how to address bias, sometimes it does make sense to seek their expertise.

For example, as part of his hiring process, experienced manager Shahan Mohideen recruited candidates who were military veterans. Once he had résumés in hand with military-specific job titles and experiences he didn’t recognize, he asked for help from a veterans’ group on LinkedIn and colleagues who are veterans.

I apologized in advance, pleaded ignorance, and said, “I need help reading these résumés.”



“

Words matter. And what’s appropriate and inclusive evolves and changes over time. It’s essential to listen, watch, learn, engage, and reengage.”

—Anne Chow,
CEO of AT&T Business, Coauthor of
The Leader’s Guide to Unconscious Bias

3. Craft responses to use when you encounter potential bias.

Publicly calling out people as biased makes them feel defensive or ostracized. It's unlikely to inspire them to change their behavior.



Addressing a biased comment or action can help you and the other person realize their behavior may cause unintended harm.

A subtler, more effective approach is to ask people to clarify or reconsider a comment or behavior in a way that gives them a chance to save face. After all, most people don't intend to be biased.

Think of a few helpful responses ahead of time so you don't draw a blank and say nothing—or say something in the moment that you'll regret later. Show genuine curiosity and convey through your words and tone that you assume positive intent.

I don't think you meant it this way, but...

Look for opportunities to share your own experiences. For example:

I haven't experienced that with this person. Do you perhaps mean assertive rather than abrasive?

Here are a few examples you could use or adapt as needed:

- *I'm not sure I understand. What do you mean?*
- *How did you come to that conclusion?*
- *Do you think this is a problem with the person, or could it be a perception problem? Or is there something else that we aren't aware of?*
- *I know you didn't mean it this way, but some people might find your comment demeaning.*
- *I realize that some people might be OK with that term, but I'm uncomfortable with it. Would you be open to using _____ instead?*
- *I know you didn't mean it this way, but some people might see the image in this campaign as biased. Under the title "Suspicious Solicitors," the man in the picture is a person of color. Could we talk through some ideas to avoid that stereotype?*

4. Team up to enact group strategies.

A chorus is more powerful than a single voice. You'll be more effective if you share ideas with diversity-minded colleagues.



All it takes is one good listener to stop a group from overlooking or co-opting someone's good idea.

Depending on your situation, you could:

- **Devise team tactics and share them across your organization.**
For example, if your company lacks robust hiring practices to reduce bias, create your own when it's time for your team to hire—or offer to help your manager do so. Enlist your direct reports to help you define the role's core competencies and a candidate rating system or to serve as judges for test projects. Or maybe you can work with peers to research job-posting sites that reach diverse candidates or events where you can source a diverse candidate pool, and then share those resources with other hiring managers across the company.
- **Amplify others' good ideas in meetings.**
Sometimes all it takes is one good listener to stop a group from overlooking or co-opting a person's good idea. For example, you might say, "Hae-Won brings up a good point. Could we spend a few minutes talking about it?"

When you ask others to join you in amplifying good ideas from a variety of sources, you can help shift your meeting culture from one where the loudest or most powerful voices prevail to one where the best ideas, with proper credit given, prevail.

- **Strategically work with teammates to influence your manager.**
Sometimes people need to hear things multiple times before they're ready to adjust their thinking. When there's a consensus by a group that's different from what a leader thinks, coordinate efforts to be consistent and perhaps more persuasive over time.

One employee told us about their busy but well-intentioned manager who sometimes made hasty or potentially biased decisions. "There are three of us who coordinate how we will talk about an issue with our manager in our 1-on-1s and team meetings. If he hears our message enough times during the week, he often sees the reasoning and takes our recommendation."

By amplifying good ideas from diverse sources, you can help create a meeting culture where the best ideas—rather than the most powerful voices—prevail.



5. Talk about the importance of diversity.

Addressing systemic bias starts with talking about the issue and encouraging others to do the same.



Even if nothing changes right away, you're planting seeds that will grow when the next person raises the issue.

You might begin by speaking with your manager or someone in your HR department. Let them know you'd like to help build a more inclusive culture.

Here are a few ideas:

- If your organization has an engagement survey, use it to give detailed feedback.**

Particularly if you feel left out at your company, you may cynically disregard employee surveys. But they provide an easy, anonymous way to share your candid views with the executive team. And if several people mention the same issue, it's much harder to dismiss.
- Flag messages you notice that could hurt the organization's image.**

Let's say the images on your company's About Us page show a sea of similar faces, or a marketing campaign risks co-opting a cultural symbol. It's worth sharing your observations with higher-ups. You might say something like, "It's important to signal that our company values inclusion for the sake of our customers and our employees."

- Ask HR for statistics—and transparency—on diversity.**

Is your organization collecting data on hiring demographics and pay and promotion disparities? If not, suggest to HR that it starts. If so, ask for those results to be published to the whole company. Research suggests that disclosure leads to gap reductions. You could say, "That way, we'll all be able to take pride in what we're doing well, and we'll be empowered to help improve areas where we're falling short."

The same goes for engagement survey results. Just adding one simple question can help gauge whether your organization has an inclusive, healthy culture.

For example:

Do you feel like you belong here?



Choose your battles carefully, make your good intentions clear, and team up with others in order to reduce risk and increase your chance of success.

6. Be careful not to overcompensate.

As you become more invested in shaping an inclusive culture around you, beware of new bias pitfalls.



An action that seems unfair could be the result of poor communication or misaligned expectations.

You may, ironically, become more susceptible to new biases, such as:

- **Assuming a level of familiarity that's unprofessional.** Just because you participate in diversity initiatives or have a diverse set of friends doesn't mean you can tell a joke based on stereotypes or use a group-specific term at work. What you see as perfectly fine, given your comfort level, can be biased and hurtful to someone else.
- **Giving your allies and people from underrepresented groups a pass on poor performance or behaviors.** It's easy to favor people who you're close to or who align with your mission. But it's not fair or helpful if you consistently judge allies and underrepresented groups by an easier standard or shy away from giving them constructive feedback.
- **Overattributing behaviors to bias.** When a decision or action seems unfair, it could be the result of bias. But it could also be the result of poor communication, misaligned expectations, or any number of other factors not visible to you. When in doubt, ask questions about the situation before jumping to the conclusion that it's simply a matter of bias.

IMPORTANT NOTE

This guide does not address illegal behaviors, such as discrimination and harassment. The line between unconscious bias and these illegal behaviors isn't always clear. If someone's behavior may have crossed this line, be sure to review your company's policies on harassment and discrimination, which may require you to report the incident, or contact HR for clarification.

Addressing bias can improve results for your organization.

It's a common misconception that we can't do anything about our unconscious biases.

Our brains use biases to compensate for information overload. But that doesn't mean we have to let biased thinking drive our decisions. By identifying biases and building a culture of empathy, curiosity, and inclusion, organizations can unleash the full potential of leaders and employees at every level.

Research shows that inclusive teams and organizations are more innovative and more collaborative. They have higher productivity and lower turnover. And in study after study, inclusive decision-making has been linked to better business outcomes.

FranklinCovey's Unconscious Bias learning solution

will help you build a culture where inclusive decision-making is the norm, not the exception.

This article and others like it are available through Jhana®, our bite-sized performance support portal for leaders, which is included in the FranklinCovey All Access Pass®.

To learn more, email us at info@franklincovey.com, visit franklincovey.com,

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