

# BUSINESS INSIDER

## Here's What Google Teaches Employees In Its Course On Unconscious Bias



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*Google+ / Google Glass*

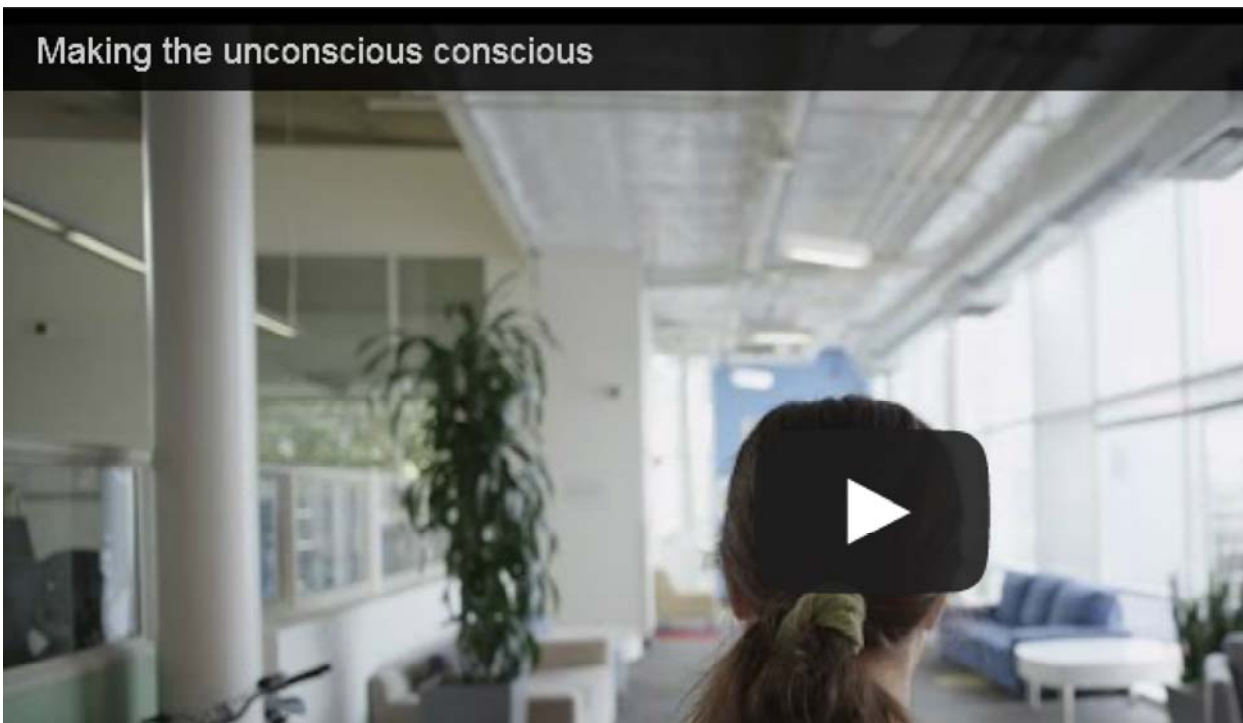
Google sees through biased eyes.

Like [almost every other tech company](#), Google has a [diversity problem](#): 70% of its employees are guys, 61% are white, and only 21% of people in leadership roles are women.

With those unflattering statistics staring them in the face, Google has tried to figure out *why* the numbers are so skewed toward white dudes.

One conclusion: Unconscious bias, the sometimes useful tendency to make snap judgments (that subway car is empty for a reason), guides us into unexamined bigotry (she's a woman, not a leader).

Google made as much understandable to its employees with the below video.



Google HR boss [Laszlo Bock](#) was tipped to the possibility of unconscious bias at the company when he read [a New York Times story](#) about a Yale University study, which concluded that "science professors at American universities widely regard female undergraduates as less competent than male students with the same accomplishments and skills."

