

# Unbound Ideas

Presents

## **Bias-Free Leadership: Making diversity work for your organization's competitive advantage**

*With Sondra Thiederman, Ph.D*

**Thursday, February 18, 2010**

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Eastern  
12:00 Noon – 1:30 p.m. Central  
11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Mountain  
10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Pacific

**Moderator:**  
Dr. Shirley Davis



February 18, 2010

Dear Attendee,

Unbound Ideas and our moderator, Shirley Davis, are pleased to have you join us in welcoming influential thinker and author Dr. Sondra Thiederman.

In this packet, you'll find the presentation slides that Dr. Thiederman asked us to forward to you in advance. The slides only include those you are intended to see before hand, and the full presentation may be more extensive and contain elements not in these slides.

Also included is an executive preview titled "How to Defeat Unconscious Bias" and a self-testing quiz that proposes several scenarios where bias may be have been present. You are asked to evaluate each situation and decide if bias played a role in the outcome.

Remember, you may send this document to anyone who intends to join you on site for the event and you may make as many copies of the material as will be of use to you.

Finally, as part of your registration you will be receiving a copy of *Making Diversity Work: Seven Steps for Defeating Bias in the Workplace*. Look for it in the mail shortly.

Thank you in advance for joining us!

Sincerely,  
Unbound Ideas

# How to Defeat Unconscious Bias

By Sondra Thiederman, Ph.D.

Anytime we want to change an attitude – which is exactly what a bias is – it is a lot easier to do so if we know that attitude exists. In the case of bias, we know it exists by what we say or by the inflexible thoughts that pop into our brains about different groups.

All-too-often, however, attitudes – including biases – are unconscious and, therefore, fail to produce any obviously recognizable words or thoughts. They, instead, quietly influence our decisions and behaviors in ways so subtle that they completely escape our notice.

That's the bad news, but here's the good news: There is a lot we can do to defeat biases even if they are unconscious and hidden from view. Here are just a few ideas to get these efforts started.

- **Display images that depict individuals in positions and situations that are “counter bias.”** Studies show that exposure to images that are inconsistent with bias have the power to change even the most unconscious of beliefs. The reason this works is the same reason that pervasive images cause biases in the first place – the images send a message that gets slowly but surely imbedded in the brain.

What these images are depends on the bias challenges and demographics of your workplace. Examples might be: A person with a visible disability depicted in a position of leadership; a woman depicted in a usually male dominated role (or the other way around); an older person deeply involved with technology. These images might appear on posters, in brochures, on your intranet site or in any other place that is viewed by members of your team.

- **Arrange for team members to interact with those who are different from them.** Nothing diffuses unconscious bias faster than contact between people who might have inflexible beliefs about each other's group. This interaction allows people of diverse backgrounds to get to know each other as individuals with common goals, not merely as members of a group about which they might hold an unconscious bias.

*In order for that contact to be most effective it needs to have these characteristics:*

- Be appropriately intimate (not too casual or brief)
- Be among people of roughly equal status
- Be positive in nature
- Be among a variety of members of the respective groups (group members of different ages, functions, etc.)
- Be oriented toward a shared goal

The specific way you make this contact happen depends on your workplace culture and logistical restraints. One common approach, however, is to arrange for volunteer activities that bring people of diverse backgrounds together around the shared goal of helping others.

- **Expose team members to information about individuals from a variety of groups.** You might, for example, have a team member who is a new American write a short article about her immigrant experience for an in-house publication or invite a person with a disability to share her story at a team meeting. This exposure allows us to realize that all members of a given group are not alike.
- **Encourage and motivate team members to treat each other with respect. That is, to act as if there is no bias.** Research shows that acting as if we do not have a bias has the power to reduce that inflexible belief even if we are unaware that it exists. One reason this strategy is effective at reducing unconscious bias is that, the more we treat people with respect, the more positive responses we will receive; the more positive responses we receive, the more time we are apt to spend getting to know individuals from that group; the more individuals we know, the more we realize that all members of the group are not alike. The result? Our bias begins to fade.

