

HOW TO MOVE PAST
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS
TOWARD REAL CONNECTION



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- ▷ Depression → neuroscience → unconscious bias
- ▷ Not an expert... an enthusiastic student who loves to share



HR compliance products and services for small business employers.





Let's start with a riddle...

A father and son are in a car accident. The father dies at the scene. The son is rushed to the hospital.

When the boy reaches the operating room, the surgeon looks down and says, "I cannot operate on this boy. He is my son."

How is this possible?



Actual responses

- ▷ “The son has two fathers.”
- ▷ “The surgeon is his stepdad/adoptive dad.”
- ▷ “His parents are in a same-sex marriage.”
- ▷ “One of them was a sperm donor.”
- ▷ “The ‘father’ in the accident was a priest.”



Actual responses

- ▷ “The father is a ghost (angel or God)!”
- ▷ “The father was revived and rushed to the hospital to perform the surgery.”
- ▷ “The boy had been kidnapped and raised to believe his kidnapper was his father.”
- ▷ “The doctor did not realize that he died.”
- ▷ “I have no logical answer...”



Gender bias runs deep!



Multiple studies conducted over 50+ years show that

80%-90%

of respondents fail to come up with “Mom” as an answer

How deep?

- ▷ **No difference** between men & women
- ▷ 22-year-old female university students: **86%**
- ▷ Children aged 7-17: **86%**
- ▷ Self-described feminists: **78%**
- ▷ Close female family members are doctors: **68%**

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

The normal, human tendency to make automatic judgments about other people ... without realizing we're doing it

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

*Gender bias is just one type
of unconscious bias.*

Affinity bias

The tendency to gravitate toward others who are like us in some way.

- ▷ Similarity bias
- ▷ Us/them bias
- ▷ “Birds of a feather” bias



An illustration of ten hands of various colors (purple, orange, yellow, light orange, light green, teal, and blue) raised in the air, symbolizing participation or voting. The hands are arranged in a slightly overlapping, staggered pattern against a white background.

Raise your hand if...



















Did you
FEEL
the effects
of affinity?



Warm & fuzzy

Small charge of
happiness or excitement

Instant like or respect

Desire to connect, ask
questions or share stories

What's happening?

- ▷ Having things in common feeds the human need for safety and belonging
- ▷ Affinities create trust
- ▷ Easier, more comfortable to connect
- ▷ **Lack of affinities causes mistrust and fear**

Racial bias

The tendency to favor others whose race is the same as ours.

- ▷ A type of affinity bias
- ▷ Not the same as racism (belief that other races are inferior)



Cultural bias

The tendency to judge others based on the norms of one's own culture and cultural experiences.

▷ A type of affinity bias





***What would you think
if the person seated next
to you were eating a pile
of crispy insects?***



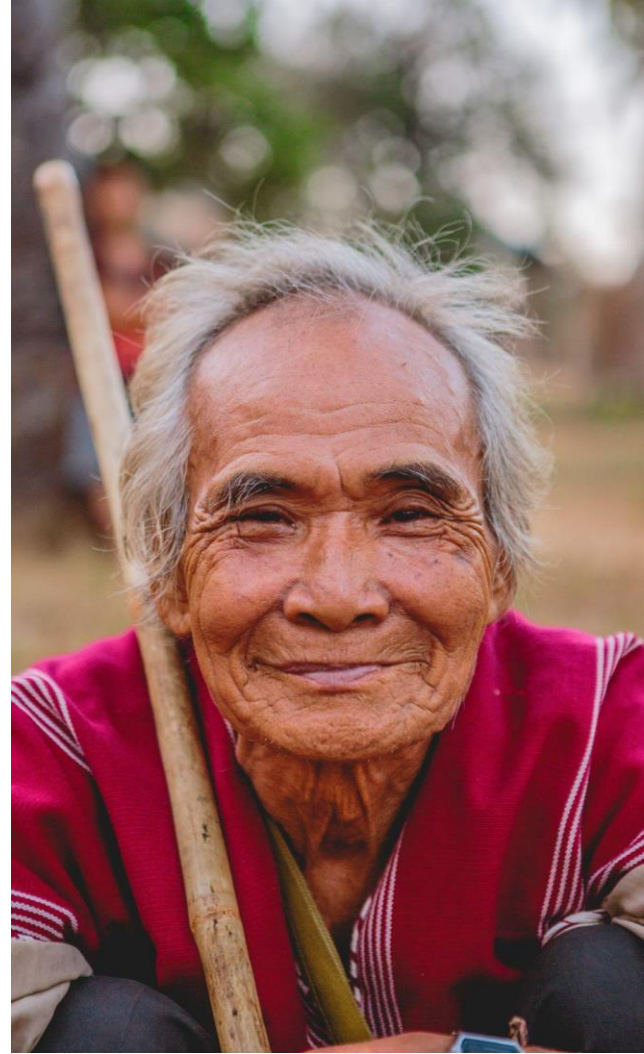
***2 billion people around
the world eat insects***

