



GFWC Communications and Public Relations Newsletter July 2019

Unconscious Bias

Unconscious Bias seems like a strange topic for the Communications and Public Relations Committee to be concerned about. However, each of us has bias and it puts a shadow over our communications.

For example, suppose I have a bias against people who dye their hair green. If I am in a club meeting and a potential member arrives with hair dyed green how am I likely to react to her? Will I eagerly go over and welcome her offering to have her join me and sit together? Will I sidle to another part of the room to avoid engaging with her? The bias impacts how I deal with her. She may be a great person who is really interested in the club's activities. She may have great ideas on how to fundraise and get new members. I will never know because my bias prevents me from learning about her and her interests.

Green hair is a "comfortable" bias to talk about. We laugh because it seems so absurd. Many persons react in similar manners to persons of a different skin color, with visible tattoos, piercings, religious choices. Your bias seems "ok" to you. The real question is whether the bias is "ok" or is it not as rational as you think.

Bias is normal and, in some cases, can protect us from danger. We make a snap decision not to cross the swollen street with our car or not to approach the person holding a knife pointed outward. Unfortunately, bias can also interfere with our ability to interact with and appreciate others.

Many biases are cultural or familial. We learn from those who raised us or who are around us. It is part

of our daily life so it seems "reasonable." One study on bias asked participants to label certain groups to indicate whether it was "always ok, sometimes ok, or never ok" to have negative thoughts about groups of people. Some were obvious like "rapists," but others were not, like farmers, male nurses, students who don't study, or men who stay home to raise children." Yes, some people felt it was "ok" to always have negative thoughts about these groups.

We all need to take a step back and try to be self-aware in our dealings with others. The first step is to admit that you have biases. Then ask yourself "how are those biases impacting my interactions with others?" Are you being fair to the person? Once you recognize that you are not being fair, try to learn more about what is causing your reaction. For example, in the above example try to learn why some people choose to dye their hair green. Maybe it is in memory of someone who dies whose favorite color is green and the funeral was yesterday. Maybe it is support of their high school soccer team. As you learn you become more comfortable.

Do not be afraid to talk about bias with others. We are all members of the bias club and can bring unique perspectives to the conversation. However, you have to be willing to really listen when others speak and not just disregard their perspective because it differs from yours.

Lastly, do not be afraid to go to someone and let them know that you feel they have been treated unfairly. As my mother said from the time I was born - Honesty is ALWAYS the best policy.

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