

A WEEK IN *Learning*

CHECK YOUR BLIND SPOTS

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Recently, my car of nearly ten years died. After three weeks of repeat visits to the repair shop and hundreds of dollars in useless repairs, I looked into the eyes of my mechanic and asked, “Tell me the truth, is she going to live?” He glanced away for a brief moment, took off his work goggles, and let out a passing sigh. “She doesn’t have much time left.” Immediately, all the memories of moving, travel, and raising my family with this vehicle began to flood my soul. I was devastated. Did I mention I no longer had a car payment? The thought of needing financing (again) was an additional point of frustration. No matter how I felt, it was time to pull myself together, get a plan and put it in action. Besides, it is not the worst thing I have ever experienced. I have the privilege of having a car.

Once I got over the initial shock, I decided to go back to the same dealership where I purchased my previous vehicle. The service was excellent, the warranties were fantastic, and the sales prices were even better! I was so happy with my experience, I purchased a new vehicle that weekend. I pulled out of the dealership driveway and headed down the road with a smile. I was about a mile-and-a-half away from the dealership, and was ready to make my first lane change. I clicked my left signal, looked in both directions and proceeded to merge. I did not see any traffic around me, however, there was a little, yellow light that proceeded to blink in my door mirror. I have seen these before, but I never had a car that had one. I knew it was an alert of some sort, but since I had been driving all these years without one, my brain did not register its purpose immediately. It gave me enough pause to refrain from merging into the left lane. Then it happened: a fast moving sports car blazed past me in the lane I was entering, but it missed me because I waited. That is when it clicked; that little light was a **blind-spot monitor!**

This experience revealed that I was driving with my own set of biases and judgements that may have worked well with the previous vehicle, but not in this new one. Having a blind spot monitor helped (and continues to help) me thoroughly assess my interpretation of my surroundings before making decisions. Sometimes, checking for blind spots seems like an unnecessary step. In reality, it could be life altering.

Where are your Blind Spots?

The *Bias Blind Spot* is a ‘real’ thing. Dr. Nathan Heflick from *Psychology Today* magazine stated it in these terms:

*Research by Emily Pronin, a psychologist at Princeton University, and colleagues, has found that people rate themselves as **less susceptible** to a variety of biases than others... So, the result is we all tend to think what we believe is factual. And, we think that we are immune to the biases, mostly, that impact others.*



“Acknowledging our blind spots is not a sign of weakness or inadequacy.”

- Georgia Harris

Based on this definition, you may be thinking of some ways this may show up in your life. Dr. Heflick discusses some versions of Bias Blind Spots you may recognize:

- **Hindsight Bias**- The tendency to look back and believe that an event was more predictable than it actually was. This bias is identifiable in the workplace when we show overconfidence after learning the result of a project and/or critical decision. Sport fans often call this person the “Monday Morning Quarterback”. This can be dangerous because it causes us to develop tunnel vision.
- **Planning Fallacy**- The tendency to underestimate how long things will take. This can show up a number of different ways. The most common way to recognize this in the workplace is if you have a pattern of missed and/or ‘near missed’ deadlines.
- **Self-Serving Bias**- Tendency for all people to think they are better than average. An example of this in the workplace is interviewing for a new position. If you get the position, do you attribute it to your achievements, experience, etc.? If you do not get the job, do you diminish the achievements of the chosen candidate with statements like, “*The interviewer never liked me anyways*”?

How can we improve our blind spots?

The research on Bias Blind Spots is relatively new, with most of the relevant research conducted in the past 40 years. Still, there is enough research out there to provide us with some general guidelines on how to monitor the bias blind spots in both our personal and professional lives.

Hindsight Bias

To minimize hindsight bias, make data your friend. Because those with hindsight bias rely strongly on their sense of “knowing”, they limit data-driven planning, and therefore make reproducing results impossible. If you need a simple mantra for this, here is one: “Trust the **process**, not the **outcome**”.

Planning Fallacy

If setting unrealistic deadlines are a concern for you, consider the sources you allow to inform your decision-making. Are you looking at past completion rates of all parties involved? Have you listed competing priorities? *Psychology Research and Reference* gives this advice: “*Specifically, before generating a task-completion prediction, forecasters are asked to recall when they typically finish projects, and then to describe a plausible scenario that would result in the upcoming project being done at the usual time.*”

Self-Serving Bias

Self-serving bias is a self-esteem protector from a negative experience. However, workplace peers can view taking credit for only positive outcomes negatively. Three things that can help improve this bias are: learning to value failure, taking responsibility for your failures, and finding ways to give others the same credit you desire.

One final thought

We all have some bias within us. The research from *Carnegie Mellon University* states that only one adult out of 661 has said that they are more biased than the average person. Acknowledging our blind spots is not a sign of weakness or inadequacy, rather the contrary. Your level of ownership may be the difference between guiding your team into success, or drifting them into oncoming traffic.