# Can You Spot a Bias?

Sondra Thiederman, Ph.D.

***Bias = An inflexible positive or negative belief about a particular category of people.***

Basing your answer solely on what is on the page, which, if any, of these people are guilty of bias? I don't mean "might" be biased or "suspected" of bias, but absolutely, positively guilty?

**Case 1:** Juan, a 50-year-old manager, had occasion to interview a woman named Nancy who, at the time of their meeting, was in her mid-20s. After the interview, Juan said to his boss, "I'd like to hire her, but Nancy has quit four career-track jobs since college. We need someone willing to commit for the long run. It looks like some Generation Xers really do move around a lot."

**Case 2:** It was the end of a long day at the diversity conference, and Eva was tired and ready to relax. Figuring that most of the people she knew would be in the hotel restaurant, she walked in hoping to hook up with a dinner companion or two. Upon entering the room, Eva was glad to see that it was filled with conference attendees. There was one problem, however: Her friends were scattered between two large tables. At one table, everyone, like Eva, was white; at the other, everyone was black. Because she knew the folks at both tables equally well, she was faced with a dilemma. Where will she sit? If she were honest, she'd admit that her impulse was to go to the all-white table. It promised a little more familiarity, a little more comfort. In the end, she gave into that impulse and took a seat at the table with the folks who looked most like her.

**Case 3:** Ayana, an immigrant from Ethiopia, had been working at the department store for only three months. One morning, she was approached by a tall, blonde woman who asked her to find a particular item in another size. Upon returning from her quest, Ayana walked up to the wrong customer and said that her size was unavailable. The woman looked at Ayana blankly; Ayana had mistaken one white woman for another.

**Case 4:** When Harry heard his new neighbors speaking English with a Spanish accent, he guessed that they were from Mexico. After all, he figured, everyone else in his neighborhood had emigrated from Baja California. In a gesture of welcome, he packaged up some homemade chocolate chip cookies, knocked on the door, and made awkward conversation beginning with, "Hello, I'm your neighbor next door. Are you from Mexico? I vacationed there last year and it is a beautiful country." The couple became visibly upset at Harry's assumption. Obviously outraged, they defensively pointed out that they were from Argentina, not Mexico, and even went so far as to say something like, "How could you think such a thing?" Despite Harry's good intentions, his neighbor's were deeply offended. It took months to mend the rift.

**Case 5:** Being a lifelong lover of the blues, Mary was thrilled to be invited to a concert presented by her favorite artists. Upon arriving at the venue, she made her way to her seat, which was next to the only white person in the audience. At the end of each concert, the musicians had a tradition of inviting the crowd to shake something white in the air as a symbol of solidarity and optimism. When the call came to perform this ritual, Mary realized she had forgotten to bring the traditional white handkerchief so, without missing a beat, she grabbed the man next to her and playfully started shaking him.

**Case 6:** Cameron’s colleagues were just a little hesitant to hire Ming for the newly created IT position. Ming had a solid university background, but the job required extensive computer skills and his formal training in that area was weak. When the committee met to make the final decision, Cameron spoke vigorously in Ming’s defense saying, “Ming is very much a product of his culture, so I’m sure, like all Asians, he’ll pick up the technology easily.”

**Case 7:** Miriam works as a high-level administrative assistant and had had many bosses in her 25-year career; some have been men and some women. When asked which she preferred working for, she responded vigorously, “Oh, a man for sure. Women in powerful positions are just too demanding and controlling. Besides, once a female makes it, she forgets about helping the women who are still coming up through the ranks.”

**Case 8:** Len was in charge of hiring engineers for his division. Because of the large number of Asian residents in the community, his boss mandated that Len hire a certain number of Vietnamese and Chinese engineers within the year. As hard as he tried, Len failed to meet that goal. When asked why he didn’t hire more Asians, he said that the ones whom he interviewed lacked the assertiveness necessary for the job. On closer examination, it turned out that Len had misread the applicants’ lack of eye contact as a sign of passivity and indecisiveness.

