

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION & ACCESS

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Inclusion Icebreakers: Affinity Bias

Prospective Employees

How to use this Lean In card in a group setting:

- Read the situation on the front of the card aloud, including “Why it Matters”
- Discuss times when people in the group have witnessed or experienced this situation and possible actions to take to address it. *We strongly recommend anonymity and confidentiality when sharing stories.*
- Flip the card over and read “What to do” and “Why it Happens” aloud
- Encourage people in the room to think of one thing they will do when they see bias at work, or one thing they learned that they’re going to share with others. Take turns, go around the group and share.

Affinity bias: Tendency to gravitate toward people like ourselves in appearance, beliefs, and background, and avoid or even dislike people who are different from us.

You realize that your company gets most of its new employees through referrals by current employees.

WHY IT MATTERS

If you're not careful, you may end up with a lot of employees of the same race or gender, or from similar educational or economic backgrounds. This could mean that your company is failing to get the benefits of diversity—and isn't necessarily getting the best talent.

LEAN IN**WHAT TO DO**

If the new hires lack diversity, talk to HR or someone senior. Say that you've noticed that your company tends to hire people who are referred by other employees and explain the shortcomings of this strategy. Another issue could be that your process for evaluating new hires is too subjective, so someone saying, "He's my friend" ends up carrying a lot of weight. To counter that, suggest using a list of standardized criteria, so all candidates are judged by the same standard.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Rooted in affinity bias

Affinity bias makes us more comfortable with others like ourselves.⁹² This can make it feel safer and more comfortable to hire people who are already known and liked by existing employees.⁹³



Keep in mind: Bias isn't limited to gender. People can also experience biases due to their race, sexual orientation, a disability, or other aspects of their identity.

Reference:

50 Ways to Fight Bias, *LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company's Women in the Workplace Study*, 2015.