# Mitigate Unconscious Bias – Virtual AFB Leadership Conference 2020 – Complete Transcript

## Part I: Presentation

**Narrator:**

Thank you for connecting online with us for the AFB Virtual Leadership Conference 2020, and this session, titled “Mitigate Unconscious Bias.” Now, a welcome message from Kirk Adams, Ph.D., President and CEO, AFB, and Roslyn Adams, Spouse and AFB Ambassador.

**On screen:**

Dr. Adams, a man with salt-and-pepper hair, and wearing a business suit, sits next to Ms. Adams, a woman with dark wavy hair, and wearing a bright purple blouse.

**Dr. Adams:**

Hello, I am Kirk Adams. I am President and CEO of the American Foundation for the Blind.

**Mrs. Adams:**

My name is Ros Adams, I’m married to Kirk and I’m a longtime supporter of AFB.

**Text on screen:**

Kirk Adams, Ph.D., & CEO, AFB. President

Roslyn Adams, Spouse and AFB Ambassador.

**Dr. Adams:**

And we thank you all for joining us from your living rooms and home offices across the country. We are in our apartment here in Arlington, Virginia, and we welcome you to our Virtual AFB Leadership Conference. Now our Leadership Conference is really the highlight of our year, we bring hundreds of people together, all dedicated, passionate individuals, who are all committed to creating a world of no limits for people who are blind. This year, for obvious reasons, we’re bringing you our conference virtually.

**Mrs. Adams:**

We’re really excited that you’re joining us, and as an educator I’m particularly happy about the fact that we’re using technology to help us stay connected at this time.

**Dr. Adams:**

We wouldn’t be able to present you with this virtual conference without the help of our supporters and partners and friends. I want to thank Bridge Multimedia for lending a hand in creating this virtual content, and our sponsors who make it possible for us to provide this content free of charge for anyone who could find it useful. Please do share!

**Mrs. Adams:**

So I just want to stress that this is our opportunity to continue to learn from each other. So do enjoy the session and please take the time to visit us online at AFB.org/VirtualAFBLC.

**On screen:**

A photo shows a diverse group of business professionals sitting around a table. One of them is using a wheelchair.

**Text on screen:**

Mitigate Unconscious Bias.

**Logos:**

AFB and LHH.

**On screen:**

A multi-screen video display shows three men, coming to us remotely, using their home computers: Grant Doster who has short black hair, Chris Rice who has short light hair, and Russell Shaffer who keeps his head closely shaved.

**Grant:**

Hello and welcome to LHH Inclusive Leadership Workshop, “Mitigate Unconscious Bias.” This workshop will offer you foundational knowledge, application, and real examples of decision-making bias and the implicit impact of the business.

**Text on screen:**

Grant Doster, SVP, Diversity and Inclusion, LHH.

**Grant:**

We have included slides that will accompany the brief presentation, but are tertiary to the process. They’re supplemental to the conversation to just add a little extra stimulus and shouldn’t interfere at all with the flow of the talk.

So with that, let's go ahead and get started. I want to start with an exercise. If you will, just imagine with me for a moment, three vignettes. So take a breath, shake off the day and just come with me for a moment.

All right, in the first vignette: imagine you're working from home and your doorbell rings. You answer the door to hear a service repair person introducing themselves on your front porch. You're so relieved they came because your internet has been down for two days and well, since you work from home, this has been extremely inconvenient. So I want you to consider that for a moment. Lock that visualization in your mind.

Okay, great. Let's move to the second one. We're moving now to a coffee shop. Later in the day you decide to head to your local coffee shop. It's nice to get out of the house. And of course you have the need for some much needed caffeine. Greeting you from behind the counter is a polite young man who seems to be new to the job. He takes a little longer than it usually takes to get an order out. But that's okay, you're in no rush, so it's okay, it's fine. So go ahead and lock that one in your minds.

All right, and the last vignette. The next morning, you're listening to a broadcast of a news conference. You hear the cameras snapping pictures as they describe play-by-play. The doctor is approaching the podium to introduce the cure to COVID-19. You hear the thunderous applause in the Great Hall as the doctor takes the stage and opens their portfolio to make the announcement.

Okay. Do you have that idea locked in your mind? Fantastic. So, you'd have a solid sense of all of that. Now that I've-- I've got some questions for you now. Was the service repair person a woman? Was the young man behind the counter visually impaired? Was the doctor an African woman? It's okay if one or more of your answers is no.

Your brain creates images of what's familiar. The things I mentioned are generally less familiar. Hearing the voice of a female service repair person may have surprised you. The young man working behind the counter telling you that he was visually impaired may have caught you off guard. And perhaps hearing the doctor’s Nigerian name and regal African accent probably also caused you a double take.

In a nanosecond your brain constructed mental models before you can even think – “Wow that's great that the coffee shop is hiring persons with visual impairments.” Well, hopefully we will all get to the point where these aren't surprises anymore. But for now, it is kind of a surprise for most. So thanks for playing along. I'd like to introduce my esteemed colleagues. First, Russell Shaffer.

**Text on screen:**

Russell Shaffer, Director, Global Culture, Diversity & Inclusion at Walmart.