**Case 9:** Gerry was a manager at a business journal based in New York City. One of his writers was a young woman named Liz. Liz was a satisfactory journalist but not quite up to the standards of the organization. Because of this, Gerry had gotten into the habit of editing her pieces rather than doing what he does with the men on his staff: send them back for a rewrite. When one of those men asked Gerry why he doesn’t edit their writing too, Gerry says, “Your situation is different. After all, Liz is a single mother, and you know they all have a rough time and deserve an extra break.”

## The Answers

### Case 1: Flexible vs. Inflexible—Juan Is Innocent

Juan was innocent because what he felt about Nancy was not an “inflexible belief about a particular category of people,” but an observed fact about a specific individual. If prior to meeting Nancy, he had said, “All Generation X employees change jobs a lot, I know that’s the way Nancy will be,” he would have been guilty of bias. Another sign of his innocence is the fact that, when referring to Nancy’s generation, he said “some” – “some Generation Xers really do move around a lot” – if he had said “all” his statement would have been inflexible and, in that case, a sure sign of a biased attitude.

### **Case 2: “Just Like Me”—Eva Is Innocent**

Being drawn to people like yourself is not automatically a symptom of a biased attitude. Often this attraction grows, not out of bias, but out of a desire for comfort and familiarity. Having said all that, a caution is in order here. Being comfortable with your own group is not a sign of bias, but failure to make an effort to be with others is a mistake.

It is a mistake because one of the key ways for you to stave off bias is to spend time with people who are different from yourself. In short, was Eva biased for sitting with other white people that night in San Francisco? No. Would she have been better served, in terms of building relationships and keeping bias at bay, if she had stretched herself a little? You bet.

### **Case 3: “All White People Look Alike”—Ayana Is Innocent**

Confusing one member of a race for another is often erroneously thought to be a sure sign of bias. If we wanted to, we could jump all over Ayana for mistaking one tall, blond customer for another. The truth, however, is that her error is nothing more than an example of the truism that groups of things or people that are unfamiliar look alike to our untutored eye.

### **Case 4: Reasonable Assumption—Harry Is Innocent**

Harry may be socially clumsy, but, if we judge only from what is written on the page, we have no reason to think him guilty of bias. In a perfect world, Harry would have asked his question about Mexico a bit more tentatively. He didn't, but that omission does not make him biased. Harry's only crime was drawing a reasonable conclusion (based on the country of origin of his other neighbors) and having it turn out to be wrong.

A word of caution: Although it is not necessarily a bias, it is still unwise to act on every reasonable assumption that comes along. If we did, we would be guilty of both legal and moral transgressions when we, for example, promote a man over a woman because of the possibility that the woman may quit to bear a child. There is no reasonable assumption more irrefutable than the fact that women are more likely to become pregnant than men, but that does not make it right, or legal, to act on the assumption that a pregnancy will actually occur.

### **Case 5: In the Spirit—Mary Is Innocent**

A good sense of humor, a comfort with oneself, and a willingness to laugh at the forces that divide our society have nothing to do with bias. When I heard this story from the white person who had been so warmly embraced, I fell a little bit in love with Mary. I imagine you did too.

### **Case 6: A Positive Bias – Cameron Is Guilty**

Surprised? Perhaps you let Cameron off the hook because he was saying a good thing about “all Asians.” I understand that temptation. After all, most of us would love to be able to, as Cameron put it, “pick up the technology easily.” However, if you look back at the definition of bias—“an inflexible positive or negative belief about a particular category of people”—it is clear that Cameron's attitude is as much a bias as if he had uttered that time-honored classic, “All Asians are inscrutable.”

