

Check Your Bias

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After attending an amazing program about diversity and inclusion, what did I do? Acted on my worst assumption about someone. When the caller i.d. flashed on the screen, I just *knew* what he was going to say. My mind went into defense mode, while my bias about dealing with someone from his *particular profession* ran amuck. Instead of being warm, my tone shifted to a cold, don't-mess-with-me mode.

The conversation was totally different than expected. He was not calling for the anticipated reason. I fessed up to my presumption. We laughed. Grace won out.

A moment of self-reflection washed over me. All of us have biases based on our life experiences. That's not new news. But, becoming self-aware: that's the tricky part. If we are unaware of our biases, we may react negatively in both our personal and professional lives. That may cause us to unconsciously discriminate in our personnel actions and even negatively impact our ability to serve our community as informed citizens.

In my research for the recent OK Ethics' program, I ran across a few ideas for the courageous who want to identify personal blind spots. First on the list is an interesting tool developed by a non-profit collaboration of researchers from Harvard, the University of Washington and the University of Virginia. It is known as the Implicit Association Test (IAT) and is available for free at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>.

Their organization's purpose is to uncover implicit attitudes that cause us to act a certain way. IAT offers a wide gamut of bias assessments: from religious to political associations. Even if one doesn't agree with the results, it is a thought-provoking exercise. Are we truly acting in accordance with our beliefs?

Another tool is Alex. It's available online at <https://alexjs.com/> and is designed to catch potentially hurtful language in communiqués. These include gender-favoring, polarizing or generally inconsiderate terms. The app explains why certain words might be problematic and provides alternative verbiage.

Finally, I liked the Diversity & Inclusion Video Series on FaceBook, available at <https://managingbias.fb.com/>. I watched the ones on Maternal, Performance Attribution and Competence/Likeability Tradeoff Biases. Eye-opening and worthy of a courageous conversation to discuss further.

The first female chief of the Cherokee Nation, Wilma Mankiller said it best, "Everybody is sitting around saying, 'Well, jeez, we need somebody to solve this problem of bias.' *That somebody is us.*"

Let's get busy.

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