

In 2019, I had nine opportunities to train a workshop I developed with the help of Jodie Hembree and the North East Ohio Regional Training Center staff:

"Toward a Better World: Understanding Implicit Bias"(2017)

. The workshop evaluations revealed that the training contributed to participants' increased understanding of how our subconscious mind affects our thinking, feelings, decisions, and actions.

During that year I learned that after training, participants in the child welfare system were able to assess the impact of unconscious bias on:

- *Their Perceptions: How they see people and how they perceive reality*
- *Their Attitudes: How they react toward certain people*
- *Their Behaviors: How receptive/friendly they are toward certain people*
- *Their Attention: Which aspects of a person they pay the most attention to*

In addition, the following definition from the Kirwan Institute at The Ohio State University seemed to resonate with many participants:

"Implicit bias, first is an inclination or prejudice for or against one person or a group. Second, unconscious biases are feelings or prejudices we are not aware of that we have toward other people. Unconscious feelings, thoughts, or preconceived notions play a strong part in influencing our judgment of certain people and groups. In many different areas of life, it is these judgments that are far away from being balanced or even-handed."[\[1\]](#)

Honoring Resistance

While these "take away" observations proved invaluable to me as a trainer seeking feedback, the participants' resistance to the Kirwan Institute's definition and other content areas convinced me of the following:

- 1) The merit of making it safe for them to resist content and process
- 2) Honoring the participants' right to resist by giving them a listening ear
- 3) Making sure you hear it all before moving on
- 4) Asking them for permission to move on

By honoring resistance in this manner, I personally witnessed improved self-awareness, increased empathy for others, and better critical thinking skills. I found that honoring and working with resistance can become one additional tool in the trainer's toolbox.

But let's begin with the hard, cold facts-training isn't optional. Training child welfare employees on an ongoing basis is an absolute necessity. Unfortunately, there is a lot of resistance to training for line staff, supervisors, and management.

As a trainer for almost 24 years, I have experienced many areas of resistance, but in this article, I am limiting my observations to two categories of resistance that were pronounced in a few of my implicit bias workshops:

Communicating the Agency's Vision

In many cases, the RTC, agency leadership, and county commissioners many have a clear picture of where the organization and employees should be heading, but it is often true that line staff have difficulties seeing or sharing that vision.

Many organizational leaders and trainers are just as guilty when they fail to lay out the big picture of how a specific training might fit into that vision. For example, my first draft of a training on implicit bias failed to show two things. First, how the training was relevant to their jobs; and second, how the training fit into and was relevant to the big picture of "strengthening families and child wellbeing." In this regard, without cueing up the long-term implications and job relevance, I experienced several unit members and supervisors who resisted my workshop just by viewing the name and a short workshop description.

This resistance response is typical when an RTC or trainer mentions the words: diversity, culture, or inclusion because in today's climate, many case workers may not associate any diversity issues as relevant to child welfare best practices.

One forthcoming workshop participant told me that when he is "forced" to take a workshop involving the words diversity, culture and inclusion, he feels all discussion within the workshop will be similar to having a discussion on political correctness (PC). It seems, according to my participant that: "in today's climate, even well-informed people are turned off by words or concepts associated with PC." Unfortunately, many child welfare employees fail to make a distinction between a politically correct statement and empathy for individual differences.

My implicit bias workshop was designed to bring awareness of how our unconscious mind can limit empathy toward differences. Unfortunately, because of the notion of PC, the exact opposite occurred. When some people hear the word "bias" they automatically moved to a defensive posture-and in many cases begin to resist the content or the person.

Still, I bear some responsibility for the resistance experienced in my implicit bias workshop; I failed to highlight the implication of implicit bias to staff development or to the long-term vision that continues to promote ever-changing best practices.

Tying the Workshop to Agency Goals and Outcomes

Fortunately for me, the NCORTC coordinator, Gina Callender, discovered this gap in my training draft. She suggested that I add a section on overlooked father involvement in child welfare as a best practice for child wellbeing (a long-term vision for her agency). This one suggestion not only improved the relevancy of my implicit bias workshop to staff development, but it linked the agency leadership's vision to increased father engagement.

This one change articulated in my workshop's opening statements (that unconscious bias in fatherhood involvement limited child wellbeing), moved the words implicit bias from an abstract concept to a burning concrete issue most workers and supervisors face. The

outcome was a lower resistance to the overall workshop content, which hopefully translates to increased fatherhood engagement.



Daniel A. Houston

Brief Biography

With a background framed by poverty, strong family, and a drive to learn, Dan Houston set goals to be a leader in whatever field he was blessed to till. By stretching his boundaries, he became an executive director and certified leadership coach with the John Maxwell Team, an international trainer, and program evaluator. He is also a co-author of *A Better World: A Framework for Diversity, Inclusion & Engagement*. As CEO of The 1750 Group, Inc./Daniel Houston & Associates, Dan has enjoyed conducting diversity and management training and leadership coaching across the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, Russia and Japan. He has spent more than twenty-five years as an Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP) trainer-of-trainers on diversity, leadership, and communication strategies. Additionally, he is an approved executive coach with the OCWTP.

The State Universities of New York at Stony Brook and Albany, as well as Northwestern University awarded Dan bachelor's and master's degrees. Continuing his thirst for growth, he received doctoral-level training in management science, group dynamics, and organization development from Northwestern University.

Dan is married to award-winning author and publisher, Melanie Houston. Their daughter, Alexis, is a graduate of East Carolina University with a degree in nursing. Dan's memberships include Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., the American Psychological Association, and the American Society for Training and Development.

[1] Source: <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/researchandstrategicinitiatives/> Accessed December 5, 2019. **The Implicit Bias Workshop**