**Russell:**

Yes, thank you Grant. And thank you for the invitation by LHH to be a part of today's presentation. I love that opening vignette, because it really gets at the heart of what we're trying to talk about today with unconscious bias and mental models, and how that can affect the way in which we work and interact with others.

That's a big part of what I do day-to-day as a Director in the Office of Global Culture, Diversity and Inclusion at Walmart Inc.

**Text on screen:**

Q&A to follow...

**Russell:**

I also have a long history with AFB having been involved with the organization for a number of years and serving a two-year term as the chair of the board that ended in November 2019.

I come to this work as a person who's personally passionate about it, having been diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa when I was 10 years old, which led to my legal blindness by my late twenties and my life with little to no usable vision for the past decade or so.

**Grant:**

Thank you, Russell. And Chris Rice.

**Chris:**

Thank you, Grant and Russell.

**Text on screen:**

Chris Rice, Managing Director, Global Talent Development, LHH.

**Chris:**

My name is Chris Rice. I run LHH’s talent development business. We're divided into a number of categories. Topics like inclusive leadership, which is the topic of this presentation, leadership, coaching, assessments, change and transformation, and organizational culture. And we have colleagues who are around the world on every continent. It's a pleasure to be part of this presentation.

**Grant:**

Thanks Chris. And I'm Grant Doster. I'm head of Global Inclusive Leadership for LHH. I'm responsible for delivering thought leadership and subject matter expertise to our global markets…

**Text on screen:**

Q&A to follow...

**Grant:**

And customers who create cultural and feeling or a sense in the value of belonging. And we also want to help our customers/constituents to elevate themselves and their team members, especially those who are or feel disenfranchised.

So thanks for joining today. First, let's just start with going back to our imagination exercise for a moment. We have to begin to examine these auto behaviors. Our automatic responses to comfort or danger that may, yes, save our lives, but can also perhaps alienate our next star employee in the process.

So let me first of all give you permission to not think of yourself as a horrible person if you didn't get all the “best answers” during the imagination exercise. That's not the intent. The intent was for you to experience your own unconscious bias. As Russell said, it happens to all of us. And noticing if you automatically went to whatever is familiar, you know that you're inherently a good person and your responsibility as a good person is to examine your own behavior, to make sure your auto responses are not discriminating or hurting others within your organization, department, or team.

**Text on screen:**

The purpose of our talk today:

* Definitions and understanding;
* What this means to us;
* How to overcome biases.

**Grant:**

So this is not a speech on diversity, but it is about recognizing unconscious bias and how to manage it within yourself, your team, as well as your organization to ensure a more inclusive work environment. So the ultimate goal here is to help create an environment where you feel as though you belong and others feel as though they belong, while creating an environment that elevates you and your team to achieve the desired results. So Chris and Russell, how would you define diversity and how, how do you define inclusion?

**Chris:**

And maybe I could start. You see on this slide that there are five green apples and one red apple. And that's a metaphor for, for diversity and inclusion. It's diverse in that 1/6th of that population is different than the other 5/6th. And it implies inclusion because the red apple is nicely ensconced with the, the green apples.

But this is often the mistake that many companies do: that they check the box. And I'm not sure that this team, whether it's a senior team or a work team, really represents both diversity and inclusion by having one that is different than the rest. And I suspect after a period of time, the red apple might be turning a little bit green as opposed to all the green apples turning red and they're saying, "You know, we need more red apples to really perform well." That's the difference of diversity and inclusion. Russell, how would you define?

**Russell:**

Diversity is a naturally occurring phenomenon in the world and workplaces and society. I think as corporations that are committed to making an impact, serving their customers and their shareholders, you certainly want more diversity and you want to hire more diverse talent, retain the diverse talent that you have, and maximize the ROI from the diversity within your organization. The way in which you do that is through inclusion.

At Walmart, we feel like diversity and inclusion go hand in hand and our definitions for the two really kind of play off one another. When we think about diversity, we're thinking about a workforce with unique identities, experiences, styles, abilities, and perspectives that reflects the customers and communities that we serve. Then when we think about inclusion, inclusion is the intentional action of understanding, supporting and championing individuals in that uniqueness, in that diversity, resulting in an environment where people feel welcome, comfortable, and safe, and are empowered to bring their full self to work every day, to be high performers.

**Grant:**

Fantastic, thank you Russell. And with Chris's example of the apples, I think it's important that we understand that there is a difference between diversity and inclusion. And I love Russell's example and his definition of diversity being a phenomenon. It's a naturally occurring thing. And inclusion should be an intentional action. I have often said that diversity happens regardless, but inclusion is a choice.

So diversity and inclusion are different. Today we're talking about inclusivity, and the litmus test for inclusivity is belonging. So let's look at some of the things that get kind of in the way, perhaps, of some of that inclusion. What is bias? Russell, you have a great way of explaining the background of what has led us to the biases that we know today. Can you share some of that with us?

**Text on screen:**

Defining Bias and Unconscious Bias:

- Bias: Prejudgment, prejudiced, sometimes unfair.

- Unconscious bias: Involuntary and without awareness or intent;

- Conscious bias: Intentional and responsive.

