

Transcription - Lisa Tromba Part 2

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. We're continuing our discussion with Lisa Tromba, talking about mind knots and biases in terms of leadership.

It's just fascinating because while you're talking I can think of examples and think yes they should have done this. They should have made it this kind of person and what were they thinking? So my question then is where do our listeners start? Do they start with understanding what the organization needs in terms of biases or do they go off to all of their people and say, you work out what your biases are and then we'll see where the resources can best be used?

Yeah, I think it's a good question but listen, you know the leadership matters, right, because that sets the tone and tenor of the organization. So I think it's most important the CEO, the C-suite level, because that's where things are being driven from. And biases are pervasive and I'm sure you can also think of situations where you know if a CEO is this way or that way, whichever way it is, you can watch people within the organization start to mirror. You know, as the CEO makes decisions this way, oh I guess that's okay, then I guess we can do that. We're following in those footsteps right or behaves a certain way. You know it happens all the time, so that's why that saying you know, as the leader goes so goes the organization. I talk about that in Mnd Knots, that it's the same thing with biases they're very pervasive.

So because people pick up those behaviors, they pick up the clues that the biases leave behind and now you come into a new problem which is a cultural bias and then that becomes a big deal. So now, you're not just trying to create awareness and recognize and manage on an individual level, at the CEO level or one of the leader leadership team members. Now, all of a sudden, you have to be thinking about we need to manage this at an organizational level and that's whole different thing, right, so that's when you really need to put in place a framework that recognizes that we think we have, you know, maybe an egocentric bias throughout this organization right. It's showing up here, showing up there, maybe customers have said something, you know, whatever the case may be. Now it becomes, you know really an organization and so that's where I then go to, I have frameworks in the book to address specific biases that I have featured in the book, but you know, that's when you now are into the realm of you need processes in place just like in business for any other thing, where you're trying to not control behavior but to have like a lane, right, you can solve this problem in this region but beyond that right we have processes that say that's not a good idea.

Same thing with biases. You can put practices in place, policies in place you can require teams that are comprised of multiple types of leaders, who have multiple types of mental lenses, as I described before right, and then that becomes powerful, it becomes sort I call them organizational buoys, right, to keep things moving properly and not to go way off the rails. So checks and balances for the leaders, you know, intuitive, a brain or whatever it may be. To go through this process, biases I think are no different than how we treat behaviors in organizations.

To do that or leadership anything, it should be come part of how we think about leadership

effectiveness because it is as important, if not more, as how we think about decision making. It is embedded in how we make our decisions, so I don't think it's a one and done. I don't think it's ,we have a problem, we're going to solve that problem. It's a journey, I mean, I think it's a perpetual. We need to pay attention to it all the time every day. It's actually not so different to continuous improvement. What we should do is include this way of thinking of biases. Firstly understand and then we can also know what our biases are.

When we did all these other exercises to talk about what am I like, am I an introvert, extrovert, am I a completer, a finisher, a strategy ideas person, whatever, whatever. Then we've got to understand that as an individual, then as a group, then as an organization. So it would be great to include now the biases, am I and I don't know if I'm using the word correctly you said before, egocentric or any of those biases that I've got that and that can be good or bad depends how I use it right? Then as a leader and managing a team, if we are aware of that and have those continuous improvement conversations and be helpful.

That's exactly right and that's why I say we have many many lenses that we look at in terms of leadership and leaders themselves who are on that journey, as you said in the very beginning, to grow into development, to become better leaders, better than they were, you know, better tomorrow than they were yesterday and it's every day. That's what you hope for and you know, between coaching and development and all this, we touch all these things. But we're not talking about biases and biases are the things that propel most all of those other things, right, so it's very important and I agree with you that's why I say it's a new leadership lens that we really need to be thinking seriously about and it should just be embedded in a assessment process the way everything else is and more importantly it's about helping the leader. Helping people, individuals, get smarter about this and understand them so that it's not just leadership, it's life right, they get in the way of relationships, they get in the way of everything, if we're not aware of them and if they're not managed. On the other hand you know, biases are mental shortcuts right, they take away the serious work of thinking, hard thinking, in certain situations when you have no time and you're in the moment and a car is coming at you, thank goodness for biases because we have a mental shortcut that's going to say to our brain immediately this doesn't look like a good idea if I stand here, I think I ought to get out of the way. This thing is speeding at me. That's when biases are most effective. Mental shortcuts are most effective in situations where there is not time to think, there's not time to do analysis. But let's face it, in leadership and in business, in the complexity of that, mental shortcuts do not work. They are used all too often but they don't work. Don't work in hiring, right, I think we can all think of situations where perhaps a leader hires in their own image because that gives them comfort and security and listen you know everyone's got an ego and you think well oh that person looks and sounds and does things like me, that would be the answer, but no, it usually isn't. That's a mental shortcut. So that's when it comes into play, right, and that's when just like we would assess for critical thinking, strategic thinking or relationship skills, we have to be like paying a little bit more attention to does this person show evidence of a prominent bias? Great, but to know what it is really worth the gold, is so that it can be leveraged in good ways and managed in ways that might not be so good for the leader or the organization or the team.

I'm smiling because I can remember a time where I was doing executive recruitment for a particular organization and I got so frustrated because I said you're either choosing someone who is exactly like you or someone who is no threat.

Exactly right, when we should be choosing the person who is exactly like what the role demands or the situation demands. That's why I say that's the first thing, that is the most important thing, is to understand what the situation is, then you can assess people and try to find the right match.

The second question we sent you, we already covered, was talking about how are we looking at these things early enough in careers, so we'll move on to the third one. What is the most challenging mind knot you have encountered, that you had to try and overcome?

Yeah, there are over 200 cognitive biases if you can believe that! So I don't write about 200 in my book, I write, I think I referenced more than 40, somewhere between 40 and 50, but I would say, because my work is leadership, that one of the most prominent biases that I see is the egocentric bias and it should not come as much of a surprise. These are leaders who have very strong thinking and interestingly enough, if you want to pull any job description or position brief, as I refer to it, for a C level executive or even a VP level executive, and you read the words in there, you find words like, you know, energy, commitment, conviction, quick decision making, urgency, sometimes even assertiveness too, tenacity, persuasiveness. These are all, these can be extremely positive things in leadership, but when you think about an egocentric bias, those are many of the attributes that you see on the outside. We don't put in, we don't acknowledge, that the opposite of all those things or sometimes those things in excess can turn into liabilities. So egocentric bias typically is when it goes wrong, right, but you know in organizations every day we talk about, you know, we want someone who is commitment and conviction and they're going to move fast and they're going to move forward and sometimes what gets lost between the lines is listening to other people, getting perspectives, working collaboratively, and those are things that an egocentric leader tends not to do so well. Again the risk and the treasure. Some of those attributes that typically accompany that bias are very good and can be very powerful and can bring, you know, great success to an organization. But in excess, that's where it goes off the rails, so that we come back to a strong business partner that can, you know, work closely with that person and it will tell you that. Sometimes, when it's very extreme, I mentioned, is one of the hardest biases because people who have it as a prominent bias often don't ever see it, often don't acknowledge it. So it's very very difficult then to kind of get the course going in the right way and if it's manageable and if the person is somewhat coachable, you know, you can usually surround them with people who can manage it for them or processes or organizational biases that can help them manage it.

This is given us a little bit to think about in terms of our recruitment and our management of our teams so let's leave it there for this week. Join us for part three, for now I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.