

Chapter Two – Eradicating the Virus of Bias

*“All of us show bias when it comes to what information we take in.
We typically focus on anything that agrees with the outcome we want.”*

~ Noreena Hertz

Bias is a slanted, inaccurate, or incomplete perspective.

Your challenge this week will be to identify a situation or relationship that is being negatively impacted by bias. You’ll complete the challenge by dropping the bias and Creating a New Story to Generate Success, to render the situation more productive.

We have focused this module about bias into six learning components:

1. What is bias?
2. The difference between productive bias and “implicit bias.”
3. How the brain’s reticular activating system can cloud or enhance our perception.
4. How the Virus of Bias creates “Brain Blindness” and how to overcome it.
5. How bias cycles function and how to diffuse them.
6. How to ensure your stories are free from the Virus of Bias.

GAME CHALLENGE TWO:
*Transform a situation infected with
bias into a productive one.*

1. What is Bias?

What if you could see every situation clearly, without bias?

To understand how that might be possible, let’s dig deeper. First of all, everyone has biases.

A bias is a perspective, an angle, or a viewpoint. It’s a slice of reality. It’s a *part* of the picture, but not the whole thing.

In the second module of the full immersion online learning game, we present a picture and challenge you to discern what it is. Initially, it's doesn't look like much of anything. Then we change angles and see it from a different place.

Suddenly, it's a portrait of former South African leader, Nelson Mandela.

What's called Perspective Bias functions in much the same way. It's not that what we saw in the first image was inaccurate . . . it was a group of odd-shaped pieces of metal and that's exactly what it looked like. But from that angle you didn't get the whole perspective—and thus you missed the larger picture.

Biases show up everywhere a human brain is engaged because it's how the brain works. But that's not bad news. Biases are generated as our brains create thinking shortcuts, and those are useful. These are developed based on available information *and* how we've lived, learned, and interpreted the patterns in our lives. These shortcuts are meant to enhance efficiency.

While it's normal to have biases, they *can* limit our ability to develop innovative solutions by keeping us in a survival mindset.

As thriving leaders, part of our role is to recognize counterproductive biases that may be at play in our perception, so that we can coach our people and our colleagues to see beyond the limitations such biases create.

2. What's the difference between a productive bias and counterproductive bias?

What if you could develop the ability to see beyond the biases that limit and constrict productivity?

One example of a productive bias is how we've consciously trained our brains to be see only part of the picture when we're driving. We see the road, other drivers, etc. But we don't see a thousand other visual details, because that would be distracting. That's a productive bias.

An example of a counterproductive bias would be selectively ignoring someone's comments in a meeting because we have an unconscious belief that they have nothing of value to contribute.

We call this an “implicit” bias because it’s based on an unconscious belief that impacts our thinking and our actions. We likely don’t even know the bias is there or recognize the influence it’s exerting on our decision-making.

The term “Implicit bias” was coined by social psychologists to describe a specific type of counterproductive bias. It refers to our tendency as humans to have unconscious and unquestioned preconceptions about people who are not part of our group, as if those assumptions were unequivocally true.

**Implicit bias can lead to favoritism,
prejudice or, in extreme cases, outright
bigotry.**

We refer to this type of bias as the Virus of Bias because it infects our thinking, just like a computer virus infects your software. Operating quietly beneath the surface, implicit bias inserts itself into our stories, our decisions, and our evaluation of who’s valuable and who’s not.

Let’s be clear: Everyone is vulnerable to The Virus of Bias.

Why? Because implicit biases get installed through our social programming starting in early childhood and continuing into the present. These implicit or unconscious biases constantly run in the background, as part of our personal operating system.

Our biased programming is then regularly reinforced, and updated through our social interactions, the media, and family relationships. Knowing how keenly vulnerable we are, it’s up to us, as thriving leaders, to establish systems and processes to protect our people, our decisions, and our processes from being infected and sabotaged by the Virus of Bias.

3. How the brain’s reticular activating system can enhance or cloud perception.

*What if you could train your brain to deactivate its bias
filters in order to see more clearly?*

Brain scientists tell us that part of our brain called the “reticular activating system” or RAS filters our experience to confirm its conscious and unconscious reality. It’s the RAS that regulates our attention and enables us to focus. It’s also the part of our brain that can unintentionally obscure our vision by seeking evidence for beliefs that may not be true.

For instance, if you believe someone is highly capable, you'll unconsciously look for evidence to support that belief. If you believe they're *not* capable, your brain will look to confirm that belief as well. So, let's drill a little deeper.

