PRESENTER'S GUIDE

"<u>UNCONSCIOUS BIAS</u>"

Part of the General Safety Series

Quality Safety and Health Products, for Today... and Tomorrow

OUTLINE OF MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS

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The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the program. The outline can be used to review the program before conducting a classroom session, as well as in preparing to lead a class discussion about the program.

- **An "unconscious bias" is a quick and very often inaccurate judgement, typically based on limited information that has been gleaned from a number of sources, including…**
  - Our own life experiences.
  - What other people tell us.
  - What we see and hear in the media.
  - What we are taught in our institutions, such as school or church.

- **Biologically speaking, "unconscious biases" occur naturally in the brain, so everyone has them.**
  - In fact, biases are the brain's attempt to conserve energy, recognize patterns and keep us safe.

- **Studies have shown that we are bombarded with 11 million pieces of data every second.**
  - Yet the brain can only be "consciously" aware of about 40 of them.

- **So it is constantly trying to sort out what we are going to pay attention to… and looking for anything that can help it make these decisions.**
  - Drawing on our storehouse of "unconscious biases" provides the brain with "shortcuts" in its decision-making process.

- **If a situation "fits" into one of our biases we can decide things "automatically", so we can move on with our day.**

- **Unfortunately, the perceptions and assumptions that are based on our "unconscious biases" are often incorrect.**
    - And while we may thing that we are being deliberate, rational and thoughtful, our "conscious" thinking is actually a very small part of what drives our actions and judgements.

- **When our "unconscious biases" come into play, if people don't "fit" into our expectations we can have trouble recognizing their capabilities and potential.**

- **Many of us think of biases being about things such as…**
    - Gender.
    - Ethnicity.
    - Skin color.
    - Religion.
    - Age.

- **However, we can be biased regarding almost anything, including…**
    - Dress.
    - How someone talks.
    - Where they live.
    - What they do in their free time.

- **While we typically think of "biases" as negative, they can be positive as well… which ironically can still result in a bad outcome.**
    - This is often because we identify with a trait or characteristic that they have that we have as well.
    - For instance, when we view someone as "qualified" because they went to the same school we did… not because we know that they can do the job they are applying for (this is often called "affinity bias").

- **The bad news is that it's almost impossible to eliminate our biases.**
    - After all, they are ingrained in our brain.

- **The good news is that while they are "unconscious", we can work to unearth and mitigate them.**
    - It is important to remember that having "unconscious biases" is different from being "discriminatory".
    - Discrimination is a purposeful action, whereas doing something based on an "unconscious bias" is not.

- **Most people think of bias as being as "individual" thing.**
    - You are biased toward a particular person, or type of person.

- **However, biases can be wide-ranging and have many effects, impacting…**
    - The type of people we work with.
    - How efficiently our company runs.
    - Even whether the company makes a profit.

- **It can begin with the hiring process.**
    - Is a job applicant being evaluated based on their capabilities and not on their race or gender?
    - If someone is hired or not hired because of an "unconscious bias", the company may not be getting the best person for the job.

- **"Unconscious biases" can affect promotions and salaries as well.**
    - Are they based on performance or something else?
    - If they are influenced by an "unconscious bias", people may be getting promoted who are not the best suited for the job… or aren't qualified for the position at all.

- **"Unconscious biases" are even able to affect job assignments and responsibilities.**
  - Are they given out based on an employee's capabilities or because we just "like" them or they "look the part"?

- **At best, if assignments aren't based on capabilities, we could be underutilizing employees who have real talents.**
  - At worst, the company may not be putting out the best product or providing the best service as a result.

- **On a personal level, "unconscious biases" can affect our ability to work with others, which can create a very tense workplace.**
  - It can also cause us to miss opportunities to learn from someone who has a different perspective or set of skills and rob us of the chance to get to know new and interesting people as well.
  - It could even thwart our own professional growth.

- **On a more company-wide level, "unconscious biases" can stifle creative thinking and innovation.**

- **If we aren't willing to listen to diverse points of view from people who aren't "just like us", we can miss opportunities to create products with unique attributes or that could appeal to a wider range of customers.**
  - This is also true when working with people outside of our organization.
  - More and more companies are seeing a real mix of people in their customer base, as well as the vendors that they work with.

- **Every day you may need to interact with people...**
  - — Of all ages.
  - — Of multiple genders and gender identities.
  - — Who have different sexual orientations than you do.
  - — With physical or mental disabilities.
  - — Who are racially or ethnically different from you.

- **The more diversity that your company has in its own thinking, and staffing, the better it will be able to relate to different types of customers and vendors.**

- **As you can imagine, all of these things can have a significant impact on a company's financial success.**
  - — The better you can relate to a diverse group of customers, the more products and services your company will sell.

- **The more you can identify with an international customer, the better the chance you have of doing business with them too.**
  - — The better you can relate to vendors, the lower your costs and more efficient your supply chain will be.
  - — The better your company does, the more likely you will reap be to the benefits as well.

