031 The Biased Read

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No operator reads their building without bias. The operator who believes they do is running the most dangerous bias of all — the bias that their read is objective.

This is not a character flaw. It is human cognition. The brain processes information through shortcuts built from experience, pattern recognition, and expectation. Those shortcuts are not errors — they are efficiency. They allow the operator to read a situation faster than a first-timer could. They also allow the operator to read the situation wrong in consistent, predictable ways — and to feel certain they are right while doing it.

The discipline is not to eliminate the bias. It cannot be eliminated. The discipline is to name it before it drives the decision.

Five biases that contaminate the operator's read of their own building:

Affinity Bias — the operator favors what is familiar. The cast member who came up through the same kind of restaurant. The candidate who reminds them of themselves at that age. The vendor they have worked with for years regardless of whether the relationship is still the best available. The section assignment that goes to the server the operator enjoys talking to rather than the server who earned it. Affinity bias feels like good judgment. It is pattern recognition optimizing for comfort rather than quality.

The diagnostic: when was the last time the operator promoted, assigned, or chose someone who didn't remind them of someone they already trusted?

Confirmation Bias — the operator seeks evidence that confirms the story they have already decided is true. The kitchen that "always runs clean" stops being examined for the evidence it doesn't. The cast member who "has great potential" keeps getting the benefit of the doubt past the point where the evidence supports it. The business that "is stronger than the numbers show" never gets the honest read that would surface what is actually happening.

Confirmation bias is most dangerous in the Perspective fundamental because the Perspective read is where the operator decides what story they are telling about the business. The story that was accurate six months ago may not be accurate now — but confirmation bias keeps surfacing the

evidence that confirms the old story and filtering out the evidence that contradicts it.

The diagnostic: what is the story the operator is telling about their business right now? When was the last time they actively looked for evidence that the story was wrong?

Attribution Bias — the operator credits their own leadership for the strong periods and blames the circumstances for the weak ones. The strong quarter was good leadership. The weak quarter was the labor market, the weather, the competition, the economy. The strong cast member's success reflects the operator's development work. The struggling cast member's failure reflects their own limitations.

Attribution bias prevents the operator from learning from both success and failure — because the success gets attributed to a cause (themselves) that doesn't require examination, and the failure gets attributed to a cause (circumstances) that doesn't require action.

The diagnostic: in the last difficult period, what percentage of the operator's explanation was about external factors versus decisions they made?

Recency Bias — the operator weights the most recent evidence disproportionately. The staffing decision made after three strong shifts from a cast member who has been inconsistent for three months. The menu decision made after last week's Guest comments rather than the six-month trend. The vendor decision made after one excellent delivery rather than the pattern.

Recency bias produces reactive management — the operator who is always responding to the last thing that happened rather than reading the pattern that the last thing is part of.

The diagnostic: are the operator's current decisions based on what happened last week or what the trend shows over the last quarter?

Halo Effect — the cast member who is excellent on the floor gets promoted to Lead because the excellence on the floor lit up a halo around every other assessment. Without examining whether the Lead disciplines — reading the room from altitude, developing cast, holding the standard without being the one executing it — are present. The vendor who does one thing exceptionally well gets assumed to do everything well. The new menu item that performed brilliantly in testing gets assumed to perform brilliantly on the line.

The halo effect produces misplaced responsibility — putting people and products in positions based on a strength in one domain that does not necessarily transfer to another.

The diagnostic: before the last promotion or significant assignment, did the operator examine the specific disciplines the new role required — or did the halo from the previous role do most of the deciding?

The operating question is not "am I biased?" The answer is always yes. The operating question is "how am I biased right now, and what should I do about it?"

That question, asked honestly before every significant decision, is the Perspective discipline that all five of these biases require. Not the elimination of the bias — the examination of it before it drives the outcome.

What Changes Tomorrow

Before you trust your read of your own building tomorrow, name which bias might be shaping it — are you favoring what you already like, confirming what you expected, blaming outside forces for problems that are yours, weighting last night too heavily, or letting one strength blind you to a real weakness? Pick the one most likely operating on you right now and check it against reality before you act.