

JANUARY 2019



# The Inclusive Cultures Toolkit:

How to combat unconscious  
bias in your organisation

# What is unconscious bias?

Unconscious bias goes one step towards explaining why, despite equality being enshrined in New Zealand law, outcomes for different people in our society still look so unfair.

Unconscious bias is a totally normal part of how we make decisions, a mental shortcut that fills gaps in our knowledge with similar data from past experiences and cultural norms. It is not intrinsically 'bad'.

But it becomes a problem when our automatic associations don't align with our conscious values. Unconscious bias can lead us to overlook great

ideas, ignore an individual's potential, or create a less-than-ideal work experience for our colleagues.

Consider if you have ever associated a good/bad work ethic with particular ethnic groups, or assumed that a female applicant with young children would take more time off work than a male applicant.

Common biases affect everyday decision making and can impact every facet of a business, from recruiting staff, to leadership effectiveness, communication, decision making and workplace interactions.

## How individuals can combat unconscious bias



### 1 QUESTION YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Self-reflect, 'Why am I thinking this way?' Ask if you would have the same thoughts if the situation involved a man instead of a woman, a person with no children instead of a parent.



### 2 HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE

Hold yourself accountable for self-reflection, learning, and continually analysing your behaviours and experiences. Politely call out others engaging in biased behaviours and suggest constructive alternatives.



### 3 DISRUPT THE DEFAULT

Challenge when the status quo perpetuates bias. Consciously create connections by finding a mentor or sponsor from a different demographic group than you, or joining an employee network as an ally, for example.



### 4 SPEAK OUT

Discuss issues in ways that are comfortable to you (e.g. private conversations with a mentor, anonymous feedback on employee surveys). Share your experiences to start a dialogue that will generate solutions that work for everyone.

# How leaders and Champions for Change can combat **unconscious bias**



## 1 **BE CURIOUS**

Ask questions to understand the root causes of biases. What forms of bias are occurring? What forms of covering are occurring? How do they affect you, your colleagues and teams, your workplace, and your business?



## 2 **BE VOCAL**

Say to others, "I recognise that I have biases and I am working to identify and address them." The effect will amplify as the intent is adopted by others across the organisation. Share your story of vulnerability, learning, and growth.



## 3 **START WITH YOU**

Engage in critical self-reflection. Hold yourself accountable for recognising and pushing back against your own biases before asking others to do the same. Be the first to uncover and role model these behaviours.



## 4 **KNOW YOUR PEOPLE**

Make personal connections and spend time learning how your coworkers experience your workplace. Don't assume you know what and where solutions can be most effective—ask!



## 5 **TAKE A CHANCE**

Intentionally mentor, sponsor and be open to people who have different backgrounds and experiences from you. Be open to learning from them as much as they can expect to learn from you.



## 6 **BREAK THE CYCLE**

Everybody has unconscious biases. Hold your people accountable for relying on structure to modify their judgments and behaviours rather than their own willpower.



## 7 **EMPOWER YOUR PEOPLE**

Help employees understand their role in making change. Engage stakeholders from a range of backgrounds to help make decisions more inclusive.



## 8 **FIND ALLIES**

Reach out to other champions with proven track records of success. Find others with shared passion and commitment and engage them as partners.



## 9 **STAY COMMITTED**

We all have biases that change and evolve even when we confront them. Remain committed to sustained action over time.

## About Champions for Change

Champions for Change is an initiative that brings together over 50 leading Chairs and CEOs to advance inclusion and diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand, through individual leadership and collective impact. Current initiatives include speaking out about the benefits of inclusion and diversity for businesses; measuring gender and ethnic representation through the Diversity Reporting Framework, creating inclusive and flexible workplaces, and investing in talent pipelines and leadership capability.

**Got any questions? Email us at [champions@globalwomen.org.nz](mailto:champions@globalwomen.org.nz)**

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