***They are full of
essential nutrients***

Age bias

The tendency to discount a person's value based on their age.

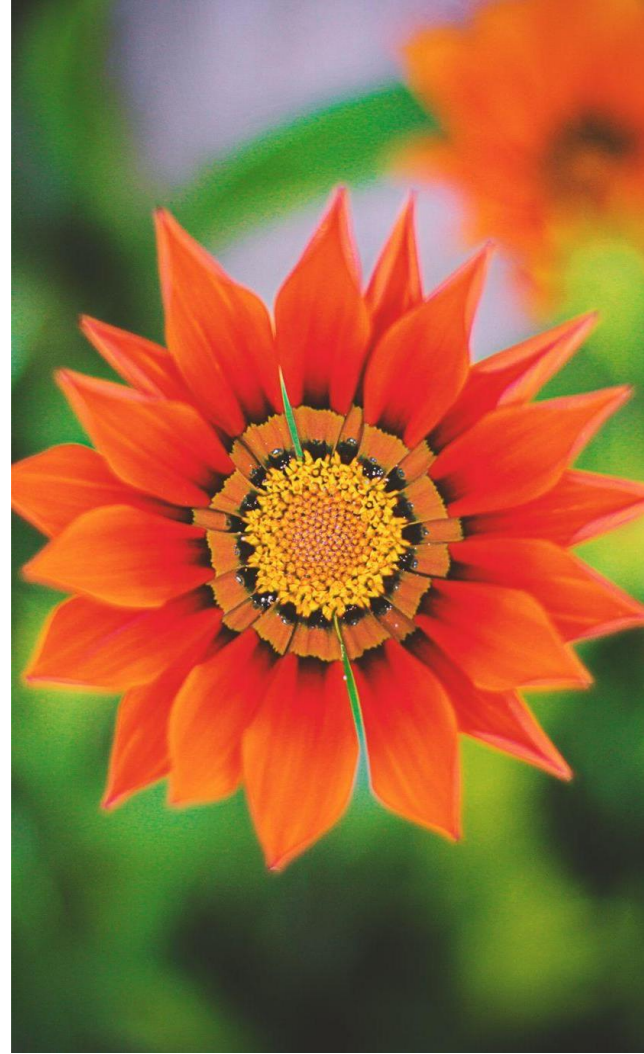
- ▷ Not necessarily affinity bias
- ▷ We can have this bias against people of our same age



Beauty bias

The tendency to prefer people we find attractive.

- ▷ Influenced by cultural norms
- ▷ Can be biased *against* beauty in certain situations



Ability bias

The tendency to view persons who have disabilities as being inherently “less than.”



