



Earlier this year, I published my third book, *Crisis as a Platform for Social Change from Strawberry Mansion to Silicon Valley* (<https://outskirtspress.com/>). In my book, I discuss bias, and since that time, I have noticed an awareness and openness to talk about what bias is, who has it, and how it is used. In January, I spoke on the issue at a Diversity and Inclusion Conference, and the room was full – some individuals were strongly interested.

The intent to support equal opportunity for everyone is not enough because there is a huge difference in equal opportunity and true equity. Equity and equality are two strategies organizations can use to produce fairness. Equity is giving employees what they need to be successful. Equality is treating all employees the same. Equality aims to promote fairness, but it can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same help. Herein lies the problem. All employees do not have access to what they need for a fair opportunity. Realizing this difference and exploring where it takes place is an essential step in creating change. Understanding the problem is not enough; organizational leaders must act.

Most people don't wake up in the morning thinking consciously about the issue of bias or thinking about the impact of our biases on employees in our organization. I don't believe people intend to marginalize some people, but intent does not equal impact and avoiding exploring individual and organizational biases only perpetuate the problem. Here are four things to keep in mind in exploring implicit bias:

1. Examining your implicit biases should not and does not need to make you feel guilty or ashamed. Guilt and shame are often paralyzing and halt progress. Looking deeper can fuel our inner desire to be change agents and helpful when understanding how our biases can contribute to changing rules, procedures, practices, and laws that are inequitable. I believe exploring, without being defensive, is the first step to creating an inclusive workplace. We get out of the silos our biases have created and build community and purpose.
2. Exploring our biases does not mean we're a bad person. Everyone has biases, and some of our biases may include race, ethnicity, gender, class, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, religion, etc.). The thought that making changes, removing barriers to access for others, threatens us with the belief that we will lose something is a very dualistic view of the world or situation. It is an "either/or" attitude, and it must be a "both/and" if we are to collaborate and come up with ways to create equity.

3. The fear of honestly looking at the reality of bias is not a real fear, one that is a life or death situation. I contend that fear is the primary reason change does not happen, even when there is an intention to change. We don't necessarily like to admit fear, but our biases, which we all experience at some point, keep us safe – at least we like to think they do. But if we are committed to making a difference and creating change in the dismantling of systemic privilege, we must acknowledge our biases.

4. Our willingness to show up, open, and ready to have a dialogue (not debate) about this issue is a message we send, whether we know it or not. We may “step in it,” and it won't be perfect, but that is not the point. A wise colleague and friend told me a compelling quote: “You are not responsible for your first thought, but you are responsible for your second thought. Which choice will you make?” So, understanding that our unconscious biases and beliefs drive our thoughts and behaviors helps give us the space to pause, allowing a little slack on the first thought, and challenge the source and the truth of this automatic response.

So, if you are ready to take the discussion further to move the needle for greater inclusion, here are some steps you can take to engage and make a difference:

- The next time the issue of implicit bias comes up in conversation, commit to staying with the discussion. Be aware of your initial thoughts and reactions and remain present.
- Explore your own journey and story, and question how you contribute to the problem by “staying out of it.” Be patient.
- Observe how bias manifests and perpetuates a message in the media, and the policies, procedures, rules, and laws that keep it in place. Find a way to bring awareness and be part of a progressive action to dismantle systemic privilege.