Table of Contents

Foreword by Todd Davis 5

Introduction: Unconscious Bias and How It Affects Leaders, Teams, and Organizations 7

FranklinCovey’s Framework for Understanding Bias and Unleashing Potential 17

Skill 1: Identify Bias 19

Skill 2: Cultivate Connection 27

Skill 3: Choose Courage 31

About the Authors 39

About FranklinCovey 41
Foreword by Todd Davis

As chief people officer of FranklinCovey, I’ve been privileged to be a part of this influential firm for twenty-three years. I could not be more excited for FranklinCovey to continue as a voice and an advocate for building effective organizational cultures by honoring inclusion as an essential component of that work.

On behalf of my colleagues around the world, I’m honored to introduce Pamela Fuller and Mark Murphy as the thought leaders of this Unconscious Bias monograph.

Pamela is a nearly ten-year associate, specializing in applying our solutions in the U.S. federal government. As our chief thought leader on inclusion and bias, Pamela’s work has always been tied to issues of diversity, with an emphasis on exploring the impact of bias. A strong commitment to the empowerment of historically marginalized groups of people has always been a factor in her professional and personal endeavors.

Mark has served as a senior consultant for more than two decades, and is adept at facilitating the majority of our solutions and coaching clients as an implementation expert. Mark also serves on the boards of several community-action groups that promote inclusivity.

You’ll likely find, as I did, that this monograph is an engaging read and an inspiring challenge to many of our paradigms about our own biases. We’ll be continuing the conversation as we offer this new solution to clients, and begin the important work of expanding this monograph into a full book available in the near future.

In my position of chief people officer, I take our commitment to inclusion and unleashing the talent of every employee very seriously. I’m looking forward to further implementing these principles inside FranklinCovey so we can model what we teach. In the words of our founder, Dr. Stephen R. Covey, “Be a light, not a judge. Be a model, not a critic.”
Introduction: Unconscious Bias and How It Affects Leaders, Teams, and Organizations

Recently I was hiring a new member of our team: a project manager who would be responsible for a breadth of moving parts for an important and demanding client. I was drowning in a sea of tasks and grateful to have finally gotten approval for this much-needed role. After several rounds of interviews, we offered the job to a motivated candidate with extensive customer-facing experience. She accepted the job immediately—then asked about the maternity-leave policy. She was pregnant.

Now, I passionately believe that workplaces achieve their highest performance when they allow their employees to be whole people, which includes taking time to adjust to big life events like having a baby. I’m familiar with a wealth of research connecting parental leave and flexible workplace policies to overall outcomes for parents and children. I have a personal mission to develop diverse leaders and create inclusive workplaces that support them. And as a working mother of two, I’ve taken maternity leave twice myself.

And yet... when this candidate asked about maternity leave, my heart sank.

How would my new team member handle the requirements of this new job and a new baby in the coming months? And maternity leave! She hadn’t even started, and already I felt a growing sense of panic about how we would cover her absence.

Stepping back from my initial reaction, I was ashamed—and a little shocked. I’ve worked for incredible organizations that allowed me time above and beyond what is required by law. My leaders gave me flexibility in travel and remote working, and were patient with the occasional coo, babble, or cry on video conference calls. In return, I’d created solid plans for coverage in my absence, ensured nothing fell through the cracks, and returned from leave with energy...
to exceed expectations. I’d been lucky to have empathy, confidence, and support from my leaders. And that was what I needed to offer this new employee; she deserved no less.

As a subject-matter expert in inclusion, I am not immune to the effects of bias. It is an ongoing reality—not something we learn once and conquer evermore, but something we must continually apply and examine.

Simply put, bias is a natural part of the human condition and can have real impact on how we define the possibilities of ourselves and others. The topic of unconscious bias can be a controversial one, fraught with opinions, political leanings, assumptions, and difficult interactions. But our experience and research has shown that bias is far more ubiquitous than we can even imagine—and it’s impacting our organizational results.

WHAT IS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Very few leaders purposefully set out to have biases. We move into new interactions and circumstances with good intent, and we think we’re making observations and decisions based on facts, when they’re actually often framed in our own paradigms, experiences, emotions, and preferences. As logical (and fair) as we try to be, we are nearly always operating with a degree of bias without ever being aware of it.

These biases kick in automatically before the chance to be deliberate, and often show up as likes and dislikes. As humans, we tend to prefer characteristics like our own or those society favors, and avoid characteristics that differ.

Unconscious bias arises from mental shortcuts that often serve a necessary and helpful purpose. We have so much information coming at us that our brains protect us by filtering out most of it and operating via shortcuts. This can be a blessing for time-strapped professionals, letting us make quick decisions without deliberating on every piece of information. But as we rush, we become prone to bias in ways we might find unacceptable if we paused to analyze the subtext. Without thinking, a hiring manager plowing quickly through resumes makes assessments: this school is prestigious, this name sounds successful, this resume format looks dated.
Essentially, it’s a capacity problem. We take in 11 million pieces of information each minute, but we can only consciously process about 40 of those bits. To handle the gap between the overwhelming stimuli and our processing ability, our brains build cognitive shortcuts to make sense of all of this information.

Some of these cognitive shortcuts are born from our survival instincts. We often say we feel things in our gut, but in reality, we feel them in our primitive brain. The fist-size part of the brain at the base of our neck reacts reflexively to stimulus—the things we see, hear, and experience each day.

