

## Transcription - Lisa Tromba Part 1

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Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we are joined by Lisa Tromba who's going to talk to us, among other things, about leadership and leadership qualities.

A managing partner, Lisa Tromba leads Lisa Tromba Associates Executive Search and is a founder of Leadership Intelligence Services. For more than 25 years, Lisa has guided companies from mid market enterprises to fortune 500 powerhouses in searching for and selecting their executive leadership. Today she caters to lower to mid market companies in search of executive leadership. The high touch, high impact solution oriented approach includes assessing the impact of psychological bias on leadership. Lisa is a best selling author and has spoken on leadership topics to corporate, trade and academic audiences, including executive MBA and rising leaders, whom she also coached for fortune 50 company. Publications feature her work including Your Executive magazine, the AMA quarterly, and she is referenced in the book From Cinderella to C-Suite (now many of you will not see Lisa but I can tell you that she looks a bit like a Cinderella). So welcome Lisa. Thank you for negotiating the time zone differences and being able to be with us today, tonight for you.

My pleasure. Thank you for your interest and I'm excited to have the discussion.

We've sent Lisa some questions. We'll start off with those and as you all know, we will stray from those, but first of all, Lisa, tell us about the "leadership lens".

Of course. I guess I should backup just a little bit to make sure that people to give it context, right? So the book that I wrote and a part of my work and how I evaluate and assess leaders in the context of executive search and whatnot, is really to understand them. So most any company that does assessment work, you know, there's a whole variety of things, lenses, I would say, that are applied to understand and tell leaders where they shine and where they may need some support.

So the leadership lens, as I refer to it, I think about cognitive and emotional biases as a new leadership lens or let's say one that's been overlooked. I am hard pressed to tell you any companies or organizations with whom I've worked that talk about it or even think about cognitive or emotional biases. And the reality is, they are so prevalent and we all have them, right? So I say there's three truths to psychological bias. It's a human condition. We all have them. But very importantly, they represent our mental lens. So the lens through which we see the world and everything, how we perceive things, so how we then process and make the decisions, actions we take. So when I refer to this new leadership lens, it's because I believe that it's very important. It really runs below the surface of anything and everything that a leader does. And these biases are very powerful forces.

So over my many years of working with leaders and also questioning things in myself, this was a phenomenon I was really determined to learn about and focus on and it has, took me about four and a half years to do the research, write the book, have my executive network weigh in because indeed it is, they're often derailers for executives and the scariest part is, most of the time most people don't even recognize them in themselves. We tend to recognize

them in other people much more readily than we do in ourselves.

So part of my work in the book is to sort of raise the flag and create awareness, at a minimum, to have leaders, although this applies to leadership and life I should say, but to have leaders recognize these things do exist and they present in very deep run of the mill daily things that we are exposed to or do or say or emote. But there's always a bias running underneath that. And so that's really the root cause of a lot of what goes wrong in leadership.

So it's important to be aware and you know this is the first truth, is human condition. We all have mental lenses. We really do frame how we see everything and perceive everything and the third thing is we can't eliminate them. They are within us, right? And they are here to stay. So the only choice we have is to really become aware of them and manage them and that's the key. And I even go as far as to say when you really do give them attention, and they warrant our attention, we can harness the force of these biases and sort of flip them into, you know, working for us instead of against us. So I can talk a little bit more about that, but that's really the point. And so yes, I think it's a very important leadership lens that we need to be aware of because it's so impactful. And when bias has gone unnoticed and unmanaged, that's when things go very wrong. So very, very important. But thank you for asking that question.

Just in terms of that answer then, one of the things that it reminds me about is we have had a lot of guests talk about mental wellbeing, particularly for male executives. We had one last year who actually brought female executives into the mix as well and said it is even harder for them in terms of mental health because they have to be, or appear to be, that much stronger than the male executives that are there in their peer group. Do you think that, how should I put it, the numbers of people we are seeing at that executive level who are recognizing that their mental wellbeing is not as good, is a reflection of the fact that they are blocking out the emotional lens because they think it's the wrong thing for them to be doing?

I guess my view on that is I think yes, that that's a good point, right? I do think that women are more comfortable being a little bit more authentic with emotions than men might be in a work environment in particular. But the interesting thing is that emotional biases don't have that filter. And so what we see in a work environment on the emotional side can look like a lot of different things. And then I would say maybe not so much control going on. So things like, you know, I just think about self control, right. Self control bias refers to when someone does not have good self control, right? So that is connected to emotional intelligence. So I think your question is very much related to, you know, the level of emotional intelligence that we see in business and in leadership. And I think we can all agree, you know, there are some people are far better at it than others. So I guess I would directly say, yeah, I think in my experience anyway in my lane, I do think women are a little bit more comfortable with emotion. But on the flip side of that when it's the bad emotion, I've seen it go wrong whether it's a woman or it's a man, because it's a human thing. So emotional intelligence is very, very important. That is a leadership lens that a lot of people do pay attention to for sure. It is actually one of the coaching strategies that can help with emotional biases because they're very connected.

Are we leaving it too late in an executive career to start recognizing these things? Should we be looking at it, you know, even at school age where we're looking at people becoming leaders in their own groups in their own communities, and developing it from there?