- **Two of the most recognized types of "unconscious bias" are racial and ethnic bias.**
  - — A lesser talked about but associated bias is "name bias".
  - — Ironically, the United States, which was largely settled by immigrants of many different races and ethnic groups, has an unenviable history regarding these types of biases.

- **Over the years the Irish, Europeans, as well as people from Slavic and Asian countries have all had to fight for acceptance in the U.S.**
    - Blacks are still fighting to overcome the country's history of slavery and denial of basic civil rights.
    - Much of this resulted from "conscious bias"… i.e. "discrimination".

- **There are also many people who feel that they view everyone as "equal", but are carrying around an "unconscious bias" against some racial or ethnic group.**

- **For instance, one study looked at whether employers had any biases built into their job search activities.**
    - It showed that from a diverse and equally qualified group of applicants, people with Asian last names were 28% less likely to be called in for interviews than people with Anglo last names.
    - Blacks faired even worse, receiving 50% fewer callbacks than Anglo's.

- **Another survey found that doctors in the U.S. believed that Blacks were more than 30% more likely to come to them with minor complaints than their other patients.**
    - They also felt that Blacks were less likely to follow through with treatment regimens… both of which resulted in Black patients being taken less seriously.

- **So what can trigger racial and ethnic "unconscious biases"?**
    - The obvious culprits are appearances… skin color, hair texture and the like.
    - Things such as accents and speech patterns, dress, even the food that we see someone eating can trigger these "unconscious biases" as well.

- **Names are also a common "unconscious bias" trigger.**
    - We can also feel that if someone has a "foreign sounding" name they must have a different ethnicity than us.

- **As with all biases, racial and ethnic "unconscious biases" can affect us in a number of ways.**
    - As we relate to other people that we work with.
    - Making hiring and promotion decisions.
    - Even selecting people to be on a project team.

- **From a company perspective it can result in a less harmonious workplace, as well as one that is less effective.**
    - So it's important for each of us to discover what "unconscious biases" we have, and work to mitigate them.

- **"Gender bias" is one of the most common forms of "unconscious bias", and while it is generally thought of as affecting predominantly women, it can impact men as well.**

- **Gender bias can be evidenced in both "positive" and "negative" ways… where men and women are assumed to be "good" at certain types of things, but "not good" at others.**
    - A common example, and one that is written about a great deal, is that there are not a lot of women in higher ranking management positions.

- **While in recent years many companies have started to work proactively toward "gender equality" by establishing policies that help women to advance their careers, "unconscious gender bias" still seems to be impeding their progress.**

- **Even when a woman demonstrates that they are very good at their job and are well qualified to "move up in the ranks", in many cases an "unconscious bias" appears to result in people thinking that…**
  - They aren't "tough enough".
  - Don't have the "business savvy" that is necessary to hold these high-ranking positions.

- **At the "operating" level people often seem to assume that women really wouldn't be good at certain other types of jobs either.**
  - Frequently these jobs require physical strength, but can also include positions that involve math or "critical thinking and analytical" skills.

- **"Gender biases" can also evidence themselves in group discussions and meeting.**
  - Depending on the topic, a woman's ideas may be given only "lip service" or ignored altogether because people feel that she isn't "qualified" to contribute.
  - On the "positive" but what can be equally damaging side, is an "unconscious bias" that women are "more creative" and "more sensitive" than men.
  - This can lead to real "mismatches", putting a woman in a role that she really isn't suited for.

- **Men can be adversely affected by "gender bias" as well.**
  - It can stymie them when they aspire to positions that have traditionally been filled by women… or jobs that need skills like creativity or sensitivity, which are more often thought of as "women's strengths".
  - It can also make people uncomfortable when they are working with them.

- **For instance, some people often feel that it's awkward when a male nurse is caring for them or a man is a receptionist or a secretary.**
  - To this day, men who are elementary and even high school teachers can be looked on as "oddities", subject to both "conscious" and "unconscious bias".

- **"Sexual orientation bias" has also been around for a long time, but has taken on a number of new forms in recent years.**
  - Many people suffer from an "unconscious bias" towards those who aren't of the same sexual orientation as they are (in most cases "straight" male or female).

- **As with gender bias, this can lead to difficulty in establishing good working relationships, as well as not utilizing people within your company to their fullest potential.**
  - So it is incumbent on all of us to try and overcome these biases and realize that people of all sexual orientations and identities have a lot to contribute… for our own and our company's sake.

- **A person's age or disability can often give rise to an "unconscious bias" that can be particularly difficult to overcome… for several reasons.**
  - They are somewhat rooted in fact.
  - For many of us, our capabilities do change as we get older, or if we suffer some type of physical or mental disability.
  - Also, restricting an older disabled person's activities often makes us feel that we are doing a good thing… helping to protect them from situations that could harm them.

- **Your "instinct" may well be to not put a coworker in a situation that you feel will "tax" their strength or other capabilities, or be difficult for them to handle.**
    - One of the problems with this is that not all of us are affected by aging or a disability "equally"… but our "unconscious biases" paint everyone with the same brush.
    - So while your coworker may be in great shape at 50, you may really be starting to "feel it" at the same age.
    - Your "unconscious bias" will project this onto everyone else who is your age.