**Russell:**

Yeah, absolutely. Thanks Grant. So we want to think about bias, unconscious bias. It's a naturally occurring phenomenon. I think the first thing we need to realize, and Grant you said it earlier but it bears repeating, is that we all have bias. We all have unconscious bias.

From a neuroscience perspective, bias is our brain’s way of trying to recreate past joys and avoid past hardships. Bias is a four letter word, but it is not necessarily a bad word. I think when we reflect upon unconscious bias, we place evaluation on the bias-based decision based upon the outcome. If our bias based-decision leads to a good outcome, then we consider it a good bias. If it leads to a bad outcome, then we consider it to be a bad bias. The problem with unconscious bias is that my good outcome could be your bad outcome and vice versa.

And so when we think about unconscious bias, you mentioned it earlier, Grant. It's really designed and hard coded into our DNA as a means of survival dating back to when we as a species lived in caves and roamed on plains. As the smallest and slowest and weakest amongst mammals, our unconscious bias was our way of being able to keep ourselves safe in the presence of danger.

We as humans are the only species that can do metacognition. In other words, think about thinking. We can think about our own thoughts and that can be really good for critical thinking. But that is not so good to be deliberative and standing there when faced with a bear or a saber tooth tiger that wants to eat you for dinner, or when you are the hunter and you are in pursuit of a rabbit or a deer for dinner, standing there thinking about it rather than acting is probably going to result in your dinner getting away.

So those biases are there to help us as a species survive and date all the way back to prehistoric times. The issue is, is now we don't have to hunt for our food. And by and large, we're not being hunted. But our biases are still there and still affect our decision making, but rather than impacting survival, we're looking for patterns that are going to resolve inconvenience and the conservation of energy. And that often leads to the unintentional exclusion of people, ideas, concepts, or situations that differ from ourselves and our own.

**Grant:**

So the great news is that our definitions here on the page fall right in line with those things. So what a fantastic way to explain kind of where this unconscious bias comes from. And just to reiterate, one out of every one person has unconscious bias. There's no way around it. But we suggested unconscious bias is not a character issue, but as Russell so adeptly described it, it's a psychological and physiological.

So now conscious bias on the other hand is the decision to remain ignorant of those around you. And that may well be a character issue, but that's not what we're talking about today. We're talking about unconscious bias and we suggest that in order to get off of that hook, you have to kind of get on the hook and admit you, like everyone else, has unconscious bias. It's natural to want to deny it, but there's really nothing to feel guilty about.

**Text on screen:**

Moving from unconscious to conscious decision-making -

* System 1 – Unconscious.
* System 2 - Conscious.

**Grant:**

And I'll tell you that the reason why: we use a book that talks about System 1, System 2 thinking and it just tells us that the brain deals with 11 million pieces of information at one time. Unfortunately, we could only functionally handle about 40 of those things. So the brain seeks to conserve energy. High level thinking takes heavy cognitive tolls and mental shortcuts come into play that save time and usually yield reliable outcomes.

So what we want to do is make sure we're not using System 1 thinking, which will help us from perhaps getting eaten by a saber tooth tiger, fight or flight, and really spend more time on System 2 thinking when it comes to things like hiring and making decisions about who's going to be our talent. The reason being is, and just real quick, I'll show you some of these results, they talk about why it's important to use inclusivity in your management. This is not a matter of sensitivity or charm school. It's important in driving better business results through better decisions, through heightened innovation by enjoying the differences that we employ. And that is to employ them in an inclusive way.

*Entrepreneur Magazine* recently had an article that talked about some of the upsides…

**Text on screen:**

Inclusivity Leads to Better Business Results.

Employers who have embraced physical challenges as a component of their talent strategy report:

* **90%** increase in retention of valued employees 1
* **72%** increase in employee productivity 1
* **45%** increase in workplace safety 1

Gender-diverse leadership teams are likely to outperform on profitability from 21% and value creation by 27%.

Companies with diverse and inclusive teams lead to better business decisions up to 87% of the time.

**Side note:**

Small print text below the slide shows sources.

**Text on screen:**

Sources:

1. U.S. Department of Labor;
2. McKinsey;
3. Cloverpop.

**Grant:**

...particularly around people that have physical challenges. For instance, 90% increase in retention of valued employees, 72% increase in employee productivity, 45% in workplace safety. And sometimes through unconscious bias, we have a tendency to, to look past those upsides.

So again, it's certainly, it makes for the workplace to be a more sensitive and better place to work. But this is a business decision. It just happens to be one of the most personal business decisions that we can make. So with that, I'd like to turn it over to Chris and Russell, to discuss more about this topic and really bring it into the real world.

**Text on screen:**

Real Life Discussion -

What would it feel like if your environment was more inclusive?

**Chris:**

Russell. I suspect based on the success of your career, that you've enjoyed a lot of inclusion as you moved up at Walmart, but you may have also experienced unconscious bias. What examples can you give of either being included or being-- feeling unconscious bias during your career?