Yeah. And I think that is an excellent point. So for many, many, many years, I've actually been an advocate of leadership skills in general, being infused in our education system much earlier and not having to be elective, but very important because that's really the bulk of someone's life, right. And whether it's leadership in business or leadership in life, I have been an advocate of that for a very long time as it relates to understanding this special new lens as I referred to it. And I'm cognizant is absolutely because again, we all have them and they don't just show up in a boardroom or to business, you know, they are part of life and they are in play, as I say, every day. We all need to be sort of on alert and, you know, part of my work is how you recognize them in yourself, the triggers, the patterns that you see, so that you can take that deep breath and pause and do something before you just instinctually react.

I do think that there is a huge opportunity to, again, wave the flag and raise awareness, help people understand how to recognize biases, emotional or cognitive and how to help, you know, them understand about intervention strategies. And then ideally how to harness their natural biases to work for them instead of against them. That's sort of my mission and my message around this.

I'm just thinking, listening to you talking about that and identifying that to use it to advantage. How do we recognize it at the time of recruiting? Say you're recruiting into a senior leadership role and you look for the obvious technical skills, experience and all of that, but behind that is the behavior, right. At that point, what are the things that would help the selection committee, because you've got so much experience in that space, to identify that and find out if that person is going to be able to fit or not?

So yes, and you know that is the whole point, right, because of the work I do, that's a very big piece of it. So the biases leave clues. That's what I can say. So while you refer to behaviors or we spoke about emotions, if you really start to peel back the onion you see patterns. That's a very good way to know of certain attributes, traits, behaviors, emotions.

Those are all clues and as I said before, you know, biases are so conscious so they really run underneath all of those things that we measure and pay attention to. But we talk about them because we talk about the symptoms, right? We talk about the things we can see or we talk about the things that an algorithm picks up and we probe and we, you know, want to know more about that. And really at the root of all of it, I would say you can probably trace it back to a bias or two or three, listen, because we all have them, but we have them in different intensities. My prominent biases may not be yours and yours may be different than yours. So I think the importance is to try and figure out what your prominent biases are and what I mean by that is those forces that drive you in very similar ways every day.

So that's why I say when you can recognize patterns and decisions you make or the ways that you act in certain situations, these are clues, these are ways to look.

So in the course of assessing an executive, of course, we don't have the luxury of very big timelines, right? But an executive search, you know, search can go four months, it can go five months, you know, and when you're the person that's managing the candidate through that process, you do have time. And I do, I pick up things every phone call, there may be another thing and it's kind of added onto the data that I've been collecting like from the beginning of the process. So, and I don't mean to say that they're bad things. So what I would say about biases, this is the way I look at them. I think there's treasure in them and there's risk.

And so I remain very balanced about that. So when I say I pick up these patterns or I see these things that leads me to believe there's an indicator here of risk averse bias, let's say, right? I also know that in certain environments and certain roles and certain situations, having a prominent risk averse bias can be a very good thing. And it can be exactly what is called for in a certain situation. On the other hand, in a different situation, someone who's leading a company that has a prominent risk averse bias could be a very big problem and could really get in the way of any progress, any innovation. It can frustrate a team, especially if it's a creative endeavor, and you have a team of creatives and you are a risk averse person, that will be a problem. So helping people to understand that they might have that as a prominent bias is important.

In connection with this discussion, I would say one other thing in the world of recruiting and executive search, the one thing that is most important to me when I start a search is the context, right? Because that determines all of it, understanding the context of an organization, situation, their mission, the position for whom this person is, for which this person to be considered, all matters. And once you have that, that's the very first thing you have to do. And once you understand that's what you're mapping against, now you can begin to say, it's no different with behaviors, you know, or operating styles or performance drivers. You want to see those behaviors, those attributes, those traits that will serve this leader well toward success or themselves and for the organization based on what the context is, what the mission is, what all of it. So biases are the same, and that's why I bring up the example of say risk aversion, optimism on the other hand. Now you have an entrepreneurial start up, probably the odds are that CEO has a very strong optimism bias, right? So that's a good thing, that's treasure, until it gets in the way with overconfidence or not listening to people on the team who perhaps have a little bit more of a skeptical demeanor or maybe a pessimistic bias. They can be your best friend, you might not like what they have to say, but those are the people that're going to highlight the risks, those are the people that are going to help you ensure that you are prepared for any possible scenario that can come up in the company moves forward. So again, I come back to the treasure and the risk in each and every bias and one of the strong strategies, especially on an organizational level is, I say, you know, if you can pair opposite biases together, you have what I then call the rational solution.

So in other words, you have a very intuitive leader who is an idea a minute and you know, kind of charges forward doesn't maybe always take the time to do all work, will figure it out, will get it done on my guts telling me this is the way to go. In the book I talk about understand that, you know, if you have a, you know, say intuitive, the opposite will be somebody who's very logical and analytical. And if you can't find those traits in yourself or you don't have the mental agility to kind of say, okay, I need to adopt some of those behaviors of a logical person to help protect myself from myself or myself from the organization. Another way to do that is find a business partner who's that and work together and ensure that one person is balancing the other person out because maybe pure logic on the one hand isn't the answer either, that could prevent the company from moving forward or the innovation. So it really is kind of, a refer to it as paradoxical thinking, right, while you're thinking one way, your instinct is to move one way, to be really rational about it, you really want to make sure that you're infusing some of that opposite perspective in because that's how we get balanced thinking, that's how we make balanced decisions. Does that make sense?

Yes, it does. It does most definitely.

Lisa has certainly given us some food for thought in terms of our managerial biases, in our decision making biases, so let's take a break here. Join us for part two. For now, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, we are talking to Lisa Tromba about the "leadership lens" and this is Inside Exec.