### **Case 7: Bias from Within – Miriam Is Guilty**

The red herring in this case is that Miriam's inflexible belief was against her own group. Yes, even though she is a woman, she clearly harbors a bias that all women, once they have reached their goals, feel no responsibility to help others climb the corporate ladder. Intragroup bias is a

brand of prejudice, like positive bias, that often goes undetected. That's unfortunate because biases within groups not only have the same negative impact as any other bias, but they also have the power to seduce us into believing that bias is a viable way to think. If, for example, enough people hear Jan refer to her Japanese relatives as "hot off the boat," or Tony call other Italians "dagos," it is too easy to say to ourselves, "Well, if they feel that way about their own group, I suppose it's OK for me to as well."

### **Case 8: Ignorance is Not Bliss – Len Is Innocent**

Len failed to fulfill his manager's request, not because of a bias against Asian engineers, but because of ignorance of a cultural variation in communication style. Nobody had ever explained to Len, nor had he made an effort to learn, that some Asians immigrants drop their eyes during interviews as a sign of respect. He assumed this lack of eye contact meant that the applicants were either lying about their qualifications or lacked the confidence to tackle the demanding duties of the job.

Len was ignorant. He was ignorant of a cultural difference, and that ignorance kept him from making appropriate hiring decisions. Admittedly, this lack of knowledge is an incomplete defense and needs to be remedied. Still, ignorance—dangerous as it can be—is a far cry from racism or bias.

### **Case 9: Guerilla Bias™—Gerry Is Guilty**

Gerry would be very upset to learn of his guilt because he is one of the nicest of nice people. He has a good heart, never wants to hurt anyone's feelings, and likes to think well of others. The bad news for Gerry, and for those around him, is that he is a carrier of a particularly dangerous species of bias: "Guerilla Bias".

One reason Guerilla Bias is so dangerous is that it is difficult to spot and, therefore, tough to diagnose. Like the guerilla warrior who hides within stands of sweet-smelling foliage, Guerilla Bias lies concealed behind good intentions, kind words, and even thoughtful acts. In Gerry's case, his so-called thoughtful act was to edit Liz's manuscripts for her, rather than give her the opportunity to learn from her mistakes.

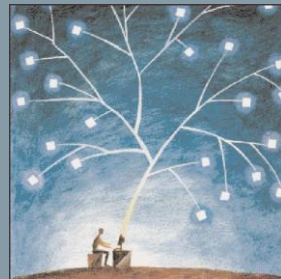
Another reason that Guerilla Bias, despite its soft persona, is so frightening is that it's based on the particularly destructive premise that certain groups are in some way, and for some reason, in need of special treatment. Because of this premise, it's easy to confuse Guerilla Bias with kindness—but there is a key difference. Guerilla Bias involves a belief that every single member of a particular group needs special treatment. A kindness, on the other hand, is directed at one person because of a given event or circumstance.

## SESSION SLIDES:

# **“Bias-Free Leadership: Making Diversity Work for Your Organization’s Competitive Advantage”**

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**Sondra Thiederman, Ph.D.**  
([www.Thiederman.com](http://www.Thiederman.com))



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## **The plan for this session....**

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**At the completion of this program, you  
will be able to...**

- **Explain what a bias is and what it is not.**
- **Identify bias in your own thinking and decision making.**
- **Practice five skills for reducing & managing bias.**

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## Participant Poll Question

Which of the following definitions of bias do you think is correct?

**Definition 1:** A “bias” is an inflexible negative, conscious or unconscious, belief about a particular category of people.

**Definition 2:** A “bias” is an inflexible positive or negative, conscious or unconscious, belief about a particular category of people.

**Definition 3:** A “bias” is a behavior that creates an environment inhospitable to a particular category of people.

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## Activity

- Write down the initials of a person whom you **very much admire**.
- Write down the initials of someone whom you **dislike or disrespect**.
- After the initials of the **most admired** person, record qualities that you **dislike** about that person.
- After the initials of the **disliked** person, write qualities that you **like** about them.



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## What Price Do We Pay for Bias in Our Workplaces?

