

8 biases that hurt communication



You may not be entirely to blame for your communication misses. People's cognitive biases can affect how they process information and make decisions based on what they heard.

Overcome these eight cognitive biases that are working against you:

Anchoring. People may rely too much on one piece of information—usually the first piece they receive—and tie all their decisions to that. Particularly if people have preconceived notions or initial negative experiences, be prepared to refocus them or even start from scratch to remove the anchor.

Availability cascade. People believe what is repeated often. Regularly communicate your vision, mission, expectations and team norms—and ensure that you are correcting misinformation.

Bandwagon effect. Groupthink is alive and well. It is detrimental when employees refuse to share new ideas or point out flaws because they don't want to be a rebel. Appoint someone to play the devil's advocate to ensure that new ideas are being considered and that old ones are being questioned.

Base rate fallacy. People will ignore relevant information if it conflicts with their own beliefs or opinions. It's almost impossible to change people's minds, even when you have proof. Your best bet is to repeat the facts until the availability cascade bias kicks in.

Confirmation bias. People want to be right, so they seek out information and people who will reinforce their beliefs. It's critical that you always weigh the pros and cons of any idea and consider alternatives—even if it goes against what you originally believed or wanted.

Optimism bias. Here people overestimate the positive outcomes of a decision or idea. While having an optimistic or enthusiastic attitude is mostly good, you also want to set realistic expectations, plan for obstacles and set reachable goals.

Pessimism bias. People overestimate the negative issues that will occur. You shouldn't ignore negative issues (the Ostrich Effect), but you also shouldn't focus solely on what could go wrong. Again, it's critical to open-mindedly weigh the merits of every idea, plan or decision; and come up with solutions for areas of concern.

Status quo bias. People want things to stay the same, even when the current situation is less than ideal. Reinforce the benefits of change, and state specifically how it will affect your employees on an individual level.

— Adapted from ["14 Cognitive Biases Which Affect Your Communications Plan,"](#) Laura Petrolino, Spinsucks,