Other cognitive shortcuts come from our identity, which in turn is formed by the billions of bits of information that have been poured into each of us over the course of our lifetime: our experiences, education, culture, context, and innate preferences. That reflexive response impacts our behavior: how we engage with others, who and what we pay attention to, what gives us “warm fuzzies” versus what repels us. This is where bias shows up, where our preferences are made clear.

From the need to take parental leave, to a heavy accent or a tendency to take risks, perceptions about others creep into our decisions. We have biases around gender, race, job function, personality, age/generation, socioeconomic status, family status, nationality, language ability, veteran status, culture, sexuality, weight, height, physical ability, attractiveness, political affiliation, virtual/remote working, hair color—even seemingly mundane characteristics, like how messy someone’s desk is or how powerful they look in their chair.

**Bias is a preference in favor of or against a thing, person, or group compared with another.** It may be held by an individual, a group, or an institution. It can have negative or positive consequences. This word “preference” is important; most people define bias as “prejudice” and inherently negative. But that definition feels accusatory and raises defensiveness, as if having bias makes us bad people, when bias is, in fact, part of being human, as discussed. If we define bias as a preference and learn how to determine the impact of those preferences, we can be open to making progress and improving possible negative impacts.
Not all biases are negative. Some biases are quite benign, like a preference for mountains versus beaches, or working from home versus the office. But other biases have significant impact, both positively and negatively in the world. For example, research in the *Harvard Business Review* revealed that 71 percent of leaders select protégés of the same race and gender, reinforcing the current and limited demographics of leadership. But should race and gender determine who is worthy of mentorship? Perhaps you feel most comfortable with people who share your interests, communication style, and views... but is that really the best way to put together a project team, make a hiring decision, or determine which stakeholders or customers to engage in a new initiative?

Considering our biases should be an additional step while making decisions. We can dig deeply into our mindset and examine whether it is inclusive or skewed. This doesn’t mean you can (or should) monitor every thought and action for bias against every kind of person. But you can revisit the overall fairness of your procedures and decision-making on a regular basis using the skills in this monograph to help build a more inclusive culture at work.

You might be asking, “With all that I am responsible for, with the pace at which I work every day, why should I put forth effort in making progress on bias? Why should I explore what can feel uncomfortable, even volatile? Shouldn’t we avoid poking the bear and just continue operating as we are?”

Let’s examine the consequences:

- **Reducing bias can help your team and organization get better results.** Companies in the top quartile on gender diversity are 21% more likely to over-perform in relation to their industry peers, and companies in the top quartile on racial diversity are 33% more likely to over-perform. And to the contrary, companies in the lowest quartile on gender and racial diversity are 25% more likely to underperform in relation to their industry peers.
– **Bias can cause your employees to disengage.** Employees who perceive themselves to be the target of bias are three times as likely to be disengaged, withhold ideas, and leave their job within the year.⁴

– **Diversity can help your team become more nimble.** Diverse teams that act inclusively make better business decisions 87% of the time, are twice as fast in decision making, and have half the number of meetings.⁵

– **You can increase innovation through inclusivity.** Diverse organizations that act inclusively see increased innovative efficiency, making more new-product announcements than other companies.⁶ To the negative, bias against diverse teams inhibits funding and organizational support for the projects of those teams.⁷ Research shows that individuals are less likely to take advice and input from women and accented voices than male and non-accented voices.⁸ How many innovative ideas are left on the table as a result?

Beyond its impact on organizational results, bias can drain your employees and harm their well-being. Catalyst, a global nonprofit working with some of the world’s leading companies to build workplaces that work for women, identified something called the **emotional tax**, “the heightened experience of being different from peers at work because of your gender and/or race/ethnicity and the associated detrimental effects on health, well-being, and the ability to thrive at work.”⁹ We presume that this tax exists across all manner of identifiers and differentiators, from having a disability to being the only non-degreed person on a team. This feeling of constantly having to be “on guard” disrupts sleep patterns, reduces the sense of psychological safety, and diminishes the ability to contribute to work. Once, while working with an important client in Europe, Mark partnered with one of his respected colleagues, “Jane,” who had authored the award-winning content they were presenting. He saw the impact of the emotional tax firsthand. The client would often ignore or talk over Jane, directing his comments only to Mark. As the client discounted her ideas over and over, Jane became angrier with every conversation, but she worked to hold her tongue. The client
is always right after all. Mark tried to ensure Jane’s perspective was heard, but it didn’t mitigate how limited she felt by the client.

As another example, a black participant in one of our Unconscious Bias work sessions discussed how he accommodates white people in his personal and professional life by making himself smaller, speaking softly, and not making sudden movements. As he shared his experience, I felt my own heart rate go up. My husband, at 6' 4" and built like a linebacker, has shared a similar reality with me. He is hyperaware of his place in the world, down to the details of where he is placed in a room, the volume at which he is speaking, and any manner of movement. This kind of self-monitoring takes an enormous toll.

There is a direct link between bias and results. Bias can inhibit decision-making, performance, innovation, and results. If there is anything you can do to increase performance for yourself, in your team, and across your organization, aren’t you compelled to do it?

On a personal level, negative unconscious biases often directly contradict our values—as when I confronted my own bias around the pregnant employee. Similarly, a manager might fully believe in diversity and then realize he’s only hired people with backgrounds identical to his own. As leaders, formally or informally, we have a responsibility to ourselves, our colleagues, and our teams to examine this alignment. Is something out of whack?