- **Consequently, it can often be hard to judge even "consciously" what capabilities that someone of a certain age has, and even more difficult to sort out your "unconscious bias" about it. As a result…**
    - Your company can suffer as well, because the most qualified people may never end up, or stay, in the jobs that they should have.
    - You may not produce the best product or provide the best service possible.

- **For example, a mechanic or factory worker may have built up a wealth of knowledge about how to work on a machine they have been using for years.**
    - Because they have gotten older, and their job can require that they lift heavy parts or materials, they are no longer permitted to do that work.

- **Rather than make that determination based on age alone, a more "equitable", and logical approach would be to actually evaluate the worker's strength and dexterity.**

- **Likewise, instead of letting your "unconscious bias" stop you from assigning a person in a wheelchair to a receptionist job, see if they can function behind the desk and with the computer there.**
    - In many cases they would do just fine, or you could find that a couple of relatively easy adjustments would enable them to do the job… and the company could take advantage of that person's welcoming personality.

- **Like other "unconscious bias-driven" decisions, what it take to eliminate these types of potential misjudgments is to figure out what "unconscious biases" you may have.**
    - Then implement ways to "check yourself" for them during the decision-making process.

- **"Unconscious biases" are almost never a good thing.**
    - They can make it difficult for you to interact effectively with coworkers, adversely impact your professional growth and even cause your company harm.
    - So you need to do all that you can to get rid of them.
    - Unfortunately, in most cases you can't.

- **There are two challenges when you are dealing with "unconscious biases".**
    - First determining what biases you actually have.
    - Second, figuring out what you can do about them.

- **By definition, an "unconscious bias" is something that has become ingrained in your brain… resulting in a "reflex" that you pretty much can't control.**

- **So you can't just say "go away"!**
  - Once you identify that a bias is affecting decisions that you are making, you can however correct your actions.
  - But you can bet that the bias will surface again if you encounter a similar situation.

- **What you need to do is develop ways to "mitigate" the effects of your biases once you have identified that you have them.**

- **Let's take a look at how you can identify your "unconscious biases".**
  - There are two approaches that work pretty well.
  - One involves "self-awareness".
  - The other requires some help.
  - They both require work.

- **When you encounter a situations where you have to make a decision, first ask yourself...**
  - "What am I basing this on?
  - "Is there anything other than the logic of the situation that is pushing me in one direction or another… "prejudicing" what I am doing?"

- **The second thing that you can do to try and identify your "unconscious biases" is to ask a close friend or coworker for help.**
  - Explain to them what you are looking to do (identify your "unconscious biases") so that you can improve your interpersonal relationships and decision-making.
  - Ask them to let you know when they think you are acting based on a "bias".
  - This can be "in the moment" or after the situation occurs, but the sooner the better.

- **Once you have identified your unconscious biases you need to work to "wash them out" of the actions that you are taking and the decisions you make.**
  - There are several good techniques that you can use for this.
  - The first is similar to one of the methods that can be used to identify "unconscious biases".

- **Step back and look at each situation logically, not emotionally.**
  - Take your time and ask "Is this the most sensible and beneficial approach to what I am doing? Will it create the best outcome?".

- **Biases most often surface when we are rushed and don't think things through.**
  - So you need to allocate enough time to clearly identify what the requirements are for you to be successful, and who has them.

- **Remove the specific people you are dealing with from your thinking and base your actions on what you would do if they didn't have the attribute that your bias is based on.**
  - Would you still make the same decision?

- **Remember, biases can work "both ways".**
  - For example, when forming up a work team if you pass over certain teammates based on negative biases you might not pick someone who could be a great contributor to the project.

- **Conversely, a positive bias might cause you to pick someone who really doesn't have a lot to offer, just because you have a "good feeling" about them.**

- **Another thing that you can do to help mitigate biases is to involve other people in your decision-making process.**
    - Listen to their opinions, and if they have a different perspective on the situation, ask yourself why.
    - This can really point out when you may be about to make a decision based on one of your biases.

- **A third technique that you can use is to purposely choose to work with a person who you might not normally select because of an "unconscious bias".**
    - This can be beneficial in both the short and long-term.

- **In the short term, you could end up working with someone who would make significant contributions to what you are doing.**
    - Over the long term, it can remind you that someone like your new teammate could be a valuable addition to a team you put together, as well as someone you might work with in the future.

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- **"Unconscious biases" are not an easy thing to deal with. But if you are willing to put in the effort, it can result in big rewards.**

- **"Unconscious biases" can affect our decision-making without us even realizing it.**

- **"Unconscious biases" can be based on a number of things, the most common of which are race, gender, age and sexual orientation.**

- "Unconscious biases" can significantly affect working relationships and even how successful a business is.

- In most cases you can not really eliminate your "unconscious biases" but you can work to identify them and mitigate their effects.

- Now that you know something about the causes and potential effects of "unconscious biases" you can start working on yours… and becoming a better coworker and a more effective employee.