

Break Through the Bias: Raising Awareness of Gender Bias in your Organization



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With the #MeToo movement sweeping the nation, women are exposing a daily reality that until now has been either hidden or ignored: 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 they can be stopped by it and feel powerless to change it. So they are impacted, sometimes in very serious ways.

As a result, in addition to the psychological reactions to sexual harassment (depression, anxiety, anger, powerlessness, guilt) and the physiological reactions (headaches, sleep disturbances, nightmares), the career-related effects can halt the ability to succeed. They include:

- Decreased job satisfaction
- Unfavorable performance evaluations
- Loss of job or promotion
- Drop in performance due to stress
- Absenteeism
- Withdrawal from work
- Change in career goals.

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. When it comes to fighting discrimination, women can't do this alone. Men need to champion women, too.

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. 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.

One primary 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. For best practices on how to achieve awareness, and how women can advance themselves and become better leaders, working with men to eliminate gender bias, get your [free Executive Summary of my book with Howard Morgan, The New Advantage: How Women in Leadership Can Create Win-Wins for Their Companies and Themselves.](#)

Dr. Joelle Jay is a Director with the Leadership Research Institute, as well as an executive coach, keynote speaker, and the author of *The Inner Edge: The Ten Practices of Personal Leadership*. Joelle specializes in the advancement of executive women, and she is proud to have supported the development of top talent into positions of leadership for many successful companies, including MetLife, Adobe, and Microsoft.