

SIGMA

Leadership Series



**Great Leaders
Stay Objective**



GREAT LEADERS STAY OBJECTIVE

“ **Dispassionate objectivity is itself a passion, for the real and for the truth.**

— **Abraham Maslow**

Objectivity is required in many areas of a leader's role. First, leaders must be objective when making decisions about whom to hire or promote. They must also be objective when reviewing employee performance. When employment decisions rely on subjective information, they're influenced by the leader's personal opinions and judgments. Similarly, in daily interactions with employees, from social nuances to outright conflict, leaders must manage direct reports fairly and consistently. Leaders who don't base decisions on facts lose employees' trust.

Objectivity is the ability to maintain a realistic perspective and keep personal biases to a minimum. Leaders who are objective minimize personal judgments and interpretations when faced with a situation or decision, instead relying on facts or data. Personal biases can come from many sources, such as previous experiences, personal history, and interpersonal conflicts, and all can influence a leader's ability to be objective.

Do You Stay Objective?

In assessing your objectivity, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I consider all the available information before making a decision?
- How can I use observable data in daily managerial decisions?
- Do I let my decisions be influenced by my personal opinions or experiences?
- Do I hold biases that influence my behavior at work?
- Have I overreacted in ambiguous situations?
- Do I over-rely on personal judgment instead of evidence?

Improve Your Objectivity

Understand the definition and purpose of biases. Bias often carries a negative connotation, but cognitive biases help us make rapid decisions. Leaders, however, often need slower, more deliberate thinking. These biases prevent us from having to think about every variable in every decision and may help us assess situations in the blink of an eye. For leaders, however, decisions may require more careful thought and deliberation than cognitive shortcuts allow. While some individuals hold biases against groups of people, based on gender, race, or other demographic characteristics, there are a number of other cognitive biases that could potentially influence a leader. For example, people can be predisposed to like or dislike certain individuals based on personality, mood, or past experiences. In addition, some individuals generally have a more negative or more positive mindset that biases all their thought patterns. Biases can be subtle or so pervasive that an individual has difficulty recognizing them as such.

Identify your bias. Every individual has biases, and the most effective way to overcome a bias is to recognize it as such. By acknowledging their biases, a leader can be aware of their tendency to react a certain way to specific individuals or situations and can correct their behavior accordingly. Biases can be a major issue when they are subconscious and influence leader behaviors in unknown ways. Recognizing biases is the first step in preventing them from affecting behavior.

Recognize the value of subjectivity. The need for objectivity during decision making or conflict resolution does not mean that subjectivity has no place at work. Even highly objective leaders need to insert emotion or subjectivity into their interactions with employees, as this is how positive workplace relationships are formed. Subjectivity is also often used when leaders make judgment calls based on their prior experiences or education. Simply remember that objectivity is required when making decisions about employees, such as hiring, promoting, or firing, as well as in interactions where emotions may be running high, such as conflict resolution.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Become More Objective

The following steps can help you to be more objective at work:

1. **When faced with a conflict or difficult decision, take your time before reacting.** Given that biases are a cognitive tool used in quick decision making, pausing for a moment or two can override the impulse to react with bias. Objective leaders have the ability to take a minute, reflect on their impulses, and temper their responses to be fair and even-handed. This not only helps in remaining level-headed in high-pressure situations but also prevents damage to the leader-employee relationship. When employees believe their leader is biased for or against certain individuals, they no longer see their leader as fair, and the positive relationship between the leader and direct report is affected. Given that this positive relationship is needed for leaders to effectively motivate and manage their employees, avoiding snap judgments can prevent long-lasting implications for the leader.

2. **Consider all the available information.** Biases are useful in cases where information is missing. When faced with these situations, it is better to attempt to collect or consider more information than relying on these cognitive tools. For example, many interpersonal issues occur when one individual interprets the intentions or motivations of another. Instead of attempting these interpretations, consider the employee's life outside work or current stress level. For example, if a leader perceives their employee is being rude or difficult, rather than attributing this to characteristics of the employee, they should consider the employee's life outside work, or their stress level due to work demands. Be careful not to project your own anxieties or fears onto others, as this can quickly lead to communication breakdowns between employees.
3. **Where possible, use hard data.** One of the easiest ways to avoid acting on your biases is to use hard data. Data can be used in a number of leadership tasks, such as hiring, promoting, or firing individuals. The interview is one area where biases and subjective opinions often influence administrative decisions. Scoring each candidate's interview on the same job-relevant criteria is an excellent way to ensure you hire the person best suited to the job, and not the individual you liked the most. Often, we like people who are similar to us, so our biases may prevent us from choosing an individual with valuable experiences or diverse perspectives. Making decisions based on numbers, rather than feelings, provides justification for making certain choices, and is hard to argue with. Just remember, not all numbers are created equal. Often, performance ratings produce a score for each individual, but these scores may be based on a supervisor's subjective ratings of an employee. Information on countable things, such as sales volume, days absent, or number of tasks completed is a better source of objective data.

Assess Objectivity With the LSP-R®

The [Leadership Skills Profile – Revised® \(LSP-R\)](#) is a personality-based leadership assessment that measures 50 core competencies, including Objectivity. The assessment can be administered online in 25 minutes, and comes with an automatically generated Focus Report, including scores, personalized feedback, and templates for creating competency-based leadership development plans (view a [sample Focus Report](#)).

LSP-R® Free Trial

See how you score on OBJECTIVITY.

Experience the LSP-R for yourself and see how you score on Objectivity. Receive customized feedback and templates for creating a personalized action plan. Take 25 minutes and experience the impact that data-driven personality insights can have.

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