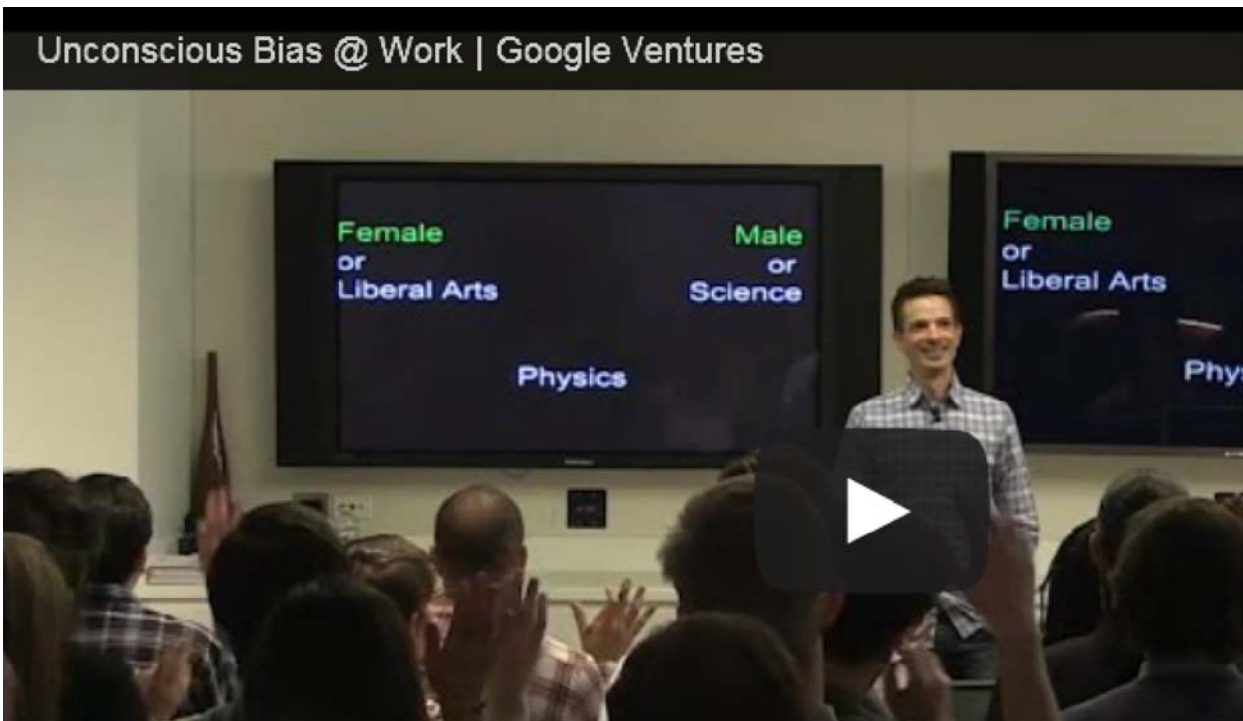
If this could happen to male and female science professors, Google realized it could happen at Google.

"This is a pretty genteel environment, and you don't usually see outright manifestations of bias," Bock [said](#). "Occasionally you'll have some idiot do something stupid and hurtful, and I like to fire those people."

It wouldn't just be *nice* to have greater diversity. It would be good for business, Bock argued, since [research shows diverse teams make better decisions](#).

So Google's HR department is spearheading a major pro-diversity initiative, and half of Google's 49,000 employees have already taken the centerpiece workshop.

See one of the talks in the video below.



To fix its diversity problem, Google has identified four steps to tackling unconscious bias.

Here they are [from the Google blog](#):

**Gather facts.** It's hard to know you're improving if you're not measuring. We collect data on things like gender representation [in our doodles](#) and [at our conferences](#).

**Create a structure for making decisions.** Define clear criteria to evaluate the merits of each option, and use them consistently. Using the same standards to evaluate all options can reduce bias. This is why we use [structured interviews](#) in hiring, applying the same selection and evaluation methods for all.

**Be mindful of subtle cues.** Who's included and who's excluded? In 2013, Googlers pointed out that of the dozens of conference rooms named after famous scientists, only a few were female. Was this our vision for the future? No. So we changed Ferdinand von Zeppelin to Florence Nightingale — along with many others — to create more balanced representation. Seemingly small changes can have big effects.

**Foster awareness. Hold yourself — and your colleagues — accountable.** We're encouraging Googlers to call out bias. For example, we share a "bias busting checklist" at performance reviews, encouraging managers to examine their own biases and call out those of others.

These are big steps for Google, and it's already made some progress. For instance, [Google's IO conference was 20% women this year, as opposed to 8% last year.](#)

Calling out bias may be the most noticeable improvement. The Times reported that during a presentation a senior executive hollered "unconscious bias!" when an interviewer asked a man and a woman who did the dishes in their new shared office.

"Suddenly you go from being completely oblivious to going, 'Oh my god, it's everywhere,'" Bock [said](#).

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