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- **Reduced productivity**
  - Lost creativity
- **Wasted time**
- **Damaged relationships**
  - **Discrimination suits**
- **Lowered morale**
- **Reduced confidence**
- **Broken teams**
- **Lost employees**

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**The Good News:**  
**It is possible to minimize the  
influence of bias on our thinking  
and behaviors.**

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## Step I: Become Aware of Your Biases

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### The Question:

Why is it valuable to identify your own biases?

### The Answer:

Knowing your biases gives you the **power** to control the behaviors they create.



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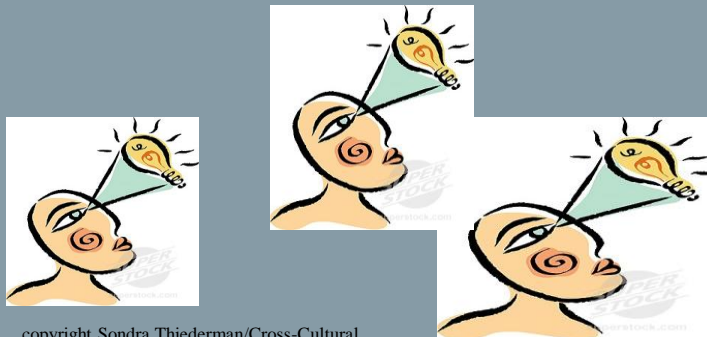
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## Step I:

### Become Aware of Your Biases (cont.)

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“Watch” the first thought that comes to mind when encountering a member of another group.



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**How can you tell if your first thought  
is in fact a bias? (cont.)  
("Bias I.D. Test")**

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**Ask Yourself:**

**"Would I feel the same way about this  
person's behavior if he or she were of  
a different group?"**



**How can you tell if your first thought  
is in fact a bias? (cont.)  
("Bias I.D. Test")**

---

**Ask Yourself:**

**"Did I think a word like 'all' or 'every' or  
'they' or did I imply an 'all' statement?"**



**How can you tell if your first thought  
is in fact a bias? (cont.)  
("Bias I.D. Test")**

---

**Ask Yourself:**

**"Have I had a memorable positive or  
negative experience with the group of  
people in which the characteristic I  
thought of was manifested?"**



**How can you tell if your first thought  
is in fact a bias? (cont.)  
("Bias I.D. Test")**

---

**Ask Yourself:**

**What do I do when I learn that an individual does not  
conform to my first thought?**

- **Accept that my first response was incorrect.**
- **Feel emotional and vaguely disoriented.**
- **Rationalize what I see to conform to my  
expectation.**
- **Do something to create what I expected.**
- **Decide that the person is an exception to the  
rule.**



## Step I: Bias Awareness **Resource**

### The Implicit Association Test (I.A.T.)

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/>

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## Step I: Bias Awareness **Follow-Up Task**



**For the next two weeks, notice the first thought that comes to mind when encountering someone from another group and subject it to the “Bias I.D. Test” found on the previous slides.**

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## Step II: Dissect Your Bias to Weaken Its Foundation

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### Question I:

**How did you learn your bias?**

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### Question

**In which of the following ways do you feel you have learned most of your biases (positive and negative)?**

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**Family**

**Friends**

**Media**

**Experience**

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## Step II: Dissect Your Biases to Weaken Its Foundation (cont.)

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### Experience:

A little experience is a dangerous thing.



- A negative experience is more apt to create a lasting bias.
- An experience does not always mean what you think it does.

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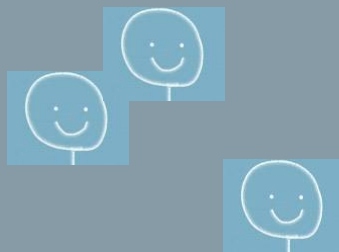
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## Step II: Dissect Your Bias to Weaken Its Foundation (cont.)

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### Question II:

How many people do you **actually know** who conform to your bias?



