



# HOW TO COUNTER UNCONSCIOUS BIASES

Whether you're a woman working in a male-dominated field, an introvert within a group of extroverts, or a new hire in a team of people who've been working for 30 years in the company, you will stand out when you're in an environment where you don't fit the norm.

Even unintentionally, your colleagues may make derogatory comments, or make decisions that are detrimental to you. This results from their unconscious biases, which may be subtle. Still, even if their words and acts aren't deliberately meant to harm, the result is the same: you feel judged, hurt, or discriminated against. We get it, and there are ways to counter these situations in your environment.

What can you do if you witness a derogatory comment from a colleague? How do you draw their attention to it without calling them sexist, racist or arrogant? Without making them feel overly uncomfortable? While preserving your relationship? Here are some steps that will help you prepare for this conversation, and act firmly yet diplomatically. This conversation is worth having, especially as the other person may be unaware of the detrimental impact of their remark.

## WHEN?

- You witness or receive a hurtful remark directed towards you or someone else, and you feel compelled to do something about it.
- You feel that the other person would benefit from a different perspective to better gauge a situation and understand the impact of their words and actions.
- You're in a situation where you believe that the other person has no ill intentions, and you feel comfortable bringing it up. If this isn't the case, you may want to speak to someone you trust instead, rather than facing a potentially harmful situation.

## HOW?

- First, decide to speak up, instead of just "taking it with a smile".
- Follow the steps and advice on the next page to find the way to have this daring conversation.

## TO LEARN MORE

- <https://www.vitalSMARTS.com/crucialskills/2017/05/tips-to-battle-unconscious-bias/>
- <https://www.amnesty.org.au/tell-someone-love-theyre-racist/>
- [http://cookcross.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CR\\_Unconscious\\_Bias\\_4-strategies\\_021017.pdf](http://cookcross.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CR_Unconscious_Bias_4-strategies_021017.pdf)
- <https://hbr.org/2017/03/root-out-bias-from-your-decision-making-process>

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## 1 CHOOSE TO SPEAK UP

Taking it with a smile isn't a good long-term strategy. Especially since, in most cases, addressing these unconscious biases is enough to raise the other's awareness, and to fix the situation. However, giving this kind of feedback can be uncomfortable, weird, or downright scary. Remember that this conversation can truly make a difference.

## 2 CREATE A SAFE SPACE

When having the conversation, remain calm and avoid being overwhelmed by emotion. This will be a challenge both for you and the person with whom you're having the conversation. In order to maintain this safe space, mutual respect is required. Start with the assumption that the other person is reasonable, rational and kind.

Remember that conversations can sometimes take a wrong turn, not because of what's being discussed specifically, but because people feel like they're being assigned bad intentions.

## 3 EXPRESS YOUR POINT OF VIEW

To express your point of view, start by stating how you feel, and remain focused on the comment or action at stake. Your goal is to help the other person understand the impact of that comment or decision on you. Remain calm. Avoid passing judgment or accusing the other person. Stick to the facts and their impact on you.

## 4 LISTEN TO THE OTHER'S POINT OF VIEW

Be open when listening to the other's point of view on the question. By allowing them to express themselves, the conversation remains reciprocal. Otherwise, there's little chance that this will be constructive for both parties.

If the other person doesn't know what to say, you can suggest your interpretation of the situation, and allow them to agree or disagree with what you've said.

## 5 CLOSE THINGS

To close things off, take the time to clearly state your expectations. You can rephrase what's been said and agreed to by both of you, in order to confirm that everything's fully understood.

### TO PREPARE

- *What's important for you? For others? For your long-term relationships?*
- *Why do you want to address the situation?*
- *What's your intention?*
  
- *The last thing I want is to damage our relationship... but I need to talk to you about something that's important for me.*
- *I really appreciate working with you. This is why I have to share something that makes me uncomfortable.*
- *I don't believe that you understand the impact of what was said earlier.*
  
- *Last Friday, when you said: "We'll ask Josie to take care of it. It's a woman thing.", I found it hurtful.*
- *Since I wasn't invited, I feel like I'm not given equal opportunity to position myself.*
- *I'm concerned about what you said in regards to our colleague's emotional reaction during the meeting, and I'd like to better understand.*
  
- *I'd like to hear your point of view on this.*
- *What was your intention?*
- *What did you mean?*
- *I'd like to understand why.*
  
- *So, you didn't realize how being excluded from this meeting would impact me. I want to thank you for being aware of it now and making sure it won't happen again.*
- *I understand that you meant well by making this decision for me, however I want to make those choices myself.*

### THE TABLES ARE TURNED

If someone points out that you've made a sexist comment, or that you may be favourably biased... listen! What the other person is sharing is a gift (if formulated appropriately ☺). If your first reaction is to get defensive or try to justify yourself, you're protecting your ego above the other person. At least listen to what they have to say!