TAKE
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stereotypes

1 Stereotypes are generalizations about people or things. They can be positive or negative, accurate or inaccurate. Social stereotypes are generalizations we make to differentiate categories or groups of people. Like unconscious biases, stereotypes are "mental shortcuts." We use stereotypes to anticipate and respond to these differences in people from the outset—rather than having to figure them out "from scratch" in each interaction. In other words, we rely on stereotypes because they help us save time and energy.

2 Stereotypes can be misleading because unlike generalizations we make about things or even animals, our generalizations about people are much more likely to miss the mark. People are extremely complex and their behavior is often highly variable from situation to situation. Stereotypes lead us to make inappropriate generalizations that misrepresent reality.

3 Since stereotypes are often applied automatically, we can arrive quickly at perceptions or judgments about individuals. The trouble comes when we accept that these perceptions have a solid basis in fact because we are unaware of the role that stereotypes have played in creating them.

4 Stereotypes can cause us to unintentionally respond to people in ways that elicit from them behaviors that confirm our stereotypes. For example, imagine a woman is being interviewed for a management position. If the interviewer, who could be a man or a woman, believes that women are not "management material," nothing the woman says will convince the interviewer of her competence. Furthermore, the interviewer may unintentionally ask tougher questions of the woman candidate and be more critical of her responses. As a result, the woman may be pegged as providing less satisfactory responses than the men interviewing for the same position and thereby seem less qualified, even when that is not the case.

5 Inclusive leaders are aware that stereotypes (and unconscious bias) happen in themselves and others and look for ways to educate, role model, and put in place structures that lessen the impact of them on others.

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