

Empowering Our Team
Reducing or Removing Stereotype Threat in a Diverse Work Environment
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What are Stereotypes and Stereotype Threat?

Stereotypes

A stereotype is defined as “a belief about a group of individuals.” Kanahara (2006, p. 311). They can be positive or negative, but it doesn’t seem to matter with stereotypes if they are true or false.

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat is the fear of confirming in oneself a negative stereotype due to performance on difficult or self-evaluative tasks. It is a situational effect. Here are the issues that effect it.

- ❖ How important is the stereotype to the person?
- ❖ How much does the person identify with the group that has the stereotype?
- ❖ How much do they want to succeed at the task?
- ❖ Higher intelligence, higher stress, cognitive load.
- ❖ Has the stereotype been activated?
- ❖ How much focus is there on evaluative aspects?
- ❖ How media portrays it?
- ❖ Social environment.
- ❖ Multiple social groups. (Morgan, 2019)

How Does it Effect Employees?

Employees who are affected by stereotype threat often don’t even know it is happening. The more negative stereotypes a person may be susceptible to, the worse it can be.

- ❖ Stress related to the pressure to not confirm negative stereotypes
- ❖ Performance changes
- ❖ Preoccupation and distraction
- ❖ Disengagement
- ❖ Disidentification
- ❖ Decreased motivation
- ❖ Over-efforting
- ❖ Working memory taxation
- ❖ Lower performance on difficult tasks
- ❖ Change in career or goals
- ❖ Inflexible perseverance
- ❖ Anxiety
- ❖ Self-fulfilling prophecy

(Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele 1997; Aronson et al, 1999; Lamont, Swift, & Abrams, 2015; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Burmester, 2017).

What Can You do to Reduce or Remove it?

- ❖ Pre-plan for the possibility that it could happen.
- ❖ Talk about stereotype threat with employees; have open discussions (Roberson & Kulik, 2007)
- ❖ Tell employees they are not being judged when they are doing difficult tasks.
- ❖ Use constructive criticism, set high standards, but assure them you know they can do it. (Roberson & Kulik, 2007)
- ❖ Affirm their abilities when asking an employee to do a difficult task.
- ❖ Talk openly about present projects and challenges. Share difficulties with each other. Help them see they have more in common than they have differences. (Roberson & Kulik, 2007)

- ❖ Create an identity-safe environment, by changing the environment to something comfortable for all social groups. (Spencer, Logel & Davies, 2016)
- ❖ Surround employees with positive role models and affirming statements. (Roberson & Kulik, 2007)
- ❖ Self-affirmation tasks (Sherman et. Al., 2013).
- ❖ Mindfulness training (Weger, Hooper, Meier, & Hopthrow, 2012)
- ❖ Networking and mentoring. (Roberson & Kulik, 2007)
- ❖ Professional development. (Roberson & Kulik, 2007)
- ❖ Be a transformative leader, empowering your employees.
- ❖ Critical mass in projects. (Roberson & Kulik, 2007)
- ❖ Train hiring committees in stereotype threat along with implicit bias.
- ❖ Refrain from making comments during interviews that would make people cognizant of their social group, such as complimenting a woman on her dress or asking if she has children.
- ❖ Make job postings social group neutral.

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