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Overcoming Biases May Improve Hiring, Employee Engagement: Expert

By Jane Anderson

Everyone harbors biases based on their own lived experiences, affecting their decisions unconsciously, but it's possible to overcome biases by fostering awareness of them—potentially improving hiring practices and employee engagement in the process, an expert said.

When leaders learn to recognize and counter their own biases, they can create a more diverse team with differing viewpoints that potentially will perform better overall, said Bret Hood, director of 21st Century Learning & Consulting LLC, at a Jan. 17 webinar sponsored by the HCCA.^[1]

“We use our own experiences, we use what we feel is comfortable, and we start to make these decisions. And these decisions that we make affect all kinds of people,” he said. “So, if we start becoming aware of how our lived experiences and our perspectives start to play a role in how we behave, then maybe we have a better chance of mitigating the negative effects of our biases.”

Humans develop assumptions about new people almost instantaneously by comparing them with personal experiences that are “catalogued” from their pasts in their brains, Hood said. “If that new person reminds you of someone you know, then you start to assign the values of that person to the new person in front of you.”

Gender plays a significant role in this, he said. For example, when asked to picture a nurse, most people think of a woman, and when asked to think of a welder, most people think of a man, Hood said. “We become conditioned to think of a gender when we talk about nurses or we talk about welders, but there are exceptions to these rules. And that can be the danger about stereotypes.”

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