Halo bias

*The tendency to allow a single **positive** experience to affect your overall judgment of a person.*



Horns bias

*The tendency to allow a single **negative** experience to affect your overall judgment of a person.*

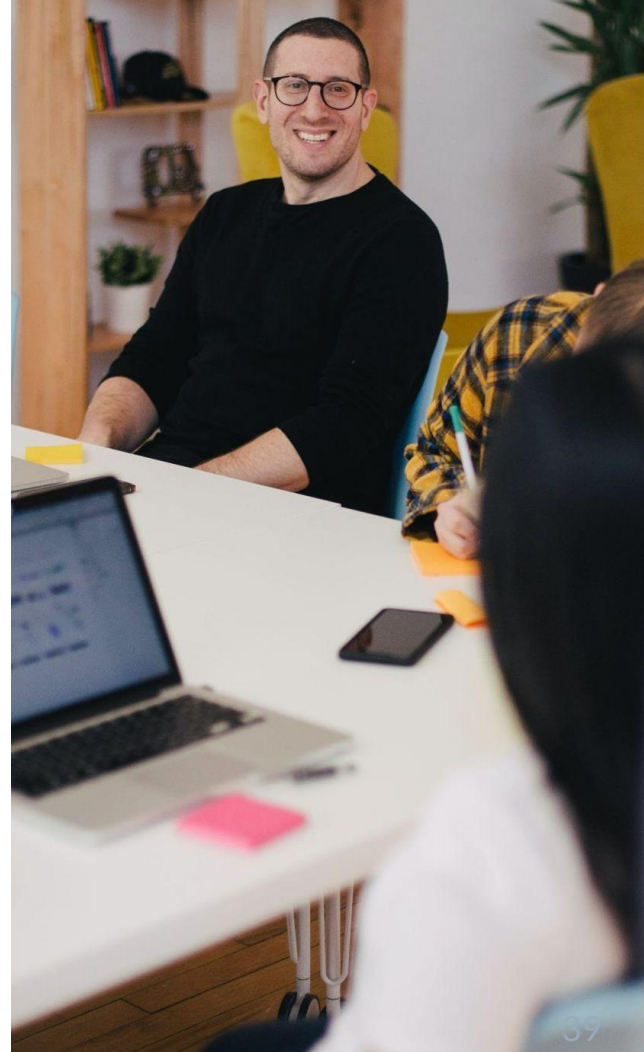
- ▷ Watch for these if you are a manager, parent or teacher!



Proximity bias

The tendency to think more positively about someone due to their physical closeness.

- ▷ Especially relevant in hybrid/remote work environments



“Why?”



“Blame it on the brain...”



IT'S BIOLOGY (NEUROSCIENCE)



What is the brain's #1 job?





Job 1: Survive!

- ▷ Brain is programmed to keep us alive
- ▷ Starts in the amygdala (primitive part of the brain)
- ▷ Built-in 'threat detector'
- ▷ **Different = dangerous**



Job 1: Survive!

- ▷ ANY difference it detects is deemed a potential threat
- ▷ Perceived threats trigger stress hormones
- ▷ Causes “fight or flight” response
- ▷ Whether or not the threat is real
- ▷ SURVIVAL ABOVE ALL



Job 1: Survive!

If
DIFFERENCES = DANGER,
then
SIMILARITIES = SAFETY
(affinity bias)

Job 2: Save energy

- ▷ Constantly bombarded with information from all directions
- ▷ Make thousands of decisions a day
- ▷ Using conscious thought is exhausting and time-consuming
- ▷ Amygdala creates mental shortcuts to save time and energy



Job 2: Save energy

- ▷ **Goal:** Eliminate the need to ‘stop and think’ every time a decision is needed
- ▷ **Result:** Automated decision-making in the subconscious brain
- ▷ “Fast thinking” vs. “slow thinking”



“How did I get here?”