**MOVING TOWARD HIGHER PERFORMANCE**

Building an inclusive organization—where each individual feels respected and that their unique contribution is valued—has significant positive impact on organizational performance and culture. As organizations embrace this mindset, it can feel daunting to implement progress toward inclusion. The unconscious biases we have about others and ourselves have real impact in how we relate to one another, engage in teams, and achieve results. When we are not conscious of our biases, we can’t perform at the highest levels. We limit our thinking, our contributions, and our results.

The model on the next page illustrates this reality.
Stephen R. Covey said, “Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves.” If we see a team member as capable—because of their credentials, because they are similar to us, or because we just like them—we will treat them as if they are capable. We give them important assignments. We rarely miss our 1-on-1s. We bring them to high-visibility meetings and let them serve as our representatives. We ask their opinion on strategic decisions. They see our confidence in their abilities and rise to the occasion. They learn from each interaction, feel good about the trust we’ve put in them, and perform at a higher level.

To the contrary, we might see another team member as incapable if they don’t have the “right” credentials on their resume, they’re different from us in a way that feels conflicting, or we just don’t like them. Consequently, we try to avoid them, task them brusquely with no background, and cancel our 1-on-1s at the last minute. This person doesn’t have enough information or support to be successful and avoids asking questions since we seem frustrated in their presence.

The impact of our biases is performance. In the first example, that person was in the High-Performance Zone. In the second example, that person was in the Limiting Zone, perhaps even the Damaging Zone. Our goal is to step back from our bias, understand how it is impacting our behavior, and assess the impact on others. If we are in the Damaging Zone or Limiting Zone or causing others to be in those zones, we can use the skills at our disposal to make a shift to the High-Performance Zone.
Much of the dialogue in workspaces centers on the Damaging Zone, the most egregious of behaviors. In my experience, people start to tune out when conversations about inclusion move to harassment and discrimination—no one considers themselves capable of going too far. The consequence is that many of us couldn’t imagine we’d be in the Limiting Zone either, and that’s a mistake.

Looking back at our graphic, the two behaviors in the Limiting Zone are “ignored” and “tolerated.” For a long time, the diversity and inclusion space focused on tolerance. But what does it feel like to be tolerated? If my husband tolerated me, our marriage would be in pretty bad shape—we’d need counseling or other help to get to a better place. Tolerance in the workplace is, similarly, less than optimal.

In the workplace, people know when they are being ignored or tolerated—it’s a very different feeling than being respected, included, and valued. As a woman of color operating in many predominantly white environments, I’ve felt the sting of that Limiting Zone. Often if I bring one of my male, white, or senior colleagues to a client meeting, the client will speak directly to my colleague, despite the expertise I might bring to that conversation. And when this happened once, I thought, “It’s probably not a big deal.” But when it happened time and time again, I started to think, “Why am I being ignored? I’ve prepped for the meeting, connected in advance of the meeting to set expectations, and responded to the client’s needs. Is there something else going on here?” In the long term, you can see how this experience can hurt performance. I could start to believe that no matter my level of professionalism or preparation, I will not be valued in these conversations, so there’s no use preparing. Perhaps you’ve also experienced the Limiting Zone—what was the effect on your engagement and results?

All of this takes on more significance if you are a manager. People don’t quit jobs; they quit their bosses. Managers create culture with every word they say and even more important, every word they don’t say. If you’ve experienced the Limiting Zone, did that feeling of being limited in performance align to the behaviors of your manager? Chances are it did. For example, Mark once had a leader who clearly preferred one type of organizational role over others, ignoring the reality that they were all vital to the division’s success. He and his colleagues keenly felt the company’s preference toward one
department and away from theirs. It took a toll on engagement and morale. With some slight shifts in language and treatment, his leader could have moved this entire group of talent from the Limiting Zone to the High-Performance Zone. In fact, when a new leader came on board, that’s exactly what he did: advocating for all roles across the firm and treating each team like a core part of the company’s business. Engagement went back up.

It is our firm belief that there is no idea more fundamental to performance than how we see and treat each other as human beings. If we employ mindfulness, empathy, curiosity, and courage, we can understand bias and unleash the full potential within ourselves, with each other, across organizations, and throughout entire societies. In the next section, let’s explore how to do exactly that.
FranklinCovey’s Framework for Understanding Bias and Unleashing Potential

It’s a common misconception that you can’t do anything about unconscious bias. Our brains are not just wired for biases and preferences, but for neuroplasticity—the brain’s ability to create lasting change at any age. Because of neuroplasticity, we can rewire our thinking and biases. Creating change in our brain takes time, and more important, a conscious effort to create new neural pathways, but it can happen. Our goal with this model is to not only define bias, but provide a framework for making progress on something so innate—and daunting.

Our framework is built in three parts: Identify Bias, Cultivate Connection, and Choose Courage, each aligned to a corresponding principle. Dr. Stephen R. Covey said, “We control our actions, but the consequences that flow from those actions are controlled by principles.” Principles are timeless, natural laws, like gravity. If we adhere to these principles, we can make progress on bias.

Identity Bias—Self-Awareness
Cultivate Connection—Openness
Choose Courage—Growth
To **identify bias**, we must first know what it is, learn when we are most susceptible to bias traps, and understand some common terminology used to refer to different types of biases. Critical to this component of the framework is creating separation between what you feel and experience, and *why* you feel and experience those things. To effectively identify bias, we must take on the intellectual pursuit of introspection and build self-awareness.