What are beliefs or biases that people may have about *you*?

For instance, do people tend to think of you as being inherently capable or not? Do they see you as a strong leader or as a good *individual* contributor who's not really cut out for a leadership role? Are you seen as part of a dominant group? Or as an outsider?

Now, think of a person you work with or someone in your neighborhood who tends to be left out or excluded. What are some of the societal biases that exist about them? Are they seen as upstanding citizens or not? Are they considered to be part of "our group" or are they outliers? Are they trusted or is there a certain hesitancy about relying on them?

What brain research conducted at Harvard University shows us is that — even without our knowing it or meaning to — our brains search for evidence to confirm societal beliefs even if they're not true. That means our brains tend to filter out contradictory evidence.

Therefore, we may be seeing things that aren't actually there or *not* seeing things that *are* there.

4. How the Virus of Bias can lead to "Brain Blindness" and how we can overcome it.

What if you could overcome brain blindness and see people's hidden talents and abilities?

Brain blindness . . . it sounds scary . . . and it is, in a way. But it's not quite as ominous as the term suggests. Here's a quick exercise to give you a sense of how brain blindness works.

Think of a time when you misplaced something, like your car keys. You looked everywhere and couldn't find them. Then someone else arrives and seems to pull those keys out of thin air, right from where you just looked.

How did this happen? The answer lies at the intersection of Quantum Physics and Human Biology. Said another way, it was a result of your brain's reticular activating system or RAS. Simplified even further, you had a bias that made what you were looking for invisible.

Because part of your mind didn't believe the keys were where you were looking, even though your eyes sent the visual data to your brain, then your brain's RAS filtered out that information because it didn't confirm with your mind's current reality.

Now, think about how might this apply to the way we evaluate a person's ability, their performance, or whether they are a fit for a particular job or opportunity?

In the online video module, we show a black and white picture at this point and invite viewers to guess what it is. Most people can't see it the first time. We provide some cues... for instance, it's a farm animal. Eventually, everyone can see the picture of a cow.

Most of us can't see the image, even when someone tells us what it is, because our brain doesn't know what it's searching for.

So, how does this apply to you and your work or personal life?

If your mind has absorbed a societal bias about a person or a particular group of people, you may become brain blind to their ability even though it's there. Even when other people tell you that the person is capable or talented, your brain's RAS might be filtering out the actual evidence because the person doesn't pattern-map to who you think of as capable. Their viability runs contrary to a long-held conscious or unconscious belief.

How do we overcome brain blindness?

By challenging our assumptions and actively seeking other people's input, especially those with different perspectives about important decisions we are making, particularly those that affect other people's careers and wellbeing.

Challenging our own habitual thinking is particularly important in cases where persistent social stereotypes may have infected our thinking. This explains why diverse hiring panels and inclusive decision-making processes are vitally important. They provide a check and balance against the biases that may have crept into our thought processes. And even in scenarios where we've created more diverse viewpoints,

Many organizations have created a rotating role called the "bias monitor." It's this person's job to watch out for implicit biases that may show up in conversation or in an evaluation process.

Who might you be leaving out of your decision-making processes?

Who is being overlooked for projects or opportunities. And why? Very often it's brain blindness that prevents us from seeing people's value, potential contribution, and their need for more involvement.

Here are three keys to overcoming brain blindness:

1. Listen to others with an open mind
2. Regularly remind yourself that your version of reality is – always – limited
3. Be willing to see multiple points view

You may not understand or even agree with every point of view. That's not the point. The more you learn to understand other people's experience of reality, the better you will be at inspiring, motivating, and engaging our people on the road to mutual success.

And remember, we are all vulnerable to the virus of bias. Regardless of how they made it into our personal minds, society's biases are part of *everyone's* unconscious mental inventory. But we can only do something about our own. We can take responsibility for our own bias filters, and that's the beginning of becoming able to eradicate Eradicating the Virus of Bias.

5. How bias cycles function and how to diffuse them.

*What if you could help others see beyond their biases
in order to significantly enhance teamwork?*

An easy way to understand how biases create counterproductive cycles is to run an imaginary scenario. Ready? Let's imagine a person that others have a particular bias towards. We'll call this individual, Person A.

What might be a bias that some people might have about Person A? Let's say the bias is that people like Person A are not cut out to be good leaders. Next, if Person A's manager has that bias cycle running in their mind, how will the Manager tend to behave toward Person A?