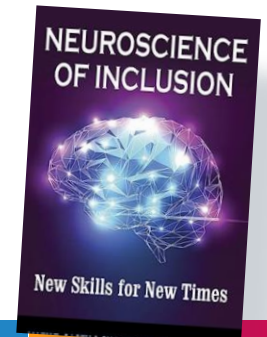




The brain also tries to 'think fast" about *people*

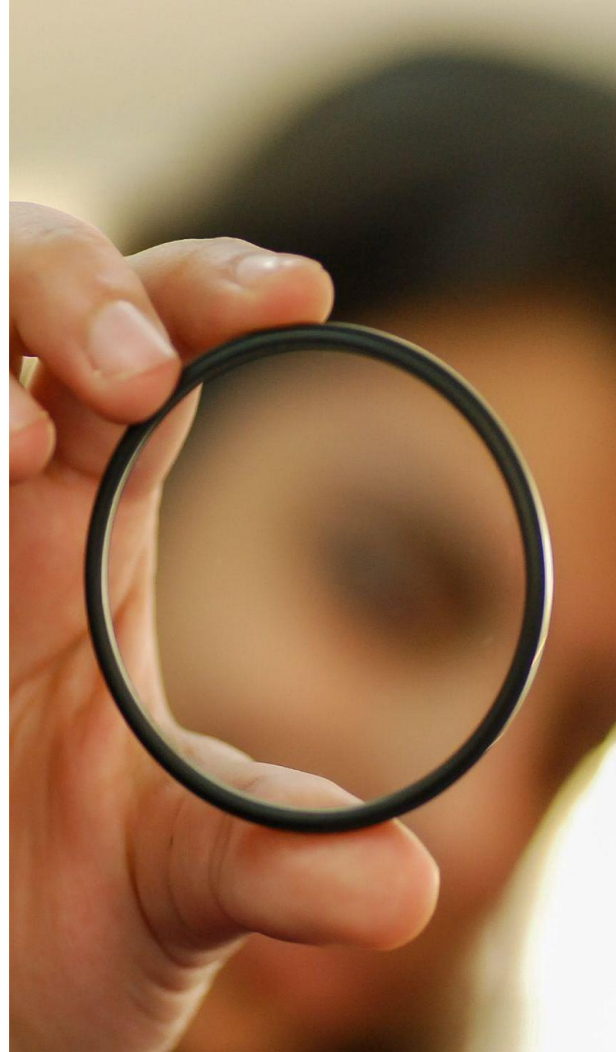
- ▷ First rule: DIFFERENT = DANGER
- ▷ Whether or not you consciously agree
- ▷ Reacts to 175 points of difference

Neuroscience of Inclusion
Shannon Murphy Robinson



The brain applies other filters to assess people

- ▷ Personal experiences
- ▷ Information it has collected and stored over time
- ▷ Direct and indirect messages it has received during your lifetime
- ▷ All from a very early age



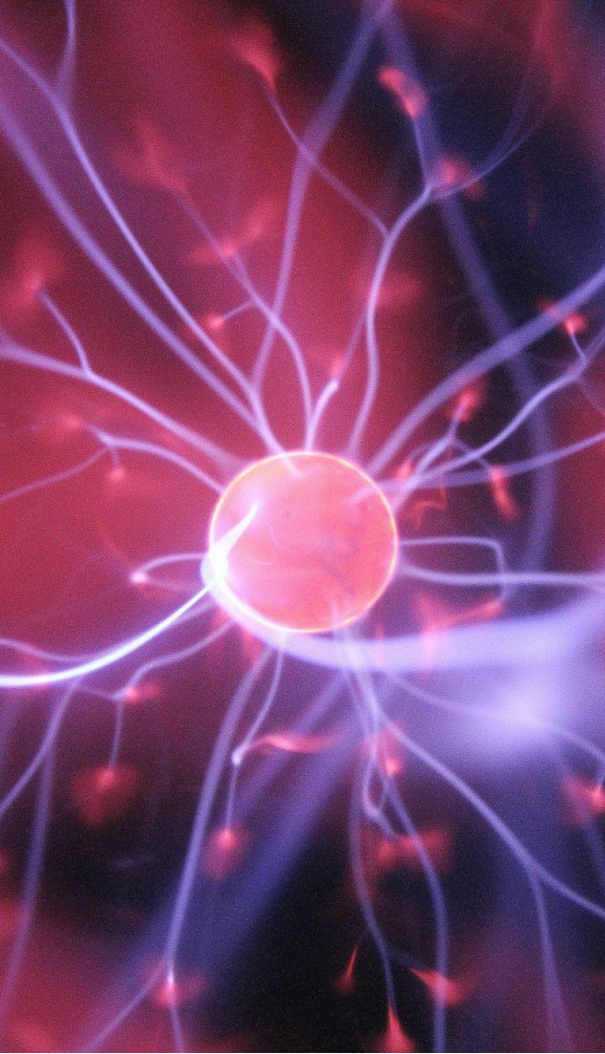
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Values & opinions of people we trust (family, friends)

