

DOES YOUR WORKFORCE



LOOK LIKE

BY MARY JAWGIEL

Take a look around your office. Do the majority of the people working with you look like you? Are they the same or pretty similar to you in age, gender, educational attainment, ethnicity, personality type, etc.? If you answered yes, you and your hiring team could be exhibiting unconscious bias in your hiring efforts.

Humans are predisposed to look for traits we ourselves have when we take a measure of others. Possibly it is because we consider ourselves to have high potential and to be high performers, so we look at others who resemble us and assume they also have the same character traits. Possibly it is some deep seeded need to belong to a tribe or clan

where we feel safe. These deep human emotions, or implicit biases, can lead us to unconsciously believe that individuals who don't resemble us may not have the same high potential or possess the same ability to be a top performer.

This attribute of human nature is especially troubling when you consider the desperate need the field of industrial distribution has to recruit and hire entry-level employees from the millennial generation and their younger siblings, Generation Z. These are the most diverse generations ever. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2015, millennials are more diverse than any prior generation, with 44.2 percent belonging to a minority race or ethnic group. And, Generation Z is

estimated to be just over 50 percent minority.

Based on these numbers and depending on where in the U.S. you are located, those who apply for your entry-level positions may represent any number of minority groups. Are you unconsciously rejecting some candidates because they are not like you? Conversely, is it possible highly qualified candidates are not applying at your company because they don't see people like themselves working there?

It has been proven that a diverse workforce is a higher achieving workforce. Companies with greater diversity outperform those that are not diverse by a large margin. Research by McKinsey & Company

shows gender-diverse companies are 15 percent more likely to financially outperform similar businesses that are not as diverse. Likewise, ethnically diverse companies are 35 percent more likely to financially outperform similar businesses that are not as diverse.

If you want to grow your business, it makes sense to bring in people that are different from you. It's been shown that diversity leads to more creativity, better decision making and more innovative problem solving. Individuals representing various races, educational backgrounds, ethnicities, gender, etc., see the world through different lenses. They bring new and unique points of view for discussion and problem solving.

Having a diverse workforce increases the chances of finding better solutions. If everyone thinks the same, then there is little room for change. Without change, we keep doing things the same way and eventually find ourselves way behind.

YOU?

Industrial distributors must compete with other fields of employment that are also looking for the best and brightest entry-level employees to fill openings being left by retiring baby boomers. The “qualified” candidates—those who have the soft skills (language and people skills) and the hard skills (technology and math)—you need to succeed are far and few between. Could you be ruling out some people due to your own unconscious bias?

Research has proven that each and every one of us has an implicit bias towards those individuals not

like us—whether based on gender, ethnicity, race, generation, outward appearance (short, tall, thin, overweight), school attended and even disability. Most of us are more prejudiced than we believe. Sociologists have been studying implicit bias and have discovered it's even more hard wired and ingrained in human psyches than previously thought. Researchers from Harvard University, along with other academic institutions, have launched “Project Implicit” where one can take various online tests to uncover levels of unconscious bias. There are a number of tests available at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>. The results can be eye-opening.

Leading companies in the U.S. and around the world are working to educate their employees and their hiring teams about the issue of unconscious or implicit bias in an effort to be the most competitive and successful they can be. There's an insightful video of Howard Ross, a

noted expert on the topic, giving a presentation to a group of Google employees at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v01SxXui9XQ>. The video offers fascinating insight into the issue and demonstrates how unconscious bias, left unrecognized, can lead us to make poor decisions.

The overall U.S. population is shifting and so is your customer base. You will need a diverse workforce to develop and implement new ideas and provide the type of experience and customer service today's and tomorrow's customers need and want. Millennials and Generation Z value

diversity, so it stands to reason they will be looking for diversity when they are looking for their next work place.

IDENTIFYING YOUR BIASES

What can you do about implicit biases? Harvard reports “Right now, there is not enough research to say for sure that implicit biases can be reduced, let alone eliminated. Packaged “diversity trainings” generally do not use evidence-based methods of reducing implicit biases. Therefore, we encourage people not to focus on strategies for reducing bias, but to focus instead on strategies that deny implicit biases the chance to operate, such as blind auditions and well-designed “structured” decision processes.”

As you search for qualified candidates to hire, keep in mind how implicit bias could possibly be affecting how you present your workplace and the jobs you are offering to entry-level talent. It's possible you could be leaving some really excellent potential employees out of your hiring pool because they are a little bit different from you or fear they won't fit in at your company due to their own implicit biases. Every person has potential, and with the right training and mentoring, that person who is not just like you could become your next superstar employee. **IS**

Mary Jawgiel is program director for Industrial Careers Pathway (ICP), an initiative of the PTDA Foundation and eight other organizations in industrial distribution. Her life-long passion is working with young people. For more insights on recruiting, hiring, onboarding, training, managing and retaining millennial and Gen Z employees in the industrial distribution industry, subscribe to the ICP Talent Tipsheet at IndustrialCareer-sPathway.org/Tipsheet.



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