**Russell:**

I've definitely experienced both. From an unconscious bias perspective, I think one of the first and most pervasive when it comes to work is that this notion that people with disabilities, people who are blind or low vision, don't work. I can't tell you how many times I've been traveling for work, making my way through an airport terminal on a Tuesday afternoon dressed in a button up and khakis, traveling by myself, traveling light, and have people ask me, “Oh, where are you going? Are you on vacation? Are you going to visit family? Is there somebody on the other end, family that's going to pick you up?”

And you know, I look at my fellow travelers who are traveling by themselves, most of whom are dressed similarly, and talking about where they're going for work or business. And I want to ask, “why is the assumption that I’m not doing the same thing that they're doing on a Tuesday afternoon? Why is it that I'm going on vacation or visiting family and not going to conduct a business meeting or to participate in a conference?”

And so, the bias starts at the very genesis of employment for people with disabilities. And that is that people don't believe that people with disabilities work. And a lot of that comes from what we've been exposed to. There's not a lot of good examples in popular culture or media of people with disabilities who are gainfully employed on television and movies or in other pieces of media and art.

**Text on screen:**

Q&A to follow...

**Russell:**

The times where people with disabilities are depicted, which is rare, they're generally depicted as, as an object of charity or in need rather than somebody who can contribute or add value. So those biases come from not only our own experiences, but what we've been exposed to.

Leading from another perspective of bias, when you think about unconscious bias towards people, you generally have likability and you have competency bias. And for the most part, people don't have a bias around likability towards people with disabilities. You know, it's kind of that, “Oh, Johnny who grew up down the street with Down Syndrome, he was such a sweet kid.” Or, “like my cousin Annie, she has cerebral palsy and she's just such a sweetheart.” There's generally not a likeability bias towards people with disabilities, but there's-- if a bias exists, it's almost always towards competency. And I've experienced that a lot in my life. Even in micro inequities, things like walking out of the men's room and somebody holds the door open for me and compliments me and says, “Oh, good job buddy!”

And to which I want to respond, “Do you compliment everybody who successfully walks through the bathroom door or, or just the guy who's blind?” And the question remains: if you think that my successfully exiting the bathroom is an accomplishment worthy of praise, what must you inherently and implicitly think about my ability to perform my job? So, these biases show up in the subtle micro ways, but when you are on the receiving end, time and again over a lifetime, over the course of a working relationship or an interaction, they start to compound and you start to feel them.

On the converse, when you're in an inclusive environment, you feel much more inspired and engaged and empowered to be at your best and to know that people truly value you. An example that just happened to me this week was that a colleague sent out a follow up to me for some meeting notes that we were on last week and pointed out that the content on slide five was an image and it probably wouldn't be accessible for my screen reader. So she took the time to type out the information that was on slide five so that I would not miss anything and then I would know what was going on.

She didn't need to do that. I didn't ask her to do that, but she saw a potential gap and she saw that I might be excluded by that. And so she took that intentional action to make me feel included, and I did. And I felt a lot more connected to her and a lot more connected to the work as a result of what she did. And it was just a little thing, but it was a big thing for me.

**Chris:**

Thank you for sharing that, Russell. I have some other questions. During your introduction, you described how you lost your vision in your late twenties, and I believe you were a Walmart employee. What can you tell us about that experience of going from sighted or partially sighted to blind as an employee of a large company on both inclusivity and unconscious bias?

**Russell:**

One of the things quite honestly is that we have to remember that, as Grant said before, one out of one people have unconscious bias. That includes ourselves and sometimes that unconscious bias includes internalized biases towards ourselves. When I started to lose my vision in my late twenties really rapidly right in the middle of my career, I wanted to do everything I possibly could to conceal it. Because I felt like if it got out, if people knew, that it would limit me in my career and my upward trajectory.

And so I tried everything to keep that to myself for as long as I possibly could until I just simply could not anymore. Fortunately, I worked in an environment where we had reasonable accommodations and a lot of things available to support me and people around me who truly cared about me and saw me as somebody who could perform and add value, with or without a disability. They saw me for me and they saw my talent

And what I ultimately started to find and discover myself, and one of the things that I like to share with other people with disabilities is that the only career limiting move when you have a disability that you can conceal or cover is doing just that. I was able to accomplish more and do more when I became out with myself and out with my colleagues, and really truly live my authentic self, and that I no longer paid the tax of covering that part of my identity. I didn't put cognitive energy towards trying to conceal that. Instead I used that to build better relationships and to be more productive. And my career really started to take off when I started to be more honest and transparent with my disability, both with myself and with the people around me.

**Chris:**

You know organizational cultures can develop in two different ways. One is that the way people act, others will act the same way and they just evolve. The other way is purposeful, that a company makes a conscious decision, that it will have a certain culture and might be a culture of inclusivity or it might be a culture of non-inclusivity. It sounds like the Walmart culture is very interesting in terms of those dynamics. How much of it was purposeful? That is, Walmart saying, “We need to have more people with a disability” and how much was it good people viewing that they need to do the right thing?

**Russell:**

Yeah, Chris, I think it's a little bit of both. We have a culture at Walmart based upon four values of service, respect, excellence and integrity that have been around since Sam Walton founded our company nearly 60 years ago. Obviously there are leadership behaviors and characteristics that are consistent with those values that when we're operating at our best, both at a macro level as a company and then in a micro level as individuals, really show up in what we do.

