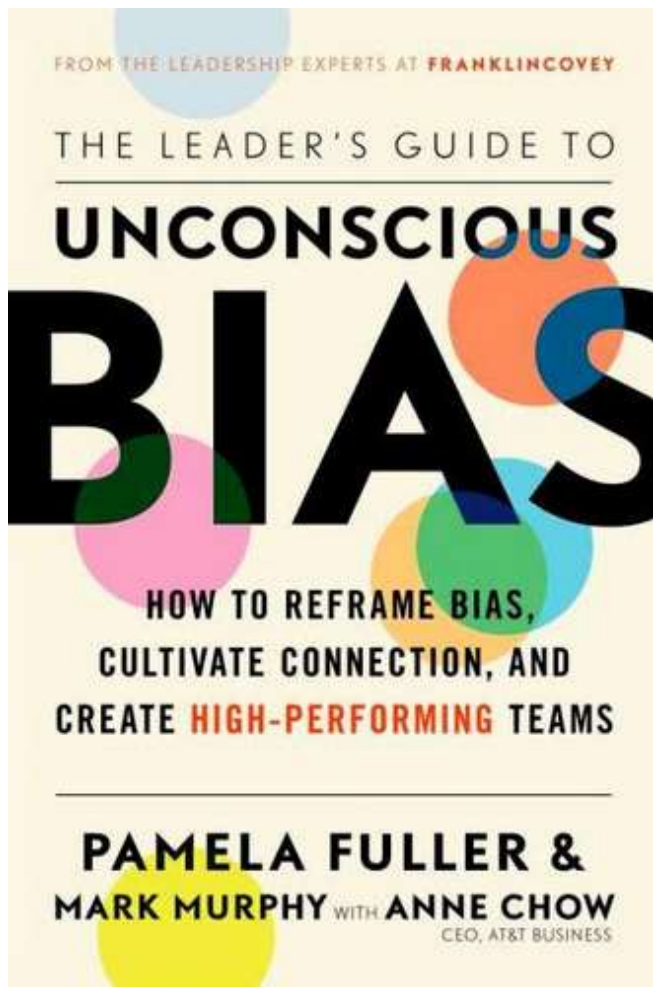


## EXTREMELY USEFUL

# Leaders and supervisors will find it enlightening

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*The Leader's Guide to Unconscious Bias: How to Reframe Bias, Cultivate Connection, and Create High-Performing Teams* by Pamela Fuller and Mark Murphy with Anne Chow. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 304 pages, \$28 (hardcover).



“To be human is to have bias,” Pamela Fuller, Mark Murphy and Anne Chow assert near the beginning of “The Leader’s Guide to Unconscious Bias: How to Reframe Bias, Cultivate Connection, and Create High-Performing Teams,” their new treatise on a high-profile topic that seems to permeate all dimensions of our society. “If you were to say, ‘I don’t have any bias,’ you’d be saying your brain isn’t functioning properly.

“Essentially, unconscious bias arises from our brain’s capacity problem,” they continue. “We take in an astonishing 11 million pieces of information each second, but we can consciously process only about 40 of those bits. To handle this gap, our brains build shortcuts to make sense of the information. We focus on the one angry customer instead of the hundreds of raving fans (negativity bias). We pay special attention to data that proves our strategy is working and gloss over data that casts doubt (confirmation bias). We unconsciously prefer the first job candidate we meet (primary bias). And we simply like people who are like us (ingroup bias).”

Admittedly, I was drawn to this thought-provoking little primer from the moment it arrived in my mailbox. Most companies, agencies and other organizations are grappling with many of the issues eloquently addressed in “Unconscious Bias.” And although the text is one of the more rigorously-researched dissertations on the subject matter at hand, the writing style is relatively straightforward and comparatively easy to decipher. Readers with a background in the basic concepts on which the book relies will no doubt appreciate it at a deeper level than those who are not as well-versed in the science, but the authors definitely intended it for a general audience. Leaders and supervisors – especially those in middle management – will find it especially enlightening.

Structurally, the book consists of an introduction, 16 chapters arranged in four major sections (“Identity Bias,” chapters 1-4; “Cultivate Connection,” chapters 5-8; “Choose Courage,” chapters 9-13; and “Apply Across the Talent Lifecycle,” chapters 14-16; and a Conclusion. The manuscript is exceptionally applications-oriented, with case studies, activities and various inventories/assessments that give the reader heightened insight into their attitudes and behaviors – and how to modify both

for personal enrichment and organizational efficacy. I immediately saw how I could use this resource as a workbook for many of the training and professional development sessions I regularly conduct.

Central to Fuller, Murphy and Chow's fundamental thesis is the inescapable notion that overcoming our inherent biases will allow us (and our organizations) to perform at a much higher level. It's all about unlocking the potential of everyone in the organization so they can contribute to the maximum extent possible. The reality is that most of us are capable of being much more productive than we typically exhibit on a regular basis. But in order to tap into that potential, we have to be more acutely aware of the prejudices that intrinsically limit our perspective – and proactively strive to limit their influence on our mindset and work strategies.

“Bias conversations can be emotional,” the authors assert in “Navigate Difficult Conversations,” the eighth chapter and one of my personal favorites. “But when someone raises an issue of bias, a leader's first instinct is often to tell them to calm down and/or to tell the direct report that their message is getting lost in their emotion. Not only is that ineffective (when in human history has asking someone to calm down ever worked?), it's misguided. Emotion is germane to this type of conversation.

“Empathetic listening includes understanding both the content and the emotion of the other person,” they continue. “When one of my children comes to me crying about a Lego creation that his brother has knocked down, I'll only prolong his upset by saying, ‘Calm down. You can rebuild it, and it wasn't that important.’ If I truly want him to move on to a solution, I need to acknowledge the validity of his emotion: ‘You worked hard on that, and I understand how upsetting it is that your brother didn't respect your stuff.’ We sometimes have the right intuition about parenting and forget to extend the same thoughtfulness to adults. As emotion rises over the course of the conversation, don't shut it down. Instead, reflect feelings and emotions back at the other person and let this emotion unfold into a solution.”

Fuller serves as a thought leader for inclusion and bias with FranklinCovey and also manages some of the consulting firm's most strategic accounts. Her resume includes extensive involvement with the United Nations, the U.S. federal government and several Fortune 500 companies. Similarly, Murphy, who has degrees in marketing and organizational behavior from Brigham Young University, has been a consultant with FranklinCovey for more than 27 years. He also co-authored “Project Diversity: Disaster or Dynamic for the Project management Institute.” Finally, Chow, who is on the FranklinCovey board of directors, is the president of national business for AT&T, where she oversees and supports most of their business customers.

“Bias, equity, diversity and inclusion have always been important issues to the effectiveness and engagement of a workforce,” Fuller, Murphy and Chow explain near the end of the book. “Leadership is a high calling, and in its toughest moments, when we're in the management trenches, we must remind ourselves that this is both a privilege and important work. Of course we all have a lot to do, and we're responsible for more that we can sometimes bear. To make progress on bias in the midst of your already busy leadership career, you must have a reason to make room for this as a priority in your life.”

Obviously, I liked “Unconscious Bias.” I plan to use it in both my graduate classes as well as when I am asked to conduct training for regional business and industry. My sense is that you would find it extremely useful in your ongoing attempt to be a better person and a better leader. Highly recommended.

– Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor in the Department of Counseling and Student Affairs at Western Kentucky University.