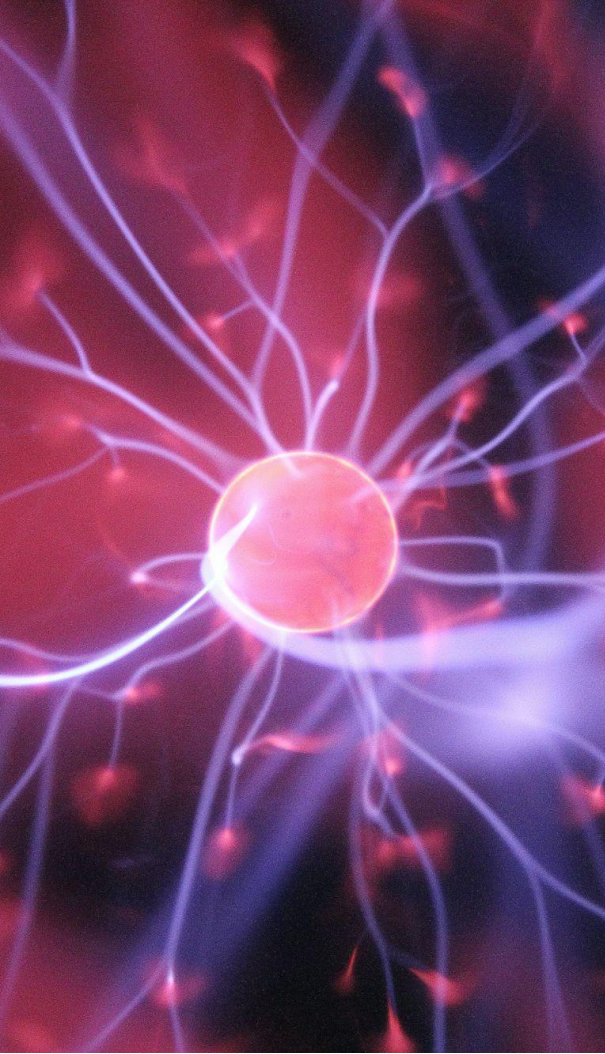
Guidance from institutions (schools, churches, government)

Messages from society (media, culture)