But there's also those antithetical things, we call them the ABCs of the anti-culture - the arrogance, bureaucracy and complacency that can creep in. Yeah, those things can form a corporate culture too or a subculture. And so you constantly have to be vigilant inside your organization to make sure that you're setting the tone at the top, that the values and the behaviors that are consistent with your company's ethos are being reflected and shown.

And ultimately that shows up to your point in the individual. That's not to say in the side of a corporation that you're not going to have bad actors. And certainly in a company in the size of Walmart, 1.4, 1.5 million people here in the U.S., that there's not going to be some individuals who run counter the culture. But what I've experienced and what I believe is that we have a self-correcting culture. And those, those values of service, respect, excellence and integrity are eventually going to triumph over the arrogance, bureaucracy, and complacency and other counterculture things that pop up.

But you have to stay vigilant and it starts with you. Each individual can be and should be a champion of the culture. And when we do that, the result is an inclusive environment where people with all types of difference, both those with disabilities and those with other types of, of diverse and differing identities and experiences can come to work and contribute and thrive.

**Chris:**

We're in the midst of a pandemic, which also brings out the best and the worst in people. And I have been disturbed by reports about conscious bias of different demographics around the United States based on the pandemic. There's more of a macro question. What are your, your comments about how the pandemic has caused either good or bad behavior around bias?

**Russell:**

You know, I think that there's been a tremendous amount of, of good behavior and I think people are, are rallying together. I think one of the things that inclusion inside of a corporation or in society lends itself to is innovation. And so, one example I would share just from my Walmart experience is that we're hiring right now. In the midst of an economic downturn, our need to help support and serve communities, to get them the groceries and pharmaceuticals that they need, requires people on the front line. And we really respect and honor our frontline associates as heroes who are taking care of the communities.

But we need more. And we've hired more than 150,000 individuals in the past month. And that type of demand surge requires a different approach. And what historically had been a two week lead time or more in order to be able to hire an individual, we've been able to compress down to about 24 hours. And we're hiring about 5,000 individuals a day.

And so that's just one example of immense innovation that's come as a result. You're seeing out in the world factories that make uniforms for major league baseball and other professional sporting leagues repurposing that into personal protective equipment or auto manufacturers and other manufacturing companies retrofitting their operations to produce ventilators to meet the demand. So tremendous good taking place.

But, in the midst of that, there's certainly been some disturbing examples of discrimination and hate, particularly towards individuals of, of an Asian American and Pacific Islander background and a lot of xenophobia around that. From a perspective of a DNI professional, certainly inside of our own ranks, inside of our own company, we do not tolerate that. But, in a more macro level, that our customers and associates are feeling that out in the communities where they live, work and play is something that is deeply troubling.

And, and we've been trying to lead the way in terms of messaging and conversations around that. We can hopefully dispel some of that xenophobia and bias that's been rearing its ugly head as a result of this. But some of those things are probably going to hang around longer than this pandemic. And our hope is that the innovations and, and ground that we've gained are the things that stick around and the bias and discrimination that's popped up are some of the things that go away with the virus when it's ultimately vanquished.

**Chris:**

Russell, thank you. I know we're going to take questions from the audience in a little bit. Let me turn it back to Grant.

**Grant:**

Thank you, Chris, and really appreciate that thought provoking, informational, but powerful story. It's certainly edified me, so thank you very much. As we start to wrap this up, I wanted to give you an idea of what we believe are four things that you can do to create a more inclusive environment. These four things obviously aren't a panacea, but they certainly could perhaps help you to move towards two things. One, being aware of how you promote an inclusive environment for the people around you. But as Russell pointed out, the whole idea of self-bias is also dangerous for us all and unconscious bias is not just outward, but it can also be internal.

But these four things are self-awareness, curiosity, open-mindedness and deliberate attention. Real quick, let me just take you through some of those definitions. Self-awareness, understanding your own style and

preferences - perhaps it’s through Myers-Briggs or some other type of instrument - recognizing the styles of others and looking for opportunities to bridge working styles - not pigeonholing people into different styles and cognitive behaviors, but really looking across the spectrum of what makes these people unique.

Russell's definition at the beginning of our talk was looking at differences not just to get in the visible differences, but through the behaviors, through the cognitive styles, through the different ways people access to disseminate information. That's going to be really important. And knowing yourself and establishing ways to receive feedback is a great portal to really start that process.

Secondly, curiosity, maintaining and developing a focused mindset. Asking open ended questions that allow for more dialogue and having an insatiable thirst to understand more about other people. I heard someone coin the phrase “Be interested as opposed to interesting.” And I think that that's going to really help the curiosity piece be more provocative for you.

**Text on screen:**

Q&A to follow...

**Grant:**

And having regular coaching conversations. You know, it's one of the things that Lee Hecht Harrison prides itself in is how do we help people become better coaches and create better conversations?

For the last two, open-mindedness: listening and multiple levels, recognizing the way conscious and unconscious biases can impact our decision making. And if we're open minded about it, and if we challenge the things that we are thinking, we have a much better chance to mitigate or eliminate some of those unconscious biases that we have.