Once we’ve identified bias, particularly negative bias, what can we do about it at the individual, interpersonal, and organizational level? One of our deepest human needs is to belong, feel connected, and be understood. The second component of the framework is around **cultivating meaningful connection** through empathy and curiosity. Empathy and curiosity are two sides of the same coin, the interpersonal and intellectual approaches to building connection. If we can meaningfully connect with others, we will often find ourselves surprised at what we learn, which is a clear check on biases and preconceived notions we might have had as we engage with someone. Cultivating connection gives us a path through bias by getting to know people for *who they are* versus *who we perceive them to be*. We must be open to those possibilities.

Armed with the skills to identify bias and cultivate connection, the final component of this framework is to **choose courage**. We often think of courage as a brash and bold act. But think of the last time you heard or saw a story that left an impression. Was it bold? Courage is not always loud or ostentatious; it is sometimes quiet and careful. Through a combination of careful and bold courage, you can make progress on bias. Our model includes four ways to act with courage: the courage to identify bias, the courage to cope with bias, the courage to be an ally, and the courage to be an advocate. In this section, we also provide a menu of associated skills and corresponding initiatives to support individual and organizational performance. In implementing those skills and corresponding initiatives, we allow for growth and impact.
Skill 1: Identify Bias

“There is no neutrality. There is only greater or lesser awareness of one’s bias.”
—PHYLLIS ROSE, AUTHOR

Remember that bias is not inherently negative; in fact, bias is a natural part of how the brain works. To see why, we need to understand the three major systems in the brain: primitive, emotional, and thinking.

The **primitive brain** is the home of our “fight, flight, or freeze” instincts. This is the part of our brain where our caveperson impulses live, the part that tells us that we should avoid touching fire, seek shelter from the elements, and find food when our bellies are empty. In the modern era, those instincts are still laser-focused on survival. One of our most basic and primal human needs is the need to belong—if we’re part of a “tribe,” we are safer and have a much better chance of survival. So our primitive brain is always automatically putting people, places, and things into categories. *Will this person or thing help or hinder my survival?* You can imagine the impact on how we unconsciously engage with others.

The **emotional brain** is grounded in memory and experience. It comes into the world as a blank slate and is programmed based on our values, beliefs, assumptions, and experiences. We often don’t even think; we just respond. Problems arise when the programming doesn’t serve us well or limits our ability to correctly interpret and fully engage with the world around us.

Finally, the **thinking brain** is where our higher-level processing, problem-solving, and creativity occurs. In many ways, this part of the brain separates humans from the rest of the animal world. We have the ability to step apart from our own values, beliefs, assumptions,
and experiences. We can see the world through someone else’s eyes. Interestingly, even when the thinking part of the brain is focused on higher-level processing, the primitive and emotional parts of our brain are still engaged, taking in information and doing their best to throw a wrench in the thinking. When we find ourselves in certain circumstances, the power of that primitive and emotional brain to keep us safe can overtake our thinking brain and our ability to consciously process and act.

Remember those middle-school word problems about a train and how fast it’s going? American researchers gave a group of individuals a baseline test on their math skills, then a problem to solve around skin care, then a math problem to solve around gun control. The results were fascinating. If the answer to the word problem contradicted the individual’s political beliefs around gun control, they couldn’t solve it for the correct answer. This was true of both conservatives and liberals. Their ability to solve the problem changed based on the beliefs they held. Their literal ability to do math, their thinking brain, changed.

And remember that initial math test? Participants were put into groups for how good they were at math. The better they were at math, the more difficult it was for them to solve a problem that contradicted their political beliefs.10

Like many of you, I consider myself a pretty sharp person. So it was mind-blowing to me that my smarts and capability would actually contribute to being more wrong or more closed off to accepting something I didn’t want to be true.

There are things we believe that can limit our possibilities and abilities. Consequently, there are things we believe that can limit how we see and define the possibilities and abilities of others. These beliefs can be so deeply ingrained in our brains that we literally can’t believe they are wrong. As one of my favorite philosophers, J. K. Rowling, said, “The best of us must sometimes eat our words.”
BIAS CAN ACTIVATE OUR PRIMITIVE AND EMOTIONAL BRAIN

Consider this: you’re having a feedback conversation with your boss. She’s carefully considered how she will frame this feedback, attended training on sensitive conversations, and read articles on how to effectively deliver feedback. She is operating in her thinking brain. The two of you sit down, and she begins to frame the feedback.

Immediately after hearing the word “feedback,” you feel your heartbeat accelerating, your eyebrows knitting... you fold your arms and lean back. You have a disability that requires an accommodation, and recently your colleagues have been complaining that you’re receiving special treatment. You’re positive that this “feedback” conversation is really an attempt to take away your accommodation, and you're not having it. You think of all the ways you’ve been slighted before, the focus on your disability and accommodation versus your work product, how unfair it is that no one acknowledges how hard you work. Sensing a threat, you are operating from the emotional or even primitive part of your brain.

Before the conversation has even begun, you are operating from one part of your brain and your boss is operating from another. When bias—or even the threat of bias—triggers our brains in this way, we talk past each other, often making the situation worse instead of better, moving into the Limiting Zone or Damaging Zone versus the High-Performance Zone. This example could be true of any circumstance: you are the oldest or youngest member of the team, the only engineer, the only woman, the most outspoken, etc.