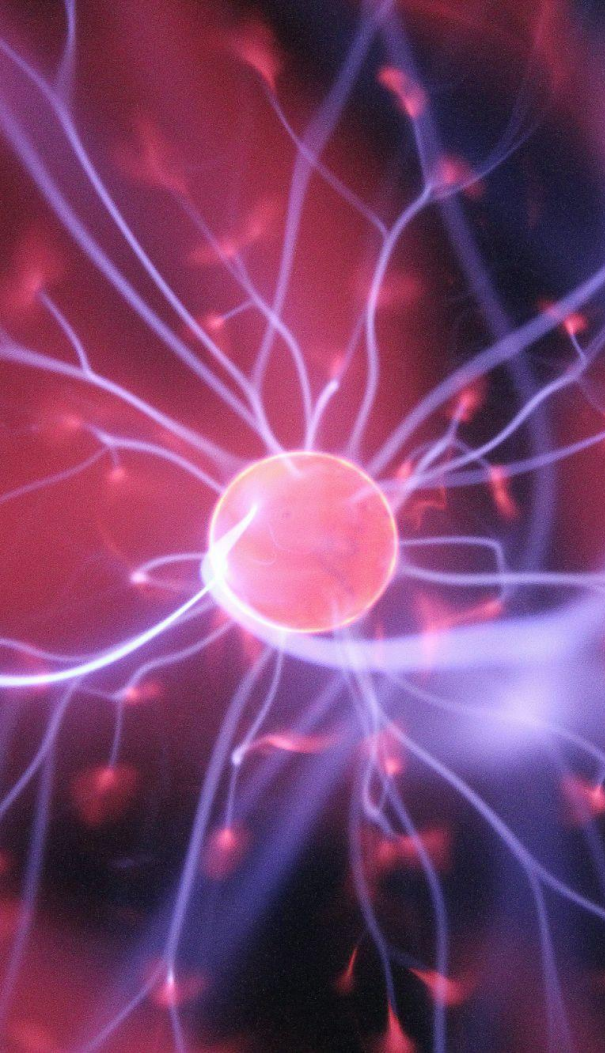
The problem: Sometimes it tries too hard

- ▷ Makes decisions in *milliseconds*
- ▷ Leaves out important information
- ▷ Makes generalizations and false assessments (positive or negative)
- ▷ Jumps to conclusions & stereotypes



The problem:
Sometimes it tries too hard

**What's designed to protect us
instead misguides us.**



The problem: Sometimes it tries too hard

- ▷ Incorrect assessments can affect our behavior in ways we don't intend
- ▷ Example: The surgeon riddle
- ▷ Also... Dr. Tamika Cross

The bottom line...

*Unconscious biases can cause us to be unfair –
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Unconscious biases can cause us to be unfair – and even discriminatory – without intending to be.

The barriers they create can stop us from making meaningful connections with our fellow humans...

The bottom line...

Unconscious biases can cause us to be unfair – and even discriminatory – without intending to be.

The barriers they create can stop us from making meaningful connections with our fellow humans...

... and then we all lose.

“What can we do?”



A person with long blonde hair, seen from behind, standing in a sun-dappled forest with arms outstretched. The background is a soft-focus view of green trees and sunlight filtering through the leaves. The person is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white rectangular area.

Step 1:

Acknowledge & Accept

A person with long hair, seen from behind, standing in a sun-dappled forest with arms outstretched. The background is a soft-focus view of green trees and sunlight filtering through the leaves. The person is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt and blue jeans.

We **all** have unconscious biases that affect our decisions and behaviors in ways we don't intend.

It's a **normal** part of being human!

Acknowledging this is a huge first step
in the right direction.



The good news:

While we can't eliminate our unconscious biases, we **can** override them by making more thoughtful and fair choices.

We can use our **conscious** brains to overcome what's happening in our **unconscious** brains.



Step 2:
**Switch to
“Slow Thinking”**

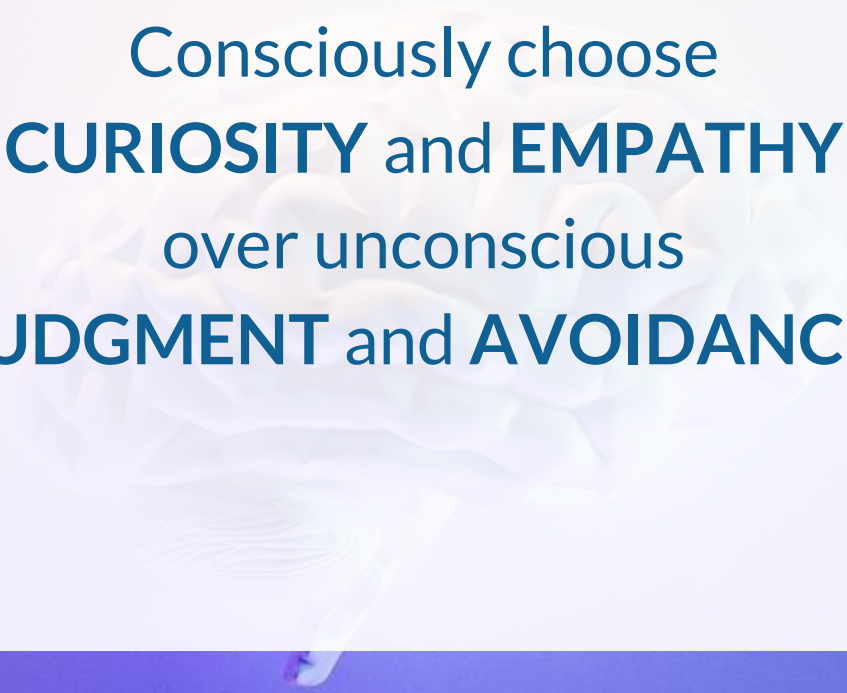
Watch for the **discomfort** and **avoidance** that often come when we encounter someone 'different.'