And then lastly, be deliberate. Pay deliberate attention, actively identifying diversity gaps. Not just again, the visible diversity gaps and how we look and what our packaging is, but how we approach things and how we think. I've often heard it said, “Let's not look for people that fit in. Let's look for people that add to.” And then approaching decisions making and delegation opportunities through the lens of fostering that ongoing inclusion, engaging with others and exposing yourself to counter stereotypes that are out there.

So these are four things that we think are really important. But before we head to the Q&A session, I just wanted to get one last few from Russell and Chris. If you could, gentlemen, looking at some of these strategies and what we've discussed today, how can you use them to mitigate unconscious bias in your environment?

**Chris:**

A number of years ago, I was working for a competitor of LHH and we would hire people from one of the Columbia University graduate schools to be instructional designers. And it was a pipeline. Every year, we would hire a couple of people. And then we would ask the previous class, “Who do you recommend in the next class that we should recruit?” And one year, the recommendation was to hire one woman who turned out to be blind.

And I remember sitting in a conference room and having a long conversation with my colleagues of, “How would this work? Person needs to get from New York City out to the middle of New Jersey? What about the dog?” All this kind of stuff. Finally I said, “I think maybe we ought to let the employee prove that she can do the job and get here when she needs to get here.” To my delight, she turned out to be not only a very fine instructional designer, but I would describe that she was to instructional design what Jackie Robinson was to baseball: she was actually better than all the other instructional designers. And that made me a lot more open minded about a person who was blind and the contribution that she could make to my company.

**Russell:**

You know for me, we're recording this a week or two after Jackie Robinson Day. As a baseball fan, I think we have to realize, particularly when we talk about people with disabilities, people who are blind especially, in many corporations and many organizations, an individual with a disability, person who's blind might be the equivalent of Jackie Robinson in that organization. Nobody with a disability or nobody who is blind may have ever worked inside that company or that organization before. Certainly might not have ever worked alongside some of the colleagues.

So there's ground that's still being broken, even 30 years post-signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. And so I think we have to reflect upon that. And as people with disabilities ourselves realize that people have a natural curiosity and that that is, to Grant's point, really necessary for inclusion. They might be awkward and clunky sometimes in how they go about that curiosity, but realizing that chances are if you use a refreshable braille display or some sort of other assistive technology, there's a good chance you're using that alongside people who've never seen that before. They want to understand how it works and how it helps you.

And so, being open to teaching others is, is really important and really critical. And I've found throughout the course of my career, really essential for helping to build those relationships, but also help foster inclusion from my own position of influence. But you know, as individuals who are looking to be more inclusive, the curiosity, as Grant said, really is key. Leaning into those conversations with people who are different than you and not necessarily leading with, “Why do you use that cane” or “How long have you been blind?”

But I often hear people say, “I don't even know how to talk to a person with a disability.” Well start by saying “Hello,” start by asking “Tell me about yourself” just like you would with anybody else. And then once rapport and trust have been established, you can ask, “Can I ask you some specific questions?” “I notice you using that device. Can you tell me about it?”

But it's all how-- it’s all in how you approach it. But you know, curiosity should be your guide. Look for those articles, those blogs, those pieces of media that are written by or showcased in a positive, affirming light, people who are different than you. And use those to supplement your, your natural human interaction. And with that, I think you can go a long way towards being more inclusive and helping to mitigate some of your own biases.

**Grant:**

Well, Russell, that was wonderful. Thank you. And I can tell you from personal experience also that micro affirmations versus microaggressions and other cues that come in to try and make people feel more comfortable. The roads are paved with people with good intentions. But this takes practice. If you don't take the time to be curious and make the mistakes and learn from them, then we're relegated to, I guess, remain where we've been.

So, gentlemen, I thank you so much for that talk. Again, thought provoking and powerful. But now it's time to turn it to our audience for questions and answers from you. So we'll be using the Q&A button and we look forward to hearing from you.

**Text on screen:**  
Q&A?

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In today’s marketplace, organizations are discovering the need to turn their attention inward to find their future talent. At LHH, we help companies see the possibilities in their people. Through assessments, coaching, upskilling and transitioning, companies can realize the untapped potential within their own workforce, resulting in increased productivity, morale, and brand affinity. A division of The Adecco Group—the world’s leading HR solutions partner—LHH’s 4,000 coaches and colleagues work with more than 7,000 organizations in over 60 countries around the world. We make a difference to everyone we work with, and we do it on a global scale. We have the local expertise, global infrastructure, and industry-leading technology to manage the complexity of critical workforce initiatives and the challenges of transformation. It’s why 60% of the Fortune 500 companies choose to work with us. Learn more at www.lhhcom.

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**On screen:**

Dr. Adams and Ms. Adams, sit together in their living room.

**Text on screen:**

Kirk Adams, Ph.D., President & CEO, AFB.

Roslyn Adams, Spouse & AFB Ambassador.

**Mrs. Adams:**

Hello again. Now as we move into the live portion of our Q&A, we’d like you to please be patient if we encounter any technical difficulties. And please enjoy the content.