BIAS TRAPS

So, what are the circumstances when our brain is most susceptible to bias? We call them the three bias traps: information overload, feelings over facts, and need for speed. When we are in these circumstances, our brain pushes more information to the side in order to focus on the 40 bits of information it can actively process. And in that process, our brain sometimes pushes aside important pieces of information.
Researchers have found more than 180 types of bias, or cognitive shortcuts, our brains make to handle living life. For our purposes, reviewing all 180 would be overwhelming (we’d fall into information overload ourselves!), so we’ve pulled out the most illustrative and common examples. That way, you can consider how bias might be showing up in your personal and professional life.

As you read through these examples, we recommend pausing after each and thinking of an example you’ve experienced, witnessed, or even been guilty of. Identifying bias begins with understanding, but it won’t impact results unless you’re willing to be introspective and explore the possibilities.

When we are in information overload, we’re bombarded with way more information than we could ever process. Our brains have learned to automatically filter much of that information, some of which might be very useful.

- **Confirmation Bias** is how we tend to seek out information that supports our own thinking. This is a way to filter out extra information and focus on what you’re looking for. For example, when we want to catch up on the news, we don’t watch all available outlets or do our own investigative reporting. We usually watch the news outlet that supports our political leanings so we can hear perspectives that align to our own. We rarely Google broadly. Instead, we Google what we know or believe to be true: “best vacation spots in Aruba” versus “best vacation spots,” or “poverty in Africa” versus “average income in Africa.”

- **Anchoring Bias** is how we tend to rely on the first piece of information we receive. This bias is evident in first impressions. We make a multitude of judgements about people’s character, intellect, ability, etc., within the first few minutes—or even seconds—of meeting someone. And once those biases are there, they can be awfully hard to replace.

**Feelings over facts** is when our brain converts how we feel about something into a fact. We saw a bit of this in the gun-control study mentioned earlier. In the absence of information, our brain fills in the blanks, often by drawing on how we feel about a situation. We then operate as if it is fact.
– **In-Group Bias** is our tendency to favor people who are like us and exclude people who are different than we are. This can show up in our hiring practices, who we select for teams, and even who we decide to work with on projects. Mark worked with a client who realized that In-Group Bias was negatively affecting important projects. So they did something truly innovative. Traditionally “important” projects were given to people with tenure, because the bias was that experienced people would have the most insight. To combat this, they mandated that when certain projects reached the threshold of truly “important,” they had to include at least one project team member with less than six months in the organization. They subsequently learned that much of the most innovative thinking was coming from the new hire who didn’t know how things were “supposed” to be done. Their fresh set of eyes provided a significant benefit. In fact, research has found that the presence of “socially distinct newcomers” can stimulate new thinking and more breakthroughs in a group.11 One of the data points we mentioned earlier—71 percent of leaders select protégés of the same race and gender—is another example of In-Group Bias. In this case, the tendency to seek similarity as a guideline for mentorship and coaching can have significant impact on the leadership pipeline and succession planning within an organization.

– **Negativity Bias** occurs when we are more powerfully influenced by negative experiences than by positive experiences. In Mark’s role as a facilitator, his participants often fill out evaluations at the end of a work session. He realized that in a class of 25 people, he could get 24 glowing positive evaluations, but inevitably obsess on the single negative comment. Similarly, we might work with a team member who is significantly different than we are—perhaps they speak with an accent, serve in a different job function, or lack a credential we have. Let’s say we’ve worked with this person before without any issues, but then they make an error. Negativity Bias would be present if we held on to the error to the exclusion of all the successes, and even extend it to the person’s identity (e.g., “This never would have happened if he’d just understood my instructions,” or “This really needed to be done by someone in sales.”)
**Need for speed** occurs when we take shortcuts to act quickly. Often these time-savers are based on bias and can be simplistic, self-centered, and even counterproductive.

- **Attribution Bias** occurs when we judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their actions. Stated differently, we give ourselves the benefit of the doubt and don’t extend that benefit to others. Mark has a dear friend whose partner he couldn’t get along with. It even affected the amount of time he and his friend would spend with each other. Mark decided to do a bit of a personal inventory and ultimately had a personal epiphany. He realized that many of the things that were annoying him about his good friend’s partner were the same attributes he knew to be true about himself. He was unconsciously evaluating himself on his good intent and judging his friend’s partner strictly on their behavior, without attributing any of the same good intentions he afforded himself. Consider team dynamics: You have a new team member in a role you used to do. It takes him much longer to submit a report than it did for you when you were in that role. You start to believe he’s a slower worker than you, ignoring the fact that you’d been in that role much longer than he has. And in circumstances like this, that attribution can even be extended to identifiers the person has, like being a Millennial, a woman, or an introvert.

- **Sunk-Cost Bias** is our tendency to continue things because we’ve invested time, money, or energy into them. It’s the idea that we have reached a point of no return. This bias can show up in our personal life when we have a hard time letting go of possessions, even after they’ve outlived their usefulness. It shows up many ways professionally as well: from the process we can’t see past because “that’s the way we’ve always done it,” to the projects we persistently continue to dump time and money into, even after we know the deliverable is not going to achieve the desired result.
As you’ve read through these examples, you’ve hopefully begun to identify experiences you’ve had or observed where these biases were at play. We encourage you to continue that exploration. Being able to identify bias—particularly when we are in circumstances that require our brain to focus on some information to the exclusion of potentially important data—is the first step to making progress and ensuring we can shift to high performance.
Skill 2: Cultivate Connection

“Never underestimate the empowering effect of human connection. All you need is that one person, who understands you completely, believes in you and makes you feel loved for what you are, to enable you—to unfold the miraculous you.”