Stop, breathe and think:

Why am I uncomfortable?

Am I holding stereotypes or assumptions?

Where did they come from?



Consciously choose
CURIOSITY and **EMPATHY**
over unconscious
JUDGMENT and **AVOIDANCE.**

Step 3:
Resist
Defensiveness

If someone calls you out, welcome the feedback.

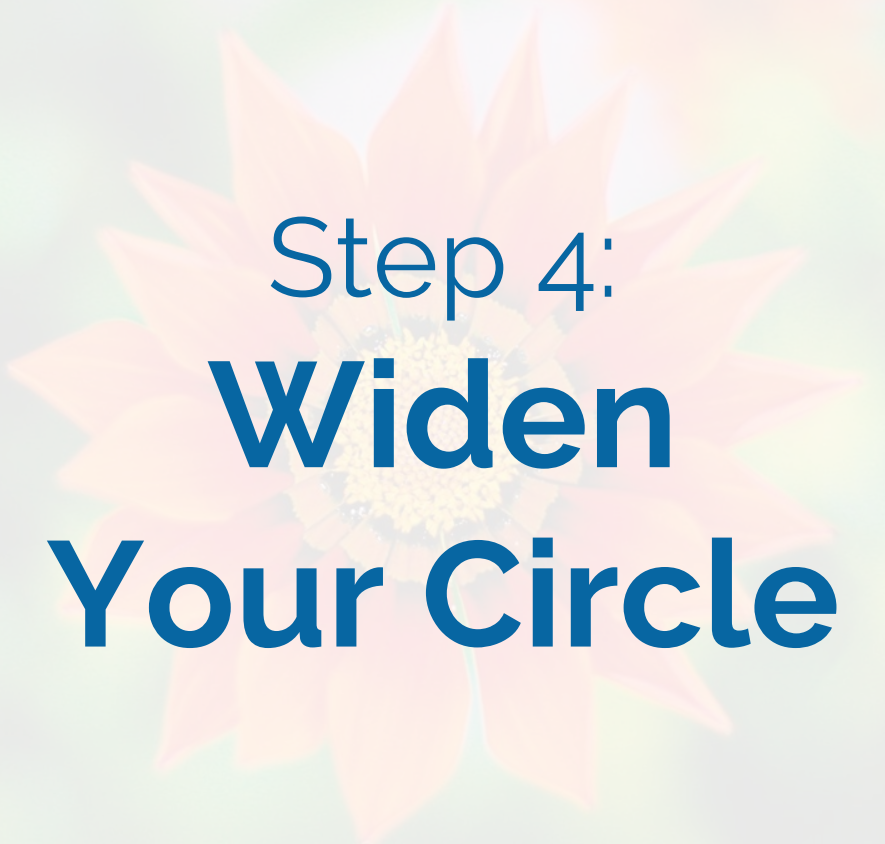
Ask questions and seek to learn.

"I hadn't thought about it that way.

Can you tell me more about your perspective?"

*"Thank you. We all have unconscious biases
and I'm committed to working on them."*

Find an accountability buddy.



