

# REDUCING WORKPLACE BIAS: THE REACTANCE BIAS

## SHORT DESCRIPTION

### WHAT:

The Reactance bias is the impulsive tendency to do the opposite of what is asked simply to assert your freedom to do what you want.

### PROBLEM:

Impulsive behavior can lead to all sorts of trouble, not the least of which is the destruction of relationships, not to mention self-esteem as well as dealing with the fall-out of ill considered actions.

### SOLUTION:

The lesson and meditation not only increase awareness but meditation in general improves conscious control making it less likely that you will act impulsively.



The reactance effect refers to the negative reaction to disconfirming information, especially when it refers to one's own behavior.

So, if someone criticizes you for an action, rather than listening to the criticism, evaluating it and possibly taking heed of it, the reactance effect dictates that you will do the opposite.

Instead of being swayed by someone's opinion or criticism, in the reactance effect you defiantly do the completely opposite.

This is often an impulsive defense born out of an emotional response to being criticized. The Reactance Effect can be very detrimental to how other perceive you. In addition to not being able to heed advice, those displaying the Reactance Effect are seen, often rightly, as impulsive, not a well-regarded quality.

There are far better ways of dealing with criticism, even unjustified criticism, than impulsively digging in and even making your opinion or behavior more extreme.

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*It would be a sin to help you destroy yourself.*

– Leo Tolstoy

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## HOW TO DEAL WITH CRITICISM?

1.

When acting angrily and impulsively to objections about your views or behavior, you are reinforcing the notion that you act emotionally, and are not given to reason.

This doesn't help your case or the perception of you by others. On the contrary, one should ask for all the information you can get about the opposing views. Ask calmly and politely what those views are, what evidence are they based on and why is it important to the other person.

2.

When you have that input you can now set about dismantling it. Perhaps you agree with some aspects of it, in which case say so. Defuse any misconceptions and misunderstandings. Perhaps they are basing their criticism on false information or misunderstandings.

3.

Be prepared to discuss the issue calmly and rationally. Remember, when you just react emotionally, you lose all credibility, even if you have a stronger case.

4.

It's okay to disagree but it's better if you have at least tried to entertain the other person's position and logically analyze and answer it.

5.

Sometimes, we don't realize how we are coming across and it's helpful to be made aware of that. Accepting reasonable feedback and criticism is a sign of strength not weakness.

6.

Mindfulness and meditation will also help modify, it not eliminate impulsive tendencies.

We all come across people with different opinions about many things, even our very actions. Keeping our composure and acting reasonably when faced with such challenges is the height of emotional control, a characteristic that many people not only find intimidating but also one that most people admire.

Emotion is the key to cognitive bias and in many ways the Reactance bias is a perfect example of how we can let our emotions influence our thinking and behavior. We have to ensure that our emotions, and especially our initial reactions to events, don't distort our perception, subsequent thoughts and actions.

As you might expect reactance refers to thinking impulsively and reacting rather than responding.

# Reducing Workplace Bias: The Reactance Bias

Biases tend to feed off each other. If you overreact to someone, then there's a good chance that you will feel the need to justify your behavior than to revise your perception and even apologize, potentially making the effects of impulsive behavior even more damaging.

Someone asks you to do something or act in a particular way. Your emotional response is anger, manifested in one or more of these thoughts.

Who are you to tell me what to do!

Oh, so you disapprove of my behavior!

Oh, as if you don't do the same thing, you hypocrite!

The anger thus generated will likely encourage you to do the complete opposite of what was asked of you. You will justify this on the grounds of your independence, of not wanting to comply with a "hypocrite" and a total dismissal of any suggestion that your behavior needs managing in some way.

So, if your sibling asks you to moderate your drinking at a family event, driven by your anger you quickly get drunk and act obnoxiously.

You might feel good about your independence, but you have also totally justified your sibling's request. Emotion has driven your thought and behavior.



*Sometimes it's a good idea to think about what you want from a situation, and try to get it, rather than just blurt out the first thing that comes into your head.*

– Emily Lockhart

Reactance is very similar to the defense mechanisms of acting out and regression, where one resorts to childish behavior.

Part of the issue for children is that they haven't developed their rational skills and the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain that guides decision-making and emotional control, isn't fully developed until the mid-twenties. However, if you are past the age of 25 you don't have that excuse.

This is what happens when you are driven by emotion that distorts your thinking. It's a great example of why we need to take pause, breathe and step away from the emotion so you can actually "think" more clearly, than simply reacting emotionally.

You need to cool down and seriously think it through without being driven by emotion.

Unfortunately, many people have not learned this skill, and you can imagine the sort of impact it has on relationships, not just because of the event itself but also the subsequent rationalizations used to justify the behavior.

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This is why mindfulness and meditation practices are so important. When well practiced, over time they will help you manage your emotions. They will help you observe your feelings in a much more dispassionate way, so that they don't control your thinking and you.

As with all these biases, it is not the first thought that matters. That first thought is likely to be infused with emotion that distorts your perception.

What really matters is your ability to recognize the feeling, to observe it and distance yourself from it. You do that with your second and subsequent thoughts, when you can view the situation from a position of rationality, not emotion.

The Reactance bias is likely to lead you to lead to being impulsive and acting and thinking in a way that you will later regret. Unfortunately, the danger is that this tendency will be compounded by other biases that will convince you that you are right and other people are wrong.



*Before you make a decision, ask yourself this question: will you regret the results or rejoice in them?*

– Rob Liano

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## MEDITATION

A key value of meditation is that by training your brain to relax, you can get much better emotional control and, as a result, minimize or eliminate impulsive behavior.

As you get into a deep state of relaxation, feel the power you have – the power not to be controlled by your first and often primitive emotions. Focus on how good it feels to be calm. Focus on how empowered you are, when you are centered and in control.

Feel the calm and the control. Focus on your ability to manage your emotion. Focus on how now you are in a much better position to think about what you want from a situation rather than blurt out the first thing that comes in to your head.

Think about the situation rather than blurt out the first thing that comes in to your head.

Recall a situation where someone lost it, over-reacted and acted out. How did it make you feel. How did others feel about the reaction? What happened to the person who acted out? Did he or she make amends? Did they say they were sorry? How did other related to them after this incident?

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By contrast, focus on your sense of calm and peace. As you focus on your sense of calm and control, recognize that you are now in a position to think clearly about your behavior and evaluate the results of any actions. You are now in a position to ask yourself the question: will I regret the results or rejoice in them?

Understand that emotions like anger, are important warning signs, but they should not control your thoughts or your behavior. You want to respond with a well- considered and rational response not react to an emotional feeling.

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Realize that impulsive reactions and a reactance bias can really damage you. You will have to work even harder to repair any damage to your status, self-perception and the views of others if you persist in thinking emotional reaction is better than rational response. "It will be a sin to help destroy yourself."

Maintain control. Keep your dignity and self-respect. Behave rationally and consider the consequences of your thinking and your behavior. "It will be a sin to help destroy yourself." "It will be a sin to help destroy yourself."

Maintain control and keep your dignity and self-respect.