Spot the Bias:

Fundamental Attribution Error
One of the most common biases!

The fundamental attribution error (FAE) is a cognitive bias which frames positive outcomes and negative outcomes differently, depending on the actor.

It refers to our tendency to attribute our success to our character and ability, and our failures to fate, other people, technical problems - in other words, to blame something or someone else. Not only is this not true, but on the other side of the error, we perceive the problems that others face as flaws in their character, and their success as luck.

For example, if *I* cut someone off in traffic, it's because I was in a rush or I happened not to see the other driver. But if *someone else* cuts me off in traffic, it's because they're a bad or selfish driver.

Who did it?

Outcome	myself	someone else
positive	personality	circumstances
negative	circumstances	personality

The same goes for positives: if I do well on an exam, it's because I studied hard and earned it. But if someone else does well, maybe the exam was too easy or they happened to guess well.

Of course, as the name implies, this is an *error*, so it's something we have to be aware of in order to fix it. Since the natural tendency is to be biased, it might be best to lean in the opposite direction. If someone else does something good, we can consider that it's more likely that it is the result of their choices. And if they do something bad, we can keep in mind that it's more likely to be due to circumstances.

Similarly, if you do something well, remember how much good fortune is involved; and if you do something bad or poorly, it may be a signal to look inward, to be more conscientious or careful next time.

The FAE is a foundational bias for many Americans through the lens of *meritocracy* or the belief that "we can make it if we try" or, in other words, we will "get what we deserve".   The thinking error is so common, that it is "at the root of any misunderstanding in which human motivations have the potential to be misinterpreted", according to Patrick Healy.

The fundamental attribution error, like confirmation bias and overconfidence, affects every day behavior.

Cognitive biases shape how an individual interacts with the world around them. Understanding these biases and becoming aware of the ways that they influence your behavior – as well as the thinking and behavior of others - is vital to your self-efficacy and to creating success. It is equally important understand biases to work with others!

Can you see this bias in yourself? In others? On TV, in newspapers (esp. by political parties) or in books?

BIASES and ASSUMPTIONS: our lazy brain relies on assumptions and limited information to make judgments.

We will never overcome our biases or our faulty logic, but if we pay attention to them, we will get much better at seeing them and stopping them….and creating better situations and opportunities by using our wisdom!

SO WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?
We can build an HONEST BIAS, where we check, repeatedly, to check our assumptions. We can also ask for feedback from people we can trust to help us see ourselves better than we could alone.

The 3 Conundrums & 13 Strategies That Generate Biases

No matter what we do, we can't escape these conundrums, but 13 strategies help us think within their constraints.

3 CONUNDRUMS
1. There's too much information (so we must filter it).
2. There's not enough meaning (so we use stories to make sense).
3. There's not enough time (so we motivate towards action).

Each of the following strategies helps us compensate for one of the 3 conundrums by overvaluing a certain kind of possibility and undervaluing everything else. Each strategy is a collection of cognitive biases, mental shortcuts, and energy savers that help us filter information, make sense of things and get stuff done.

13 STRATEGIES
1-5 HELP US FILTER INFORMATION
1. We depend on the context to figure out what to notice and remember.
2. We accept what comes to mind, and don't worry much about what doesn't come to mind.
3. We amplify bizarre things.
4. We notice novelty.
5. We seek takeaways to remember and toss the rest.

6-10 HELP US MAKE SENSE OF THINGS
6. We fill in the gaps with stereotypes and generalities.
7. We favor familiar things over the non-familiar.
8. We treat experience as reality.
9. We simplify mental math.
10. We are overconfident in everything we do.

11-13 HELP US GET THINGS DONE
11. We stick with things we've started.
12. We protect existing beliefs.
13. We will opt to do the safe things, all other things being equal.

13 BLIND SPOTS TO QUESTION:

1. Out of context: What have I missed because options were hidden from my particular circumstances and context in the moment?

2. Out of mind: What have I not considered because they just didn't come to mind at the time?

3. Lackluster: What have I missed because something else immediately grabs my attention when I think about this?

4. Expired: What options have I neglected because they didn't present themselves as shiny and new?

5. Irrelevant: What have I undervalued because it didn't fit my expectations as a proper take-away?

6. Untypical: What options have I not seen in their true light because I projected stereotypes and generalities onto them?

7. Unfamiliar: What have I passed over simply because it didn't feel familiar to me?

8. Unrelatable: What options have fallen to the wayside because they didn't match my own personal experiences?

9. Ambiguous: What options have I dismissed because they felt less certain or more risky in the moment?

10. Underestimated: What have I ignored or neglected because I overestimated my ability to control certain situations?

11. Costly: What options have I dismissed because they would require changing course from previous decisions?

12. Threatening: What have I dismissed because I wasn't ready to accept that I might be wrong?

13. Unpopular: What options have been pushed aside because I felt gathering consensus would put me at risk in some way?

For a lot more insight, check out Buster's book *Why Are We Yelling?*