What is implicit bias?

Implicit bias is “the unconscious and often subtle associations we make between groups of people and stereotypes about those groups.”¹ As humans, we make immediate assumptions about any person we meet, based on their race, gender, appearance, etc., whether or not we are consciously aware of these assumptions. These assumptions “encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments.”² Separate from explicit bias, outright expressions of bigotry against a specific group of people, implicit bias is often hard to recognize in oneself. However, all human beings have unconscious associations. Even the most open and accepting of individuals will have some degree of implicit bias against any number of groups of people, be it by race, gender, socioeconomic class, etc.

What is implicit bias training?

Implicit bias training allows participants to recognize their own unconscious associations and implicit biases. Recognition is the first and easiest step we can take to overcome these biases.

Training and courses feature information on how implicit attitudes impact hiring, treatment and promotion and how leaders such as search committees and boards can support and demonstrate inclusive attitudes and behaviors.³

Why should our rabbinic search committee participate in implicit bias training?

Implicit bias is present in all of us as a natural function of our human social interaction. Participation in implicit bias training is a vital step in conducting a rabbinic search that is committed to engaging the best candidate for the position. Undergoing implicit bias training allows a search to be undertaken that neither privileges certain candidates nor disadvantages candidates who are more likely to be stereotyped in ways that may inhibit hiring (e.g., women, people of color, LGBTQ people, people of lower socioeconomic status). Participating in implicit bias training will also communicate to prospective candidates your congregation’s commitment to equity in the workplace.

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¹ United States Department of Justice. https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/871121/download
² The Ohio State University Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/
³ NewPoint Strategies, www.newpoint.biz
The Reform Movement’s Rabbinical Placement Commission (RPC), which is comprised of representatives from the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), and the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), sets the policies for the placement of CCAR member rabbis in URJ member congregations and is guided by a commitment to a fair, orderly and dignified search process. As a way to advance equity and create a level playing field, the RPC has added several questions regarding implicit bias training to the rabbinic search application.

I am a woman or nonbinary person or there is a member of my committee who is a woman or nonbinary person. Do we need to participate in implicit bias training?

Yes! Everyone has some degree of implicit bias against other individuals, and this can include bias against groups of which we are a part. An implicit bias training will both help you recognize your own biases and help you to curtail them.

How might implicit bias show up in the rabbinic search process?

- Extending interview invitations to rabbis who are men because the rest of your senior staff are women, or vis versa.
- Assuming that a younger woman might require parental leave in the near future, or that a man might not require the same thing.
- Favoring candidates who attended particular colleges or summer camps.
- Responding positively to a candidate who reminds you of yourself.
- Responding negatively to a candidate whose identity makes you uncomfortable.

Resources and Referrals

- Lynne Revo-Cohen, NewPoint Strategies, Irevocohen@newpoint.biz, www.newpoint.biz, (p) 703-405-7133
- www.ccarnet.org – See Task Force on the Experience of Women in the Rabbinate in the Rabbinic Voice Section
- CCAR Implicit Bias Awareness Leadership Training Program and Implicit Bias Scenario Facilitator’s Guide (available August 2020)