—DRISHTI BABLANI, AUTHOR

Recently I was interviewing two candidates for an open position. I walked down to the lobby to meet the first candidate, who was tucked into a corner whispering into her phone. I smiled as I overheard the conversation, something about math homework that was reminiscent of the conversations I had with my own fourth-grader. As I approached, I made eye contact and smiled warmly. The candidate rushed off the phone and apologized while fumbling to put it away in her purse. I assured her, “I’ve been there. Haven’t we all?”

We made our way to the elevator and chatted about the life of a busy working mother. We discovered that we actually grew up not far from each other. As the interview started, the candidate stuttered through the first question, and I gave her an opportunity to answer again. “Interviews can be nerve-racking,” I said, reassuring her that her credentials were excellent and there was nothing to worry about. I continued to encourage her. She recovered and finished strong.

At the end of the interview, I felt great about the connection and what a good fit she would make on their team. I really enjoyed the conversation. I liked the candidate.
An hour later, I went down to meet the next candidate in the lobby. This was my last meeting of the day. By then, I was tired and keen to get the new position filled. I’d looked up this candidate on LinkedIn and noticed his elite connections. As we shook hands, I immediately noticed his fancy watch. *It seems too fancy for someone at his level,* I thought, *but it makes sense, since it doesn’t seem like he’s had to work for much in his life.* We went up the elevators in near silence, politely smiling at each other along the way. I didn’t have any strong connection with this second candidate.

As the interview began, I asked the same questions. As before, there was a slight stumble with an answer. I thought, “*He isn’t prepared. He should have a better answer than that. He knew he was being interviewed today, and that was a pretty standard question.*” As we went through the questions, I compared his answers to the previous candidate. The interview only lasted about thirty-five minutes, compared to this morning’s hour and ten minutes. At the end of the interview, I didn’t have a good feeling. It wasn’t about his qualifications or experience; he just wouldn’t be a good fit.

As you read this story, who was the most qualified for the position? The reality is you have no idea. I’ve said very little about the candidates’ qualifications, capabilities, or experience. However, I did say quite a bit about how each candidate made me feel and whether they would “fit” on the team.

The word “fit” is something of a four-letter word when it comes to bias. You’ll hear people say that when they’re hiring: “I can teach someone what they need to know to do the job, but I can’t teach them to fit within our culture.” Now, do we mean to discredit the idea of fitting into a culture completely? No. But the big, broad bucket of “fit,” if we aren’t careful, is often more about likeability than competence.

Researchers at Stanford and Yale conducted a study around this very point. They asked people to think of an important project they needed to work on and then rank a group of candidates in the order they’d select them to join the project.
- Person 1 is not very competent in the area of your need, and is not very likeable.
- Person 2 is very competent in the area of your need, and is very likable.
- Person 3 is very competent in the area of your need, but is not very likable.
- Person 4 is not very competent in the area of your need, but is very likeable.

People said they would choose 2, 3, 4, and 1, in that order—meaning, they would pick competence over likeability. But what they actually did was quite different. In practice, people did pick high competence, high likeability first (Person 2). But their second choice was actually Person 4: someone likeable... but incompetent! And they were more likely do the project alone before working with anyone unlikeable, whether that person was competent or not.¹²

The biggest challenge with this reality, as with my story, is that likeability is not grounded in fact. Likeability is actually grounded in how we feel about a person. And that, in turn, is often based on how similar they are to us. If we feel positively about people, we make positive decisions about them, and vice versa.

One of the most powerful mechanisms for overcoming bias or experience is to build meaningful connection. If we intentionally build connection with others, we are essentially filling in the gaps in the supercomputer that is our brain, leaving less room for assumptions and cognitive shortcuts and more room for the complexity and nuance that is being human.

We mentioned earlier that empathy and curiosity are essentially two sides of the same coin. Empathy is an interpersonal approach—putting yourself in other people’s shoes. Curiosity is an intellectual approach to cultivating connection—asking insightful questions, truly listening for responses, and building a conversation from those responses and commonality.

In the interview story, I had empathy for the first candidate. I saw a part of my own life reflected in the candidate and connected with her. Because of that connection, I was naturally curious, asking her questions, making eye contact, and listening intently to her responses. With the second candidate, I did not have empathy, and
consequently did not use curiosity. Had I employed the skills of curiosity, asked critical questions, and listened empathically to his responses, I likely would have found a connection point. Perhaps we both enjoyed running obstacle races, had children of similar age, or just really loved late-night TV. In a work context, perhaps we both had a similar view to collaboration or could cover gaps in each other’s strengths—perhaps I was more strategic and he was more relationship-oriented, and in working together, clients would feel cared for while achieving their organizational results. Empathy and curiosity are two gears that turn each other. In the absence of one, if we use the other, they both grow.

Our brain is constantly trying to figure out whether we belong. Some researchers believe that the need for belonging is even greater and more fundamental than safety or psychological needs.

As we meet people and enter new situations, our brain is sorting, mostly based on “gut” reactions. This sorting is largely superficial and drawn from initial instincts, but the ramifications of that initial categorization can be vast.

Employing the skills of empathy and curiosity can help us check assumptions and explore our thinking. It can also uncover biases we might have as each connection point becomes fertile ground for increasing likability and moving us all to the High-Performance Zone.
Skill 3: Choose Courage

“Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day that says I’ll try again tomorrow.”