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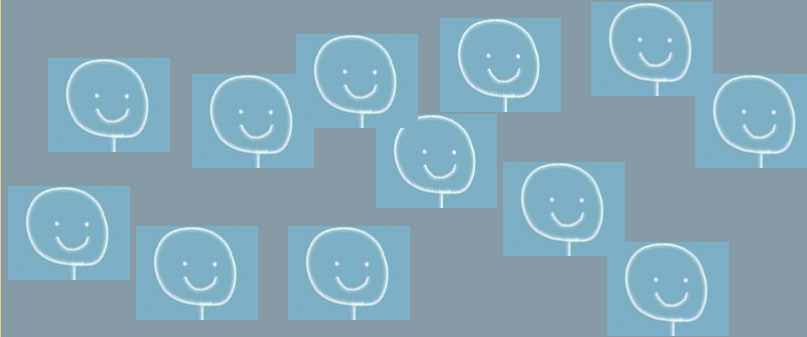
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## Step II: Dissect Your Bias to Weaken Its Foundation (cont.)

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### Question III:

How many people do you actually know who do **NOT conform** to your bias?



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## Step II: Dissect Your Biases **Follow-Up Task**

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Pick one of the biases revealed in Step I of this process and explore how and when you learned it. Ask yourself:

- Was that source reliable?
- Was the experience limited to a small group or even just one individual?
- Might the encounter have been distorted by fear or other emotions?

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## Step III: Identify Shared Kinship Groups

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**“Kinship Group” = Any population that shares a self- or externally-ascribed characteristic that sets it apart from others.**



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## Participant Poll Question

Which of the following statements applies to your workplace?

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- 1. In my workplace, we have plenty of activities that allow team members who are different from each other to interact.**
- 2. In my workplace, we do not have very many opportunities to interact with people who are different from ourselves.**

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### **Step III: Identify Shared Kinship Groups (cont.)**

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#### **The Question:**

**How does identifying what we  
share help defeat bias?**

#### **The Answer:**

**By transforming a “Them” into an  
“Us”**

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### **Step III: Identify Shared Kinship Groups (cont.)**

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#### **The Question:**

**Why does transforming a “Them” to  
an “Us” help defeat bias?**

#### **The Answer:**

**We tend to see members of other  
groups (“Them”) as all alike and  
members of “Us” as individuals  
with unique qualities.**

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### **Step III: Identify Shared Kinship Groups (cont.)**

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#### **The Question:**

**How Can We Transform a “Them” into an “Us”?**

#### **The Answers:**

- 1. Keep what we share “top of mind.” (“We notice what we decide is most important.”)**
- 2. Seek contact with team members whom we think are different from ourselves.**
- 3. Create opportunities for equal, positive, relaxed, authority sanctioned, and varied contact: affinity groups, clubs, interactive events, volunteer efforts.**

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### **Step III: Kinship Group Follow-Up Task**

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**Using the suggestions supplied here as well as your own creativity, design and implement three strategies for enhancing a sense of commonality and shared Kinship Groups within your workplace.**

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## Step IV: Act as If...

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***“Saying and doing  
becomes believing.”***

David Bem

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## Step IV: Act as If...(cont.)

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**“Acting as If” works because of...**

**... the discomfort of “cognitive  
dissonance.”**

**... the experience of positive  
responses.**

**... increased knowledge of individual  
human beings.**

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## **Step IV: Act as If...(cont.)**

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### **How to “Act as If”**

- 1. List behaviors that are consistent with an identified or unidentified bias.**
- 2. List the consequences of those behaviors.**
- 3. List behaviors that are inconsistent with bias.**
- 4. Commit to executing the inconsistent behaviors.**
- 5. Record the positive response those new behaviors generate.**

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## **Step IV: “Act as If” Follow-Up Tasks**

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- 1. Within the next two weeks, identify personal behaviors that are consistent with bias and commit to deliberately changing at least one of those behaviors.**
- 2. Pursue strategies in your work setting that will encourage others to undertake behaviors that are inconsistent with bias.**

