

What is Implicit Bias?

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What is "Implicit Bias"

Implicit bias and Implicit bias training have become a trending topic with many firms. Moreover, it is not just law firms that are getting serious about this type of exercise – large corporations, police departments, and schools are seeing the

value in this brand of training for their staff. However, what is “implicit bias” and what can we do about it?

What is it?

Implicit bias is most often considered an unconscious predisposition towards a stereotypical opinion. In the simplest of terms, it means one believes a stereotype is true because one has heard or seen it so much. We receive so many biased messages daily – in the media, from friends or family – that we often accept them as fact without question. Your brain – while taking in all these messages – will make a “shortcut” to be able to process this information, primarily, putting people into categories. And yes, some of these categories are not favorable.

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Imagine that all of your life, you've heard messages that left-handed people are disorganized. You had a left-handed classmate in school who had messy handwriting, and a teacher called them out on it. Maybe you have seen a movie or TV show, and the bungling character just happened to be left-handed. Also, also perhaps a friend or family member chimes in about their feelings about left-handed people. Over time, these messages you receive start to become your perception of left-handed people. Now, imagine that you are interviewing a job applicant that is left-handed. Your implicit bias would make you less open-minded to learning about them as a person because this prejudice has clouded your judgment long before you even met this person.

How do you minimize the impact implicit bias has on your decision-making?

Now that we know what implicit bias is, how can we conquer it? While it is not a hard task, it does need consistent attention. We need to stay aware of the message we are taking in. It's easy to use a stereotype to categorize a person we don't know, and that is where the problem lies. We should be taking the time to get to know the person and appreciating their unique experience. Further, we should be countering these statements when we hear them.

I'm sure we've all heard the lament "millennials are lazy." Not only is it not true, but it's also an excellent example of how implicit bias can alter perception. "Millennials" are people from all cultures and background that were born around the same time. Each person in this group has had different experiences shape the way they think and act. They may work differently, but to label all of a specific age group as "lazy" is, well, lazy.

While much more specific training surrounding implicit bias is so essential to all culture, genders, and age groups, becoming aware of and acknowledging your bias is a great beginning.

Once you recognize implicit bias, be aware of how these messages and stereotypes could impact your judgment – even in a way that you think is positive. Also, if you believe that your implicit bias is not grounded in a negative stereotype, then work to ensure your judgment does not swing the other way and give preference to those because of a positive stereotype.



Center for Legal Inclusiveness offers training on many topics, including implicit bias. Please contact us (info@legalinclusiveness.org or 303.313.6860) to schedule a training.

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Center for Legal Inclusiveness (CLI) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit (Tax-Id 26-1264252) based in Denver, CO. Our mission is to advance diversity in the legal profession by actively educating and supporting private and public sector legal organizations in their own individual campaigns to create cultures of inclusion.

CONTACT US

Center for Legal Inclusiveness
1290 N Broadway, Suite 1700
Denver, CO 80203

(303) 313-6860
info@legalinclusiveness.org

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