—MARY ANNE RADMACHER, AUTHOR

A manager evaluates his team for an upcoming opportunity. A high-profile client needs a Relationship Manager to travel across their six locations to complete an important project. As he compares his options, he finds himself leaning toward a young team member with no attachments. She’ll put in the hours the assignment needs and ensure the client is delighted. The leader pauses and realizes he’s dismissing a team member who consistently delivers results and leaves clients singing her praises. But that employee has been at the firm for thirty-five years. Can someone her age really handle the travel? The manager takes a step back and realizes his employees’ ages are not the basis for such decisions. It takes courage to identify when we might be making decisions based on bias.

There was a time when Mark wasn’t comfortable sharing all of who he is with his colleagues. He was careful not to let some people see the picture of him and his partner on his phone. He was uncomfortable when asked if he was dating someone, or even worse why, at his age, he wasn’t married. With the best intentions, people would say things like, “But you’re such a great catch!” He never felt like he could
bring all of who he was to the workplace. There were a couple of co-workers he confided in. He just needed someone to share with. **It takes courage to cope with being on the receiving end of bias.**

A group of senior women in the Obama White House noticed they were being talked over and disregarded in important meetings. They decided to team up and amplify each other’s voices. When one contributed an idea and was overlooked in a meeting, another woman would bring the idea up again and point out whose idea it was. When a woman’s idea was ignored and then brought up by a man, another woman would point out it was the original woman’s idea. This practice came to be known as “amplification” and became a widespread strategy for allyship. **It takes courage to be an ally.**

In 2006, activist Tarana Burke began using the phrase “Me Too” to raise awareness of the pervasiveness of sexual abuse and assault. The movement didn’t begin to spread widely until October 2017, and resulted in tens of thousands of people posting their stories of surviving sexual harassment and assault on social media. It created a worldwide movement to protect victims, educate the workplace on appropriate behavior, and teach people what to do if they experience or witness problematic behavior. **It takes courage to be an advocate.**

Courage comes in many forms. In each of these examples, we can see courage implemented differently. In our framework, identifying bias helps us make progress at the individual level. Cultivating meaningful connections helps us make progress at the interpersonal level. And choosing courage helps us make progress on bias at all levels.

In framing courage in four different ways, we are allowing for the reality of circumstance: that there is no single way to respond to difficulty or negativity; no single strategy for making the shift from limiting or damaging performance to the High-Performance Zone.

As we consider these four ways to act with courage, they are not all brazen. Effective courage can be careful and bold, and it is in applying this combination of approaches that we can make progress.
Careful courage is more appropriate in circumstances where you may be at risk professionally or personally and where safety is low. Bold courage makes the case for immediate change, where taking action will make immediate progress.

Let’s think for a moment about that distinction and the four ways to act with courage. If you notice bias in your decision-making, for example, is that a time to use careful or bold courage? Well, you might be careful because you wouldn’t want those about which you are making such decisions to feel like the decisions were biased. You might use careful courage to practice some of the tactics recommended under “Courage to Identify”—checking assumptions and learning about the individuals or circumstances about which you are making decisions. Looking at another example, if you notice that only individuals with certain job functions are being admitted to your organization’s leadership-development program, you might use more bold courage to advocate for change. This could include speaking up to your manager and broader organizational leadership about your interest in attending that program and enacting group strategies by organizing a learning committee to explore other options available to staff with this interest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURAGE TO IDENTIFY</th>
<th>COURAGE TO COPE</th>
<th>COURAGE TO ALLY</th>
<th>COURAGE TO ADVOCATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOTICE BIAS HAPPENING.</td>
<td>DEAL WITH BIAS.</td>
<td>HELP OTHERS WITH BIAS.</td>
<td>PROACTIVELY ADDRESS BIAS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAUSE: QUESTION IT</td>
<td>PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE</td>
<td>TEAM UP WITH OTHERS</td>
<td>ENACT GROUP STRATEGIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEEK TO UNDERSTAND</td>
<td>PROACTIVELY CHOOSE A RESPONSE</td>
<td>OFFER SUPPORT</td>
<td>WRITE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHECK ASSUMPTIONS</td>
<td>GET A COACH OR MENTOR</td>
<td>BE A COACH OR MENTOR</td>
<td>ORGANIZE NETWORKS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEARN</td>
<td>SHARE YOUR STORY</td>
<td>AMPLIFY OTHERS’ VOICES</td>
<td>SPEAK UP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under each of the four ways to act with courage, we’ve highlighted four skills for implementing courage. Consider this a skill builder and a resource for you to explore as you work to make progress on bias.
You might wonder why the first way to act with courage is to identify it. Didn’t we cover that as Skill 1? Identifying bias is a courageous act. A common mindset around bias is that we are not biased and that we make decisions purely based on facts, logic, or rational thinking. Admitting this is not the case can be jarring at best. Identifying that we need to improve, slow down, and question our decision-making is an act of courage. It’s like the old adage says, the first step is admitting you have a problem.

The second way to act with courage is the courage to cope. I recently saw a meme on social media that read “self-care is a revolutionary act.” (It stuck with me because all knowledge worth remembering can now be distilled into a meme!) Gone are the days where we are expected to “tough it out” around ill treatment or “grin and bear it.” Feeling as if you are on the receiving end of bias can take an incredible toll on well-being and our overall sense of belonging. The Gallup organization conducts pulse assessments across organizations globally, and one of the more controversial questions on their survey is “Do you have a best friend at work?” Their research has repeatedly shown a concrete link between having a best friend at work and the amount of effort employees expend in their job performance. For example, women who strongly agree they have a best friend at work are more than twice as likely to be engaged (63%) compared with the women who say otherwise (29%).13 If that is the impact of having a best friend at work, imagine the impact of feeling like you have no friends at work—as if you are on the outside looking in. It takes courage to acknowledge that impact and work through it by taking time for self-care, finding a mentor, or opening up about your story.