**Part II: Live Q&A**

**Text on screen:**

Grant Doster, SVP, Diversity and Inclusion, LHH.

**Grant:**

Well hello and welcome back. Chris, Russell. Now it's time for the Q&A session. I'll try and get to as many as I can. But please bear with us because it is a pretty robust list [chuckling]. So, first question I have here is: how does unconscious bias vary by country or geographic area?

**Chris:**

Let me take the first pass. And there are some unfortunate similarities by geographic region.

**Text on screen:**

Chris Rice, Managing Director, Global Talent Development, LHH.

**Chris:**

It's things like gender, age, country of origin, religion, sexual preferences, and disabilities. And the-- what's unique to the geography is which country of origin, which religion, but people are people, as you said at the beginning, Grant: one for one, people have a bias. Russell, what would you add to that?

**Russell:**

No, I think you hit it on the head, Chris. I think the thing that we would add that we didn't talk a lot about isthis whole notion of insider/outsider, and an otherness and othering.

**Text on screen:**

Russell Shaffer, Director, Global Culture, Diversity & Inclusion at Walmart.

**Russell:**

And, you know, here in the U.S. certainly we have kind of a majority group. But when you think about other parts of the world, 70% of the world's population comes from Asia and from Africa. Yet here in the United States, we refer to people from that ethnic background as the minority.

So I think it's all contextual in terms of where you find yourself in the world. And so realizing that, you know, in one situation, in one geography, you can be an insider. And in another, you could be an outsider. And the othering that can come from that, and disability and sexual orientation goes right along with that based upon the cultural ethos of the geography that you find yourselves in. If it's a conservative, if it's more of a progressive environment around certain things, you're going to find yourself feeling more included or excluded based upon a lot of the things that kind of come along with that.

**Grant:**

Thank you gentlemen. I'll just add that it's a global phenomenon. Some people think that certain areas may not experience the same type of unconscious bias, but as we said over and over again, one out of every one person has unconscious bias. And the interesting part of this is that in order to recognize that, and this is one of the questions, was how do we address it? How do we get started? And if I could, I'll just address that one. But we use a formula of assess, diagnose, prescribe, and then treat.

But it's got to start at the top. Before you can move forward, you have to make sure that the entire organization, starting with the CEO suite, feels as though this is something that's important for all the reasons that we talked about from a business perspective. So try to do to take care of two birds with one stone there. Hopefully that was a cogent suggestion. Another question we have: can you give examples of companies, organizations, that are role models for inclusion?

**Russell:**

There's a number of different benchmarks and indices that evaluate and assess performance inside corporate America from a diversity and inclusion perspective. One of those, the Diversity Inc. "Top 50 Companies for Diversity" actually just released their list earlier this week. So I'd encourage you to go check that out. There's a number of companies that are well known within the disability space that show up on that list. For instance, Marriott Hotels, which is a long-standing organizational partner with AFB, showed up number one on that list this year. You know, AT&T, Kaiser Permanente, a number of other companies are in the Hall of Fame with diversity, ANCOR showed up on that list, Walmart, we are proud to show up in the top 50 this year as well.

So different indicators assess and evaluate different things. From a disability perspective, I'd say look at the Disability Equality Index, you know, companies that score a 100 are, are going to be those best places to work for people with disabilities. Again, that's something Walmart, we are proud to have been ranked 100 for the past four years, Microsoft, a number of other great companies, Boeing, you know, across different sectors. Northrop Grumman are all going to show up on the Disability Equality Index.

So looking for those companies who are willing to kind of put themselves out there and evaluate and be benchmarked against their peers is a great way of kind of seeing who are those companies who are leading, who are really committed to this at a broad level and then specifically a disability level.

**Grant:**

I'm going to direct this one back to Russell. One person asks: I would love more examples as a coworker, I can be more inclusive of my colleagues, with especially visual disabilities.

**Russell:**

I will say, right off the bat, tell me who you are. Tell us who you are when you walk up to us or pass us in the hall. I can't tell you how many times somebody will walk past in the hall and say, "Hi, Russell." And I'll think I'll recognize the voice, but I'm not quite sure. And by the time it clicks, they're 10, 20 feet past me and I really had something that I wanted to say to them. Or sometimes, I'd never figure out at all and I spend the rest of the day kind of like, "who was that?" So, announcing yourself is, is a little bit, a really key thing with people who are blind or low vision. And then beyond that, I would just say realize that no, no one size fits all. Not every person's experience with being blind has been the same. They may have been blind since birth or may have recently lost their vision due to progressive condition like myself or through injury, may or may not be up to speed with orientation and mobility skills or assistive technology.

So always, rather than assuming what somebody can or can't do on their own, and from a support and assistance perspective, just ask, "Is there anything that I can do to help and support you right now?" And you know, if somebody says yes, try to help them as best as you can. And if they say no, realize that that person might not need your help right now, but they might in the future, and that it shouldn't necessarily mean that you don't ever ask them or somebody else if you can be of support in the future. So realize situational, circumstantially, and individually the need for interaction and support is going to be different.

