

# REDUCING WORKPLACE BIAS: THE JUST WORLD BIAS

## SHORT DESCRIPTION

### WHAT:

The Just world bias is the fallacy that the world is fair, or should be.

### PROBLEM:

The Just world bias can be very destructive setting up an unrealistic perception of the world and potentially leading to an unhelpful victim mentality that is the antidote to effective adaptation and success.

### SOLUTION:

The lesson and meditation help to dissuade you of the notion that the world is fair, enhancing your awareness of reality and driving you to a much more adaptive mindset.



The just world bias refers to the tendency to assume that the world should be fair and that all actions should be just.

The problem with this tendency is that it can lead one to focus on unfairness which can lead to unhelpful mindsets, like victimization.

The world is complex. What might seem fair to one person or group might be unfair to another. Moreover, except in extreme cases, the concept of fairness is actually difficult to define.

What might seem fair under one set of circumstances might not be fair under other conditions. The main problems with focusing on unfairness are that it can sidetrack you down dead ends and take your energy away from realistically adapting and coping with real life situations.

That's not to say that unfairness doesn't exist, of course it does. However, focusing on it can do more harm than good. Moreover, assuming that everything in life should be fair is unrealistic and again can waste your time and energy.

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*Unfairness is everywhere.*

– Pavarthi

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## HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO COUNTER THE JUST WORLD BIAS

1.

In almost all situations, the key is to find effective ways of adapting to the existing conditions. A key question is to ask yourself is whether your thoughts, plans and actions are helping you adapt effectively or are derailing you.

Is complaining about unfairness and focusing on injustice actually helping you or just aggravating you and wasting time and energy? The answer is almost always that it is a distraction that is hampering your effective coping efforts.

2.

It's important to appreciate that in most cases the concept of fairness is elusive. Do you know absolutely everything about this situation to be able to determine what is fair and what isn't? Not getting your way is not a sign of unfairness.

For example, do you know all the rules, principles and working of the justice system? You can't effectively judge what is a fair ruling and what isn't, without that knowledge. And if you were the beneficiary of an "unfair" judgment, would you complain?

3.

Meditation and mindfulness exercises can help moderate the tendency to see unfairness by moderating frustration and anger that can lead to the biased perception of injustice in the first place.

It would be great if all good deeds were proportionately rewarded and all bad deeds were proportionately punished. It would be awesome if the legal system was based on justice not laws, was foolproof and the right verdicts were always returned. It would be great if hard work was equally rewarded, and all money earned was based on relative effort.

Talent is equally divided among the population but opportunity isn't. Imperfection is also equally divided but the probability of being exposed isn't.

Unfortunately, the world doesn't work according to fairness, in part because we have cognitive biases that distort logic and that dynamic potentially affects every human interaction.

Of course, the just world bias is likely to come into play when you believe that you have suffered by being untreated fairly, rather than benefited by being treated unfairly.

In a corporate environment, the perception of being treated unfairly is one of the main reasons why people quit their jobs. That might not matter too much to an organization, unless they are losing their top talent or can't replace workers very easily and without cost.

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*Don't try to make life a mathematics problem with yourself in the center and everything coming out equal. When you're good, bad things can still happen. And if you're bad, you can still be lucky.*

– Barbara Kingsolver

The Just World bias is important because the perception of being treated unfairly is the trigger for anger. It is easy to see unfairness everywhere and to *assume that you have an unequal share of it*. This can lead to an unhealthy and unhelpful victim mentality, which will only ratchet up further your sense of unfairness.

You can then become obsessed with your plight, which only strengthens the bias even more. If you're not very careful, you can disappear in an ever-increasing cycle of unfairness, anger and victimhood. Which is why corporations need to be clear about policy decisions, and be authentic and consistent in implementing them.

Remember it's the perception of unfairness that is the key, so not only is it important to be consistent, you also need to be aware of things that might lead to potential misperceptions and rectify them before they create problems.

It's also possible that as a leader or senior executive, you feel that your company isn't being given a fair shot at certain types of contracts, for example, local government contracts, or is being unfairly treated in media coverage. The perception of unfairness can occur at almost every level of business. Sure, life is unfair and often unjust.

**Are you treated more unfairly than anyone else? How would you know?**

**How do you know how unfairly other people are treated? Compared to whom?**

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Or do you use the in-group bias to assume that the group you identify with are all more unfairly treated than other groups? If so, how do you know that?

If you have proof that you are more 'unfairly' treated than others, in what ways might you be contributing to that, apart from an unreasonable view of fairness?

Unfairness is everywhere. What is fair to someone, can be unfair to another. In addition, there's the problem of scaling. If you are treated more unfairly, how much more? Under these circumstances you are likely to see yourself more unfairly treated than you actually are. Before long, you can interpret every bad thing that happens to you, whether you contribute to it or not, as unfair.

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*I can't control what's fair and unfair. I can't control the nature of the business or the nature of society or the nature of the world, but what I can control is how I choose to see the world and what I choose to put back into it.*

– Alisha Tyler

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## MEDITATION

Meditation is an effective and important way to minimize biases. By controlling emotions and reaching a state of peace, you can see things more clearly giving you a chance to see things from a less biased perspective.

As you close your eyes and reach a state of calm, know that life can be unfair. Sometimes, you will benefit from this, sometimes you will suffer for it. However, don't assume that you are more unfairly treated than others. And even if that were the case, the best response to being treated unfairly is to continue on the path of self-development and fulfillment.

The issue isn't whether you are treated unfairly, but what you do about it. Are you going to become angry, seek revenge and compound the unfairness by your actions? Or are you going to choose to follow your path and not be deflected by apparent unfairness?

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You can succeed despite unfairness. You can succeed despite unfairness. While it may seem that the world is more unfair to you than others, remember you don't know what other organizations have gone through. Almost everyone experiences injustice in some form or another in their lives.

Almost everyone experiences injustice in some form in their lives. The world is not perfect.

When you're good, bad things can happen, And if you're bad, you can still be lucky.  
When you're good bad things, can happen, And if you're bad, you can still be lucky.

When you see others complaining about how unfair life is, you can agree with them but perhaps suggest that they don't compound the problem by over reacting to injustice and have it deflect them.

Great leaders don't compound the injustice of life by overreacting and seeking revenge. They know that only compounds the injustice.

Great leaders don't rise to the bait of anger and injustice. They don't compound the injustice of life by overreacting and seeking revenge.

Great leaders seek solutions not revenge. I can't control what's fair and unfair.

*I can't control the nature of the business or the nature of society or the nature of the world, but what I can control is how I choose to see the world and what I choose to put back into it.*

Great leaders seek solutions not revenge.