Reacting and responding when you are in harm’s way is, in many ways, natural. Taking action around something that does not impact you is something different all together. It is, in fact, counterintuitive and unnatural to throw ourselves in the fray of something that doesn’t impact us directly. Being an ally—lending our voices in defense of others—is a courageous act. Understanding others’ experiences and offering support can make a world of difference with issues like the emotional tax we mentioned earlier.

Finally, the courage to be an advocate. This is perhaps what we would think of as more traditional courage: the courage to be the squeakiest of wheels in order to make progress. We see this across
social media and media in general, all of the different platforms for individuals to share their stories and enact group strategies for change. In the space of diversity and inclusion in particular, an interesting example is the CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion™, the largest CEO-driven business commitment to advance diversity and inclusion within the workplace. In their own words, “This commitment is driven by a realization that addressing diversity and inclusion is not a competitive issue, but a societal issue. Recognizing that change starts at the executive level, more than 550 CEOs of the world’s leading companies and business organizations are leveraging their individual and collective voices to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace.”

The site also allows individuals to make pledges and commitments around diversity and inclusion.

Throughout this monograph, we’ve asked you to consider bias in both your personal and professional life. Think about a circumstance or relationship you are currently facing where bias may be at play, where you or others might be in the Limiting Zone or Damaging Zone due to bias. Is there a way you could act with courage in this situation to make a shift to high performance? As the famous quote attributed to Margaret Mead goes: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”
Citations


About the Authors

Pamela Fuller serves as one of the top global client partners, helping clients customize and implement learning and organizational development solutions to meet their strategic objectives. Pamela also served as an architect of FranklinCovey’s new *Unconscious Bias* solution. Prior to joining FranklinCovey, Pamela conceived and implemented proactive diversity programs and statistical workforce analysis at the U.S. Department of Defense, and was responsible for communication, marketing, and strategy in the nonprofit sector.

Mark Murphy has served for more than twenty-eight years as a senior global consultant for FranklinCovey. He also cofounded two consulting firms and remains on the board of directors of one. Mark facilitates in English and Spanish in Asia, South America, Europe, and the Middle East. He is responsible for certifying facilitators—both clients and FranklinCovey consultants—in the *Unconscious Bias* solution. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, he’s authored several white papers around diversity for the Project Management Institute.
About FranklinCovey

FranklinCovey is a global, public company specializing in organizational-performance improvement. We help organizations and individuals achieve results that require a change in human behavior. Our expertise is in seven areas: leadership, execution, productivity, trust, sales performance, customer loyalty, and education. FranklinCovey clients have included 90 percent of the Fortune 100, more than 75 percent of the Fortune 500, thousands of small and mid-size businesses, as well as numerous government entities and educational institutions. FranklinCovey has more than 100 direct and partner offices providing professional services in more than 160 countries and territories.
SCHEDULE A SPEAKER FOR YOUR NEXT EVENT

Are you planning an event for your organization? Schedule an *Unconscious Bias* expert to deliver an engaging keynote speech tailor-made for today’s leaders.

- Association and Industry Conferences
- Sales Conferences
- Executive and Board Retreats
- Annual Meetings
- Company Functions
- Onsite Consulting
- Client Engagements

These experts have spoken at hundreds of conferences and client events worldwide.

To schedule a keynote speech, call 1-888-554-1776 or visit franklincovey.com.
TAKE THE NEXT STEP
IN YOUR JOURNEY

Participate in an Unconscious Bias: Understanding Bias to Unleash Potential work session.

Bias is a natural part of the human condition—of how the brain works. But it affects how we make decisions, engage with others, and respond to various situations and circumstances, often limiting potential. Unconscious Bias: Understanding Bias to Unleash Potential helps participants:

- **Identify Bias** where it shows up in our own thinking and in our workplaces.
- **Cultivate Connection** with those around us to expand our understanding and improve our decision-making.
- **Choose Courage** as we engage with care and boldness in addressing biases that limit people and constrain performance.

There is nothing more fundamental to performance than how we see and treat each other as human beings. Helping your leaders and team members address bias will let them thrive, increasing performance across your organization.

To register, or for more information, visit franklincovey.com/tbd or call 1-888-868-1776.
THE ULTIMATE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

FranklinCovey is a global company specializing in organizational performance improvement. We help organizations achieve results that require a change in human behavior.

Our expertise is in seven areas:

LEADERSHIP
Develops highly effective leaders who engage others to achieve results.

EXECUTION
Enables organizations to execute strategies that require a change in human behavior.

PRODUCTIVITY
Equips people to make high-value choices and execute with excellence in the midst of competing priorities.

TRUST
Builds a high-trust culture of collaboration and engagement, resulting in greater speed and lower costs.

SALES PERFORMANCE
Transforms the buyer-seller relationship by helping clients succeed.

CUSTOMER LOYALTY
Drives faster growth and improves frontline performance with accurate customer- and employee-loyalty data.

EDUCATION
Helps schools transform their performance by unleashing the greatness in every educator and student.