

# A WEEK IN Learning

## LOOKING INWARD FOR 2020

Jared Allen, Manager of Learning and Development

I'd like to open this article with a thought experiment for you. I'm going to present a scenario, and ask a question. Think about your answer for a few minutes before proceeding.

*A father and son are involved in a car accident, in which the father is killed and the son is seriously injured. The medical examiner pronounces the father dead at the scene, and his body is taken to a local morgue. The son is taken by ambulance to a nearby hospital for emergency surgery. Surgeons quickly rush into the operating room. Upon seeing the patient, one surgeon shouts, "Oh my God! That's my son!"*

How do you explain this? Take a moment to either write your answer on the line below, or keep the answer in your thoughts.



***"Now that it's 2020, we have an opportunity to evaluate how we look at things."***

- Jared Allen

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I'm betting that some of you reading this have come up with some pretty creative answers. Perhaps the boy was adopted, twins separated at birth, or the 'father' in the car was a priest. However, the most plausible answer is much simpler – the surgeon is the boy's mother.

If you found yourself going to great lengths to explain this scenario, you're not alone. In 2007, an analysis of this activity was conducted by researchers Louise Pendry, Denise Driscoll, and Susannah Field. Results showed that approximately 40% of participants were not able to come up with the most plausible answer. This is an example of Unconscious Bias; a prejudice in favor of (or against) one thing, person, or group compared with another - usually in a way that's considered to be unfair. In this example, many participants unconsciously assume that the surgeon is a man.

Now that it's 2020, we have an opportunity to evaluate how we look at things. (You're going to hear a lot of 2020/vision analogies this year, so you may as well get used to it now). Could your perception of what kind of person is "supposed" to do a certain job be affecting the diversity of your team and your overall success? Have you been limiting your own opportunities based on how you perceive yourself?

I'll now present you with one more activity, and a few more questions.

Using the far-left column in the table below (or on a separate sheet of paper), write out the initials of 6 people that you trust the most. These people should not be family members.

<b>Trusted 6</b>					
1)					
2)					
3)					
4)					
5)					
6)					

Now, write the following headers at the top of the 5 remaining columns: **gender**, **race/ethnicity**, **age**, **religion**, and **sexual orientation**. Next, place a check mark in each box next to a member of your trusted 6 if you share a similar trait in that column. For example, if you are male, you would place a check mark in each box of the **gender** column for every person in your Trusted 6 that are *also* male.

Most people that complete this exercise will find that their Trusted 6 have very minimal diversity, and their inner circle is comprised of people with very similar backgrounds. What you see here is an example of Affinity Bias; an unconscious preference for people similar to ourselves. Affinity bias is well researched and studies have shown that people extend greater trust, empathy, and cooperation to those that are similar to themselves. What are the implications of this bias in the workplace? When it comes time to assign a high-profile project, who do you normally entrust with that responsibility? Are you unknowingly denying opportunities and limiting success?

We can all be susceptible to biases from time to time, regardless of how well-meaning we are and how non-discriminatory we attempt to be. The first step to combatting these biases is to recognize them in ourselves. With a broader awareness, we can open ourselves up to new ideas and experiences that we, otherwise, may have missed.