

Use Your Network to Short Circuit Your Biases

Did you know there are at least 150 different types of biases? This means there are 150 possible ways of making decisions based on flawed reasoning at an unconscious level.

As a leader, how many decisions do you have to make in a day? Hurried decisions, people decisions, time and money decisions, creative decisions...*How many in a week?* The more pressured you feel to make the decision the more likely you are to rely on your “favorite” set of biases. Biases that you have been fine-tuning over many years and for many different reasons.

According to researchers*, education and training to make you aware of your biases does little to lessen your non-conscious reliance on them. In other words, biases work on us so fast and so powerfully it’s extremely difficult to catch and reverse ourselves in the act.

So, how can expanding your network help short-circuit the unconscious bias mechanism?

Seeking alternative points of view is one way of changing our process for decision-making that can uncover and reduce our biases. A whole subcategory of biases relates to our objectivity (perhaps you’ve heard of some of these: Bias Blind Spot, Fundamental Attribution Error, Hindsight Bias, False Consensus Effect, the list goes on*) that is, all the ways in which we falsely believe we see the world accurately. If others agree with us, they too see it accurately. If they disagree with us, they’re inaccurate. These particular biases can negatively affect our creative decision-making. Since we are convinced we “see” reality objectively, we must be able to come up with the best solutions. People who see it differently are crazy, stupid, mean...insert adjective here.

Who do you go to when you have to solve a problem? Do you walk down the hall (or instant message) to the same teammate who sees the world exactly as you do and confirms your best and brightest ideas? Or

do you actively seek out alternative points of view? Who do you include in your *active* network and are they helping you expand your perspective and possibly expose and undo your biases? How can you intentionally expand your network to invite diverse perspectives? Who can you begin forming relationships with to help you see problems and ideas through another person's eyes?

Here are some possibilities:

- Begin building or strengthening relationships with peers in different functional areas other than your own. Ask them what the world looks like from where they sit.
- Engage your boss in conversations that help you gain a broader, higher-level perspective of the organization.
- Seek out professional networking opportunities in which you can engage in meaningful conversations about your work, such as group coaching and cohort base-trainings. Be sure to use these opportunities to intentionally solicit a diversity of perspectives.

The next time you need to make a creative decision, whom will you go to for an alternative idea, or two or three, before you proceed?

* From Dr. Josh Davis at NeuroLeadership.org

© Kande Culver McDonald, 2015