

## Help!!!! My Bias is Showing!

By *Simma Lieberman, The Inclusionist*



A senior leader at a high tech company called and said, "Simma, I just spent an enormous amount of money for a training program about unconscious bias. It was very well received and people are still talking about how much they liked it," he said. "However, nothing changed."

## Help! My Bias is Showing!

For over twenty years I've helped leaders in organizations leverage and champion diversity and build inclusive cultures.

I've spoken to thousands of people about bias, assumptions and stereotypes. Clients tell me about the amazing results from my sessions on facilitating dialogue between older and younger employees. And as a baby boomer who spends a lot

## **Well!!!!!!! I have to confess- I'm not as aware as I think. I caught myself in the act of age bias.**

After posting an ad for someone to help me with my new website, I got a call from a man expressing interest. I could tell he was older (like my age.) My first thought was, "He's too old to know the latest technology."

I couldn't believe that I, "Simma The Inclusionist," was actually thinking that way, but I was. I had to admit to a bias if I was going to get past it, and give this man a chance to show what he could do. Here's what I did.

## **My Process for Filtering Out Age Bias**

1. I became conscious of my visceral reaction, and the message I was sending to my brain. I had to admit that I felt a knee jerk reaction based on my own bias.
2. I took the time to understand the root of that bias. Everyone who had worked on my sites in the past was young and tech savvy. They had studied computer science; this man had not. Simply because those were the type of people I worked with in the past, I assumed the next person needed to be the same.
3. I realized that I had not considered experience, knowledge and skills in my initial reaction.
4. I thought of people like Steve Jobs, and Bill Gates — baby boomers and the geniuses behind today's technology.
5. This loosened up my thinking and I was able to let go of my bias to focus on his stated qualifications without preconceived judgment.
6. I asked myself, " If I didn't have that bias, and was basing my decision on what he said, would I meet with him?" My answer was yes.

7. I met with him, I made a list of objective questions and answers that would tell me if he had the qualifications I was looking for. This was to make sure I wasn't feeling "guilty" about my bias and hiring him if he wasn't truly qualified.

## **Epilogue**

Knowing you have a bias is the first step but that alone is not enough. It took years to perfect my bias, so I couldn't just will it away. I had to stop myself from taking a wrong action based on a wrong assumption. I had to change my thinking and find a new frame of reference. It was only after creating a new picture in my mind that I was able to detach from the bias and stereotype, basing my decision on skills and experience instead.

When we have a process that works and we do the footwork, we are able to see people for what they bring to the organization or community. We let go of assumptions about who they are and what they can do based on old imbedded bias and stereotypes.

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