Well, if they believe Person A doesn't have leadership potential, then the Manager won't give Person A new, challenging, or exciting assignments. It's also likely that they won't send Person A for advanced training the way they might if they thought Person A were cut out to be leader.

Now let's look at the third step in the bias cycle. If the Manager regularly behaves toward Person A in a biased fashion, how might Person A tend to react over time?

As you might expect, Person A could become frustrated. They might feel left out and could disengage. They could become difficult or resistant to the Manager's ideas. They might even leave the organization.

As you contemplate this cycle, notice that Person A's reactions become part of a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the Manager consistently treats Person A like someone incapable of being a leader, unless Person A is highly developed, they will almost automatically live down to the Manager's expectations.

Why? Because it's a normal reactionary response. We'll explore more about this response in a later module.

And here's an additional aspect to be aware of. Because the Manager has been observing Person A through their own biased lens, the Manager will unconsciously be on the lookout for any behavior that confirms their original bias.

That means they will also tend to overlook favorable behavior that runs contrary to their bias.

And the Manager may then silently say to him or herself, "See! Just as I expected. Person A wasn't cut out for leadership."

Now, the fourth step of a bias cycle is asking: What impact is this bias cycle having? How is it negatively affecting the productivity and engagement of the team, department, or family?

In this case, we can easily see how: this type of bias cycle could create disengagement, a loss of talent as people either shut down or leave, and a sense of "That's not fair!" from anyone who witnessed this process.

REVIEW:

A bias cycle consists of four stages:

- 1) The underlying bias that has infected one's thinking
- 2) The behavior one person exhibits towards another person based on that bias
- 3) The reaction the other person has, based on the biased behavior.
- 4) The outcome or impact this cycle has on these individuals and those within their circle of influence.

Okay, so what can you do about this? How can you diffuse a bias cycle?" Here's an important clue: It takes at least two people to keep a bias cycle in motion. This means that regardless of which side of that cycle you're on, you can begin to diffuse it.

It's like a chemistry experiment or baking. . . if you change what you put into the beaker, the bowl, or the relationship, it changes the outcome. The experiment works or it doesn't, the cake tastes good or it doesn't, the relationship improves or it doesn't.

It all depends on what you put into it.

Here's how the process of eradicating the virus of bias works:

1. Acknowledge that a bias cycle is motion.
2. Notice your role in it – initiating or reacting - and the biases that may be infecting your thinking and morphing your story.
3. Become clear on the productive outcome you need or want instead of what the bias cycle will likely produce.
4. Set your own bias or limiting thoughts aside and begin to inhabit the state of mind (different attitudes about the other person and the situation) that will support you to behave or react differently, and help create the outcome you need or want.

This means you can adopt an attitude of actively looking for the value in others. This enables you to create and act out a better story, one that generates the possibility for a more productive outcome.

That will challenge you to see others as partners in your own process of improvement. And then you can ask yourself, “How would I behave or react if my biases were not activated? How would I interact with someone who is an essential partner in our mutual success?

5. Act from this thriving mindset, free of personal bias.
6. Seek the assistance of an accountability partner who can help keep you on track.

The process of eradicating the virus of bias is a natural fit with what you learned and practice in Module One, because implicit biases is merely limiting beliefs that infect our stories.

You can change your story to a more productive one any time you choose to.

People often question how effective it can be if only one person involved in a bias cycle takes this kind of responsibility. They ask: What if the other person keeps doing the same thing? We tell them that you can probably count on the fact that, at first, the other person may become even more determined to maintain their part in the bias cycle.

That's the dance they know and now you're trying to change the steps.

So, what can you do about that? Here's where the fun comes in (and the need for your accountability partner): Keep on keeping on.

In other words, keep living out the thriving story that you're creating about the new and improved relationship you're building with the other person or group. If you do, from our own experience of having coached thousands of people, we have found that the other person will eventually align with your new story, often more quickly than you might expect.

Part of their neurobiology is actually designed to align with how you behave, especially if you're focus is clear and your intent is genuine. And, even if they don't align with you right away, you're already benefiting on your own. You've shifted yourself into the solution-oriented frame of mind that comes from thriving.

6. How to ensure your stories are free from the Virus of Bias.

*What if you had a simple system for immunizing
yourself from the Virus of Bias?*

The good news is that there is a very straightforward process for guarding against implicit bias.

First: Be willing to acknowledge that you, like all of us, are susceptible to the Virus of Bias. Second: Double-check your decisions and your interactions. Notice, are there any biases influencing into your decisions or actions? If not, awesome, high-five yourself. Or, there are, be glad you became aware of them. Now, go clean them up.

