

Try These Strategies to Reduce Implicit Bias in Your Workplace

By [Kathy Gurchiek](#) April 22, 2020

We all have bias; it's a human condition. But HR professionals and their organizations can mitigate the effects of implicit bias, beginning with the employer's recruiting and hiring process and continuing through the employee's growth within the organization, said Eric Ellis, a speaker at the Society for Human Resource Management's (SHRM's) Talent virtual conference.



Ellis is president and CEO of Integrity Development Corp. in Cincinnati, a member of SHRM's Diversity & Inclusion Special Expertise Panel, and a subject matter expert for SHRM's newly developed [Inclusive Workplace Culture specialty credential for HR professionals](#).

He shared the following tips during his conference session.

Recruiting, Interviewing and Hiring

- Make sure your referral processes are robust and inclusive. He suggests employers look to offer internships and scholarships to minorities; attend career fairs where diverse talent is more likely found; consider job referrals from employees of different ethnicities or backgrounds; and use diverse job boards.
- Decrease and eliminate biased requests from supervisors. That can include, for example, where candidate searches are conducted.
- Carefully check algorithms that your employer uses to find job candidates. Artificial intelligence (AI) is dependent on human-programmed algorithms and data. [Left unchecked, AI can institutionalize biases](#).
- Confirm that there is accountability in the recruiting of diverse job candidates.
- Make sure recruitment panels are diverse, and carefully plan who conducts [interviews, which should be both structured and unstructured](#). Structured interviews ask the same questions of all candidates to ensure consistency, while unstructured interviews are more free-form and can help put a candidate at ease, Ellis said.
- Establish a consistent process for evaluating job candidates.

Developing, Evaluating and Recognizing

Reducing and eliminating bias does not stop once someone is hired. It's important, Ellis said, to send a strong message that your organization wants that person to be a part of the organization's success. To that end, employers should:

- Coordinate placement of diverse candidates so they are with the most-effective managers and leaders and match them with effective sponsors and mentors. [Ellis pointed to PepsiCo as a good example](#). Company leaders there use research-based strategies to identify employees who display a high potential for leadership, are transparent in how they develop leaders, and adapt their leadership style and approach to a changing business environment.
- Verify equity in your reward and recognition systems.
- Ensure everyone has access to professional development and stretch assignments.

He also advocated the importance of slowing down your thinking to better understand how bias exists within your organization—and yourself. Focus on how employees are evaluated.

"We are doing so many things so fast, it's hard for us to make really good, sound decisions and include enough perspective to be fair," he said.

A supervisor may feel rushed to complete reviews and may base evaluations on how the employee most recently performed rather than on the employee's performance for the entire evaluation period. Or the supervisor and employee may perceive that performance differently. Ellis recommended centralizing and calibrating how performance is measured. Instead of an annual performance review, move to a quarterly review that is based on weekly calibrations.

In a weekly calibration, the employee identifies—and the supervisor approves—four or five tasks that will be undertaken that week. At the end of the week, the supervisor and employee assess the employee's performance. If the supervisor rates the employee's performance low on the performance scale and the employee rates himself high, Ellis said, the two need to talk about performance expectations.

Engaging and Communicating

- Evaluate workplace flexibility options. [Benefits often associated with younger workers, for example, could be equally appealing to older employees](#) and [flexible schedules for caregivers should not be limited to mothers](#).
- Survey employees' well-being and sense of belonging so organizations can learn how to be more welcoming.
- Create and maintain employee affinity networks or employee resource groups.
- Share turnover data about your diverse employees to show key decision-makers the importance of developing employees from diverse backgrounds.
- Conduct "stay" interviews.

Be intentionally inclusive, Ellis urged conference attendees. Ask "how am I going to disrupt the unconscious bias throughout all the stages of our talent lifecycle?" and begin to recognize the need "to 'own' my own bias and create a psychologically safe environment where other people could do the same."