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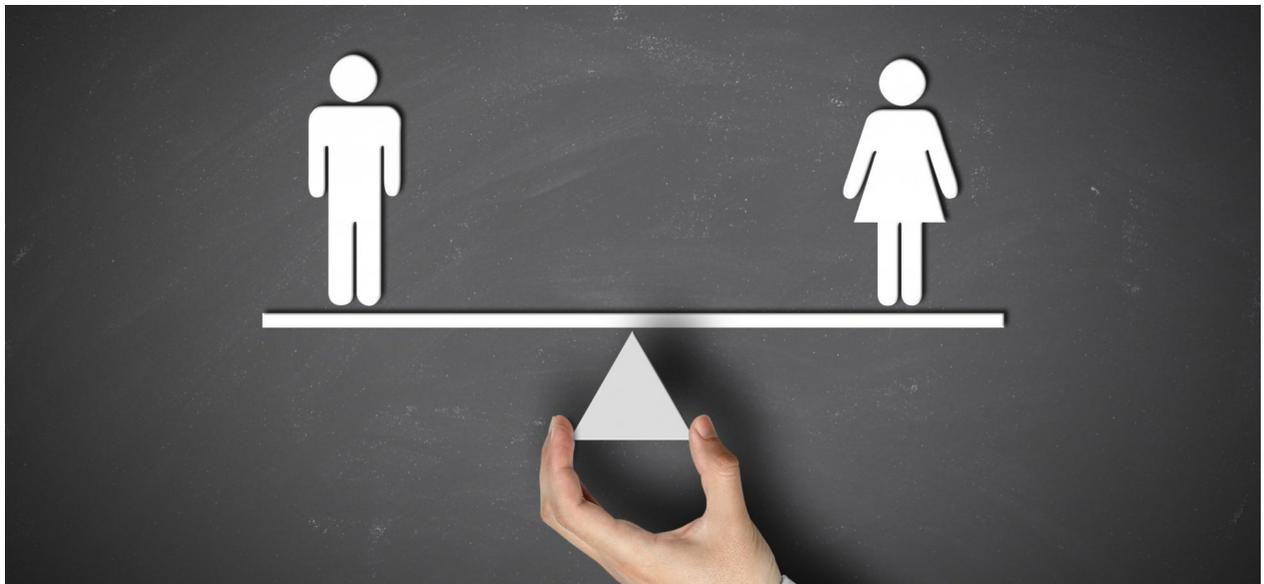
COLUMNIST

How To Confront Gender Bias In Your Workplace

Companies and their leaders can learn to identify and address bias in their leaders, employees, systems, policies, processes, practices and culture.



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Women are affected by bias at every level of an organization. They may not always recognize it, address it or respond to it appropriately, and but they can be stopped by it and feel powerless to change it.

It's not just women who are affected. Their companies are hurt, too.

In addition to the ethical responsibility of addressing discrimination and protecting employees from harm, corporate leaders have every reason to ensure bias doesn't hurt the business. Discrimination has been shown to contribute to:

- poor communication between staff,
- faulty decision-making,
- reduced productivity,
- decreased organizational citizenship behavior,
- reduced employee commitment,
- depleted motivation, and
- increased turnover.

Considering all of the above, not to mention the billions of dollars companies invest in leadership programs and initiatives for women, the cost of allowing discrimination to continue is too high a price to pay.

Companies and their leaders can learn to identify and address bias in their leaders, employees, systems, policies, processes, practices and culture. Whether we're talking about institutionalized bias, paternalistic discrimination, or plain old bad behavior, a little education goes a long way - and so does a culture of intolerance.

When business leaders are able to recognize bias, they can address it or respond to it appropriately, and companies committed to these principles root out bias and stamp it out. Here are five points to remember when recognizing and addressing gender bias in your workplace:

- Instances of discrimination run along a continuum, from the subtle to the extreme.
- Women are affected by bias at every level of an organization.

- Companies and their leaders can learn to identify and address bias in their leaders, employees, systems, policies, processes, practices and culture. Companies that address this well develop a reputation internally and/or externally for being a great place for women to work.
- One main reason people don't address bias is because they're not conscious of it. The other reason people don't address bias is that they don't know how.
- When it comes to fighting discrimination, women can't do this alone. Men need to champion women, too.

Companies that address this well develop a reputation internally and/or externally for being a great place for women to work. Meanwhile, for women, the awareness advantage is the ability to be able to prevent bias if we can or handle it when we can't.

When you're confronting bias in your company, ask yourself: What norms or patterns do you see in your organization that you think need to change? How can you take actions that are consistent with your values and give you a way to live within - and perhaps improve - the business in which you live? What perspective brings you empowerment and peace of mind? These questions can help you recognize bias, and respond appropriately

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