Taking action to rectify your actions or repair relationships where needed is helpful for others and for yourself. It's a powerful way to forge new neural pathways in your brain.

Third: Partner up with your team or others within your organization or family to be each other's Anti-Bias Software. We seldom see our own biases at play so the more we can rely on each other's different perspectives, the more effective we'll be in pre-empting a bias cycle.

Fourth, ask yourself, what are the possible future consequences of my actions or choices? How will this story likely play out? If your story is not productive or doesn't build others and the organization set it aside.

You are the writer, director, and actor in your own life movie.

Live that way and you'll discover that the Virus of Bias, while persistent at times, won't have the power to infect your stories or bring you, your organization or your family down.

All right. You've received the fundamental details from our knowledge bank about this Practice. Now, we'll run a simulation of this practice, preparing you to "go live" with this module's challenge.

SIMULATION TWO: Eradicating the Virus of Bias

You'll find a worksheet with these instructions in the download section for this module. We suggest you print this out as a reminder for your practice. We duplicate the worksheet at the end of this module, for easy digital review.

Before we start, we'll present a fictional example to demonstrate the process. This will help you run a realistic simulation.

THE SITUATION: Michael is trying to figure out how to keep Jayden from being on his team

HIS OLD STORY: "Jayden just doesn't have the drive and tenacity to take on a tough project like this. Besides, she's got kids at home and that's going to be a distraction."

HIS PAYOFF: "I get to surround myself with people I'm more comfortable with. I don't have to alter my style or approach to accommodate someone who is different from me."

THRIVING REALIZATION: "Hey, I'm letting a societal bias about working mothers infect my story about what's possible.

CREATING A NEW STORY: "What if I set that bias aside? How could I set her up to be a winning part of our team?"

Here's where Michael begins to Create a Story to Generate Success by Eradicating the Virus of Bias (using the first two thriving practices).

He's realized how a bias has infected his story and he's setting the bias aside. He's choosing to create and live out a better story, one that leads to a better outcome. He's doing a reframe and coming at the situation from a new, fresh angle that gives both Jayden and him better chances for success.

BTW, Jayden could have her own bias cycle going about this same situation. For her, it could be:

THE SITUATION: Michael is an unfair project manager.

HER OLD STORY: “I’m a single mother. He’s never going to assign me to an important project regardless of how hard I try.”

HER PAYOFF: She gets to be self-righteous and blame someone else.

THRIVING REALIZATION: “Hey, I’m letting a societal bias about working mothers infect my story about what’s possible.”

CREATING A NEW STORY: “What if I set that bias aside? How can I help Michael see the value I bring to this team?”

In this scenario, the same bias has been driving both sides of this cycle. Resolution begins when either party sets the bias aside and creates a new story that includes everyone and focuses on productivity and success.

Let’s walk you through this process now with your *own* situation. (begin music)

1. Think of a current situation or relationship that needs improvement or a new positive perspective.

Pick a situation that’s important but not overwhelming. The challenge is to shift your experience of this situation from one that’s been based on biases (a survival mindset) to one based on new possibilities (a thriving mindset). Try this with something easy. We’re looking for a quick win here. You can move on to more significant challenges later and effectively confront more entrenched biases as you increase your level of mastery.

2. Identify the underlying bias that’s been impacting how you’ve seen this situation or those involved.

Based on the bias or limiting belief you’ve had about the situation or person, what story have you been acting out? What role are you playing? What roles have you assigned to others? Are you assuming certain types of people are less capable, or are innately prejudiced. Which is it? They don’t see *your* value, or you don’t see *theirs*? Where’s it all leading to? We’ll give you a few moments to muse about this.

3. Ask yourself: “What’s my pay off? What am I getting out of this story as it’s currently being played out?”

As you learned in the last module, there are always personal benefits attached to the counterproductive stories we get ourselves caught up in. What are you getting out of this situation? How does your story about the other person or the situation let you off the hook or provide you with excuses or justifications?

4. Acknowledge that the story you created about this situation - based on a bias or beliefs - is running in the background of your mind.

Remember, we all carry society’s beliefs in our unconscious. Those biases dramatically affect how we see and experience others. Where might you be brain-blind in this situation? How might you gain more perspective? How might you be proactive in working to prove your bias is wrong—at least in this situation? This inquiry begins with

acknowledging that, yes, you've been experiencing *your* story about this situation as if it was the only truth and now you can change it.