Step 4:
**Widen
Your Circle**

“Circle of Trust” Exercise

List your 5-6 “go to” people who you trust.

Who do you turn to for advice?

Whose opinions do you seek?

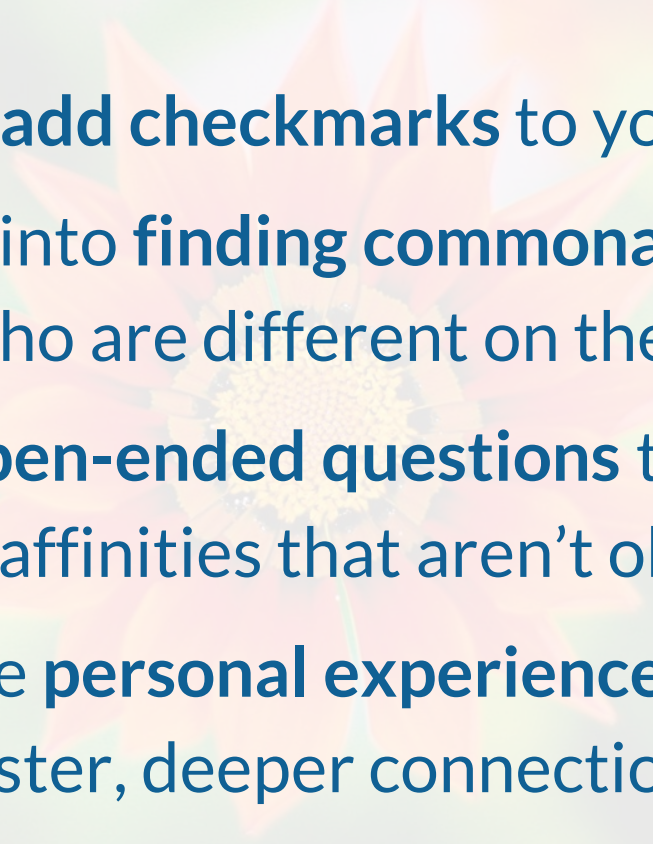
Who influences your most important decisions?

Family, friends, colleagues, mentors/advisors, etc.

“Circle of Trust” Exercise

Put checkmarks next to those who are different from you in each of these categories:

- Gender
- Race or ethnicity
- National origin
- Sexual orientation
- Ableness
- Generation/age group
- Education level
- Socioeconomic status
- Religious beliefs
- Political views



Strive to **add checkmarks** to your circle.

Put effort into **finding commonalities** with people who are different on the surface.

Ask **open-ended questions** to help reveal affinities that aren't obvious.

Share **personal experiences** for faster, deeper connection.

The background of the slide features a soft, hazy sunset or sunrise over a horizon. In the center, there are two faint, light-colored silhouettes of people standing with their arms raised in a gesture of triumph or celebration. The overall mood is positive and aspirational.

Step 5:
**Embrace Differences
for Greater Success**



Research shows:

Diverse communities are linked to more innovation and higher economic growth.

Diverse classrooms are linked to better critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Diverse workplaces result in better decision-making and improved financial results.

Another riddle

When YouTube launched a video app for iPhones, 5-10% of uploaded videos were upside-down.

Why did this happen?



The design team did not take into account that left-handed users tend to turn their phones in the opposite direction as right-handed users!



The background of the slide features a soft, hazy sunset or sunrise over a horizon. In the center, the silhouettes of two people are visible, standing on a dark, low-lying terrain. They are facing each other, holding hands, and both have their arms raised in a gesture of triumph or joy. The overall mood is one of hope and unity.

At home, at work, in our community...

Look for opportunities to
**create situations where diverse people
must cooperate to succeed.**

The background of the slide features a soft, hazy sunset or sunrise over a body of water. In the center, the silhouettes of two people are visible, standing with their arms raised in a gesture of triumph or joy. The overall mood is positive and celebratory.

THANK YOU!