**Grant:**

I've got a little bit of feedback on this one, but the question is: what do you suggest for a person who is told that they are being too hypersensitive when raising concerns about unconscious bias with a manager? In an earlier meeting, I happened to find a quote from Barbara Smith, who's a writer and feminist, and she was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. But she's quoted as saying, "For those of you who are tired of hearing about racism" - and I paraphrase - "sexism or any of the other isms, imagine how more tired we are constantly experiencing it." So I think that from a hypersensitivity standpoint, as Russell said, I think we start with trying to build rapport and trust. We build a relationship because we all need help**,** we all need assistance regardless of what our individual inability might be, or ability.

And I think it's, it's important and it's incumbent upon us to reach out to others and find out how we can help each other. So in the workplace, this actually translates to all the different statistics that we talked about. Better decision-making, increased innovation, increased profitability and productivity. So again, it's a very personal thing, but it's also a very, very cogent business argument to want to do those types of things. Chris, did you have anything to add perhaps?

**Chris:**

Grant, I think your answer was great and I would recommend to that manager: if your team members are being hypersensitive, you need to reflect on yourself.

**Grant:**

Russell, this was something specifically asked to you: do you think that the fact that at Walmart you built work relationships and were evaluated as a sighted employee before you became blind, did that influence your coworkers in a positive way when you lost your sight?

**Russell:**

I'd like to think so or hope so. You know, for me in my own particular experience, I lost my vision pretty early on into my career at Walmart. I'd only been there maybe a little more than a year or so when things really started to deteriorate. And I'm now about 14 years into my career. So a lot of the people that I work with today, my present boss, members of my team and direct colleagues I didn't know or work with back when I first lost my vision, there's only a handful of folks who I work with today on any degree of regularity who knew me before I really started to lose my vision and had to start using assistive technology and orientation and mobility skills. So perhaps it might've played in a little bit. And certainly maybe helped me establish a little bit of a reputation that preceded myself.

I think that that's one of the reasons why I'm such a big proponent and a supporter of acquired disability and creating that inclusiveness and helping people realize that you still have the same skills and abilities that you did pre-disability that you do post-disability acquisition. You just might need to go about doing things a little bit differently and need a little bit of different type of tangible and intangible support. And when you create that, you can kind of get back to that, that performance level that you had pre-disability much, much faster.

But you know, disability is the only diverse group that you can join at any time. And the longer each and every one of us lives, the more likely we are to acquire a disability. And so the hope is that we find ourselves in an environment, in a culture, where people can see us for our talent and our ability, and see our disability as part of our identity but not something that can prevent us from being successful.

**Grant:**

Wonderful. Thank you, Russell. And listen, we've got about two minutes left. So Chris, I wanted to ask, is there anything else that you'd like to add or on any of the questions asked or on any of the questions that should have been asked?

**Chris:**

Well, I want to, to reinforce a big concept and why, why do we care about inclusion versus unconscious bias? And the question is: how does it matter to a company? Well, it matters on two different levels. One: that you will inspire your employees if you do the right thing. But here's the reason for the, the members of your company who are more financially oriented. If you have an inclusive, diverse workforce, you'll have a more profitable company. Grant referred to some of those statistics. There's a, a ton of other studies out there that are compelling. You will make more money and be more successful if you do this.

**Grant:**

Thank you. And Russell, anything, any last-minute thoughts?

**Russell:**

I would just reiterate the fact that what we talked about before is that unconscious bias doesn't make you bad people. It makes you people. We all have it, we all have experiences and exposures that create things inside of our brain that are-- our responses, mental models, shortcuts that we're trying to take that impact our decision making. Our first response is almost always going to be a non-inclusive response because it's going to be bias-based.

So we have to be intentional on how we react to that first response to make a decision and an action that is based upon our, our values and critical thinking rather than based upon our biases. And you know, when we do that, we can go a long way towards mitigating bias as this webinar is focused on and creating a more inclusive environment. And one of the best ways we can do that is by staying curious and leaning into those different experiences than those which we've had.

**Grant:**

Fantastic, Russell, thank you so much. So everyone, this concludes our program. On behalf of my esteemed colleagues, Chris, Russell, we want to thank you so much for joining. It's been an extreme pleasure working on this project. We hope you enjoyed the discussion. And remember D&I is really important for all the right reasons. And it seems like sometimes we get caught up with the word diversity, but may I suggest that don't get caught up on diversity; diversity happens regardless, but inclusion is a choice. So with that, take care, be safe and be well. Thank you for joining.

**Part III: Sponsors and PSA**

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AFB: American Foundation for the Blind (registered trademark).

**On screen:**

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**Narrator:**

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**On screen:**

Expanding possibilities for people with vision loss.

**Narrator:**   
Again, Kirk and Roslyn Adams.

**Mrs. Adams:**

Thank you so much for joining us.

**Dr. Adams:**

And if you would like to help support our work creating a world of no limits for people who are blind, you can do so at AFB.org/Donate, and we would immensely appreciate it.

**Mrs. Adams:**

We truly would.

**Narrator:**

To find out more about this session and all of the Virtual Leadership Conference activities, go to AFB.org/VirtualAFBLC.

**Text on screen::**  
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Grant Doster;  
Chris Rice;  
Russell Schaffer.

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**END**