5. Write a new story.

You've dropped the bias that was infecting your previous story. So, this is where you begin to Create a New Story for Success. Imagine a positive outcome for this situation. Imagine yourself having transcended your beliefs or bias about what's possible. See the person or situation you've been dealing with transformed so that the outcome is productive and positive.

What might this be like? How would you like it to be different than it has been?

Think of the people involved. Picture them pleased, productive, and relieved at how well this situation turned out. Imagine yourself happy and grateful at the outcome as well. Now, working backwards from this new ending, start rewriting. What might lead to resolution, with everyone feeling positive about how their needs and interests were respected and addressed?

What's the new ending you want?

You might want to create a new module in a relationship or complete a project on time and under budget. Imagine things turning out in a more productive, positive way. The main strategy here is to make sure that your new story is liberated from the bias in your old story.

What new role do you need to play? What will you do and not do, say and not say that will lead to the outcome you just imagined? This is the internal work your character does to set up for a breakthrough. It's that moment in movies that we always enjoy, as we begin to see the hero emerge.

Who will you need to partner with to help you stay on track?

Is there a friend or colleague who can support you to act out this new story? Someone who can let you know if you've let biases start to creep into your thinking again? Can you partner with someone directly involved in the situation and share your desire to have the situation revolve productively? Imagine finding and aligning with a trusted ally.

6. See yourself experiencing things going the way you'd like them to go.

This is the technique coaches have athletes use to bring their mind and body into coherence: they see the goal already successfully being accomplished.

Imagine yourself smiling and feeling good—maybe even being amazed—at how well this is turning out. Feel the sense of gratitude, relief, and appreciation you have because it's gone so well. See them being grateful as well.

Enjoy this feeling for a few moments. Let yourself soak in the feeling of your success. Keep imagining that your challenge has been successfully completed. Congratulations,

OK, let's complete the simulation and review what happened.

You just turned a biased-based situation into a productive one.

Whenever you think about your situation during the week, or however long you practice this one, remember this simulation. Replay it and enhance it so you can access and deepen the feeling of success. Then act from that thriving mindset.

What will you do to make this thriving vision real?

All right, your simulation is complete, but you can rehearse like this whenever you like.

This process has given you the inner experience of eradicating the virus of bias in one situation. Before we turn you loose to practice in the 3-D world, let's troubleshoot for a few minutes.

TROUBLESHOOTING

What might go wrong with your Game Challenge?

You might not do it.

If you truly want to thrive, you must develop a new habit, and this one is powerful: to set aside personal biases and transcend your self-imposed limitations on others.

You might forget how to do it.

Print out the instructions. Listen to the audio programs. Re-watch this presentation. We're giving you the resources, but you have to use them. If you've contracted with us for a package that includes personal coaching, shoot us an email or give us a call.

You might not get support.

Having a thriving buddy will give you a powerful advantage. If you can't find someone right away, just keep the idea in mind and someone may show up later, as you progress through the program, especially as it becomes obvious that you're shifting more consistently into the thriving zone. And remember, your partner in this process could be a family member or a friend.

You might overshare about what you're doing.

Be wise about how much you say and to whom. Not everyone will applaud your efforts towards self-mastery, especially when it comes to acknowledging and overcoming biases. Also, be sensitive about touting your own successes. It's great to share, if you're heart's in the right place and you're showing a genuine interest in someone's success and well-being AND they're in the frame of mind to receive your input.

Your situation might not resolve.

You don't have 100% control over your situation. Learning to set biases aside and live out a different story will change how you behave and also influence all your relationships. What's more, it will also begin to change the situation. Of course, as we shared in the last module, chronic problems won't resolve in a week. Rather than being

disappointed, notice where you *did* move the needle. Appreciate and build on those successes.

On the other hand, your situation might change quickly and dramatically. Either way, you can learn from what happens and celebrate. Let your mind and body know that they did well. This anchors in the new habit as desirable and motivates you to repeat it.

Remember to engage with your thriving buddy. You can talk things through with a friend or coach and even role play. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness; all good leaders know how to both give and receive assistance. Listen to the two brief streamable and downloadable audio files accompanying this module (available through website).

In the morning audio, we'll guide you through the simulation again, to further prepare for contact with the situation. The evening audio is for reviewing your day.

Learn from the situation by taking full responsibility and, when you engage, notice what's happening, looking through the lens of an aware storyteller.

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WORKSHEET FOR MODULE TWO: ERADICATING THE VIRUS OF BIAS

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THE NEW STORY:

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