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## **Addendum: Unconscious Bias**

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- 1. Display counter-bias images.**
- 2. Identify shared kinship groups (values, interests, etc.)**
- 3. Share accurate information about diverse groups.**
- 4. Encourage respectful behaviors in the workplace (“act as if.)**

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**Sondra Thiederman can be contacted to discuss how a webinar or teleconference can be custom designed for your team at:**

**Sondra Thiederman, Ph.D.  
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**Preview Sondra's just released training video, *Is It Bias? Making Diversity Work*, at [www.learncom.com](http://www.learncom.com)**

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**Thank you!**

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## Dr. Sondra Thiederman Biography



**Dr. Sondra Thiederman** is one of the nation's leading experts on workplace diversity, cross-cultural business, and bias reduction. As President of Cross-Cultural Communications, a San Diego-based training firm, Sondra has 25 years experience as a speaker, trainer, and author helping professionals in Fortune 500 companies, public sector organizations, and dozens of associations find ways to successfully navigate our increasingly diverse workplaces.

Since receiving her doctorate with an emphasis on cross-cultural studies from UCLA, Sondra has helped hundreds of groups develop solutions to their cross-cultural and diversity leadership challenges. Among her clients are such leading organizations as General Motors, Xerox Corporation, Pfizer

Pharmaceuticals, Marriott Corporation, the Mayo Clinic, Century 21 Real Estate, American Express, The Federal Reserve Bank, Motorola, and AT&T. She has also addressed notable associations including the Arthritis Foundation, the Mortgage Bankers Association, the American Society of Association Executives, and the American Immigration Lawyers Association. In addition, she has served as consultant to the University of California and the American Cancer Society and has been appointed by Elizabeth Dole to serve on the Diversity Cabinet of the American Red Cross.

Sondra has extensive media experience including mention in such national publications as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *U.S.A Today*. She is published in professional journals ranging from *T&D* to *Real Estate Today* to *Association Management*, and has written on diversity for the web site Monster.com. She is the author of four books including the award-winning *Profiting in America's Multicultural Marketplace* and, most recently, *Making Diversity Work: Seven Steps for Defeating Bias in the Workplace*.

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## Dr. Shirley Davis Biography



Dr. Shirley Davis currently serves as Director of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives at the Society for Human Resource Management, the world's largest HR association with more than 250,000 members in 140 countries, and over 575 chapters. In her role, she acts as the SHRM "thought leader" on global diversity and inclusion issues and is positioning SHRM to be the leader of diversity-related resources, strategies, thought leadership, and professional development. Dr. Davis designs and implements innovative diversity strategies to further SHRM's overall business strategy; acts as the staff leader to the Diversity Special Expertise Panel; the liaison to SHRM's Diversity Advisory Council, host of the SHRM Diversity Conference; and the representative

of SHRM's Diversity and Inclusion Initiative to the public. Dr. Davis travels across the country and internationally speaking on the critical challenges and complexities associated with managing diversity in a global workforce and marketplace. She provides HR, Diversity professionals and other business leaders with practical strategies and solutions that enable them to effectively develop, implement, and sustain their diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Shirley has more than 15 years of experience in Human Resources, Organizational & Leadership Development and Diversity Management. Shirley has worked at major Fortune 500 and 100 companies and has expertise in Training & Education, Leadership Development, Performance Management, Recruiting, Change Management, Strategic Planning and Global Diversity. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Pre-Law, a Master's Degree in Human Resources Management, and a Ph.D. in Business and Organization Management. Recently she joined the prestigious faculty at Georgetown University as an Associate Professor in the first ever Master's Degree program in Diversity Management.

Shirley is a member of numerous professional organizations, sits on several Boards and is very active in her church, community and family. She's a former Miss District of Columbia, Ms. Oklahoma and in 2000 won the national title of Ms. American United States.

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