

Date: 8th March, 2022

Publication: Amazing workplaces

Link: [From Self To Organizations, Are We Ready To #BreakTheBias?](#)

How often, in everyday life we are a party to biases that we do not even realize exist in our minds. In the words of **Senior journalist & content writer Ajit Ramachandran** "She's triumphed over all barriers and rightfully got her place in the world, at large. Women, that is. And yet, women are having to prove their worth, many a time, to toxic power play, mind games and underhand tactics to undermine them." Yes it's true, Women from all walks of life, at all levels, all over the world are subject to conscious and unconscious biases.

Blame it on our upbringing, the society we live in, the people we grow up with, the truth is, biases exist and are an important part of our thinking process. As such we carry our biases into our relationships, in our day-to-day dealings with people and ultimately into our workplaces.

This year's #IWD theme calls for **#BreakTheBias**. It calls us to Imagine a gender equal world. A world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. A world that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. A world where difference is valued and celebrated. Together we can forge women's equality. Collectively we can all #BreakTheBias.

On this International Women's Day, we would like to delve deeper into what these biases are, how they can impact the way we work & conduct business and most importantly how we can address these biases in order to create a world of equals with a key focus on gender equality at the workplace.

What are some of the biases that we need to address?

Statistics don't lie, so while we have made considerable headway over the years, women account for only 39% of the global workforce. This means that irrespective of the industry we refer to, sports, IT, finance, creative or whatever, as a society we are still not able to give women their due credit at the place of work. Women still have to struggle and required to give more than their men counterpart to be taken seriously. And we owe a major part of this to deep rooted biases.

Biases are commonplace and quite a many women are subject to their effects. However, only few are lucky to surface them and share their experience with the world.

When **Sudipta Ghosh, General Counsel, Apraava Energy** decided to pursue law, she was asked to consider another profession because going to court and working with criminals was not meant for girls. Then after law school, she joined a corporate legal firm; and she was asked to consider another speciality because the corporate world is too "alpha male cut-throat". Also, working late nights and long hours are not sustainable for a woman. Then when she decided to join an energy and resource company, they told her that she wouldn't survive because it's a man's world and working at a project site, going to remote rural areas is not safe for women. She proved them all wrong. Expressing concern, Sudipta says, "I thrive on challenges, and these barriers of biases motivated me to succeed. **But when does this end? It's time to stop denying women jobs based on their gender instead of their skills.**"

Ritika Arora, an entrepreneur and coach ponders "Indeed we have come a long way and witnessed a lot of progress on this front, but looking at the larger picture, at leadership roles, women are still largely underrepresented and grossly underpaid than their male counterparts for the same amount of work."

She believes that, "representation of women at all levels of the organisation is crucial, more so because the glass ceiling needs to be broken and the conscious and unconscious bias and barriers that hinder an individual's growth prospects (women employees, per se) must be let go of."

Adding to this **Sonica Malhotra Kandhari, Joint Managing Director, MBD Group** says, "Society, in general, is evolving to be more equal, one that opens up a level

playing field for everyone to partake in irrespective of gender, caste, or creed. Although it is still some way to go but with the combined effort of governments, organisations and each individual, the future will be far more inclusive.”

Sonica is more positive in her approach and points out that more and more women are stepping into workplaces and are shattering all stereotypes by taking up major roles be it any industry or sector. “So, I would rather say that it has nothing to do with men or women, skill, competence, and hard work are just about all that is needed for women to really succeed in any given field.”

Raising the concern for trans-persons, **Simi Mishra (PhD) Director, Inclusion & Program Advocacy at Connecting Dreams Foundation, TRANSformation’s on-ground partner** says, “It’s commonplace for trans-persons to face skimpy legal protection and numerous obstacles in workplace cultures, and high levels of harassment and abuse. The key to trans-friendly workplaces lies in better understanding their unique challenges, and using an inclusive lens to revamp policies, especially health and partner benefits that cater to their unique needs and simple practices such as a weekly check-in or creating a buddy system and an invested affirmative leadership.”

Richa Vashista, Chief Mental Health Expert, AtEase further raises our attention to a pertinent truth, “according to the LinkedIn Opportunity Index 2021, 85% of working women in India claim to have missed out on a raise, promotion, or work offer because of their gender. Women also face a ‘motherhood penalty’ where employers perceive mothers as less competent and committed than non-mothers. Trans-women face an even harder time navigating through discrimination and finding acceptance at the workplace and beyond. This bias is also there in the healthcare system where women are less likely to have their pain treated, their symptoms taken seriously, or receive a diagnosis than men. The collective impact of this exposes women to a higher risk of mental health conditions such as depression, body image issues, eating disorders, and low self-esteem.”

Like most women, Anchal Mehta Founder, Knowbility also believes that biases against women exist and can only be addressed through gender equality in workspaces. Women and the under represented communities are looking for inclusivity so that everybody has equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and access to the

organization. It also means that everyone feels safe in the surrounding, everyone is a part of a team that works together and everyone is treated equally with utmost dignity and respect.

Elaborating on this, **Debashree Lad, Chief People Officer, CredAble** expresses “an initiative such as #BreakTheBias is much needed in a society where gender stereotypes are prevalent across all walks of life — be it sports, education and more predominantly in the workplace”.

Like most women who have broken the glass ceiling, she further emphasizes that, “overcoming unconscious bias is the key to cultivating equality in the workplace. As humans, we are conditioned to make certain mental associations based on gender. If we’re looking to build an ecosystem that is devoid of all gender intolerance — we need to consciously fight all the biases, lead by example and break away from all preconceived assumptions about roles that are limited by gender, in the workplace.”