

BEING HUMAN

The infinite potential of how we work, lead, and live.



beyond success



Hello and welcome back!

BY MIRJANA BOZNOVSKA

In the last edition, we explored how our thought patterns and nervous systems shape how we work and lead. Underneath it all sits one simple truth: sustainable capability is built from the inside out. This edition shines a light on what's often left unspoken. Even with the best intentions, something fast and mostly invisible is shaping our decisions every day: **unconscious bias**. Not as a flaw. Not as failure.

*But as a deeply human process we all carry, no matter how qualified, experienced, or successful we are. And if we're serious about creating workplaces that are healthy, inclusive, and high-performing, this is a conversation worth having—honestly. Because how we think, decide, and lead under pressure doesn't just shape culture. **It shapes trust, sustainable capability, and long-term business value.** This edition is an invitation to pause. To look beneath the surface. Not to judge. But to understand and with that awareness lead more consciously.*

IN THIS EDITION

Unconscious Bias

A Personal Story

Why Intention Isn't Enough

Workplace Reality

**Beyond Groupthink
A People-First Way**

Real Work Examples

Human Reset

Unconscious Bias at Work

Bias rarely announces itself.

It shows up quietly, dressed as:

- "I know best"
- "It's a good culture fit"
- "That's professionalism"
- "Strong leadership presence"
- "They're not quite ready"

It shapes:

- who gets heard
- who gets trusted
- who gets stretched
- who gets grace
- who gets labelled "difficult" or "high potential"

Often without conscious intent.

Just familiar patterns running on autopilot, shaping decisions.

Why Intention Isn't Enough

Bias doesn't disappear because we mean well. Good intentions don't interrupt unconscious patterns. Awareness does. Bias shifts when you slow down just enough to notice your defaults and choose differently in real time. This isn't about eliminating bias. That's not realistic. The work is noticing it sooner. Those small pauses don't just change outcomes. They change how it feels to work together. The most effective leaders aren't bias-free. They're bias-aware. They stay curious when certainty would be easier. They slow decisions just enough to widen perspective. They question assumptions, especially when something feels obvious.

Real Work Moments

In meetings, bias can sound like:

"Let's hear from someone more senior."

"They don't seem confident enough yet."

Confidence gets mistaken for competence.

In performance talks it can sound like:

"They're great, but not leadership material."

"They need to be more likeable."

Different communication styles get measured by different standards.

In hiring bias often hides behind:

"They didn't quite feel like the right fit."

Familiarity gets mistaken for suitability.

In who gets grace bias shows up in:

- who is excused for having a bad day
- who is supported versus sidelined
- seen as human versus "unprofessional"

This isn't about blame.

It's about becoming aware of the small moments that shape trust, opportunity, and culture.

Being Human: Interrupting Bias

What This Looks Like in Real Time

- In a meeting, you notice you're agreeing quickly → you pause and invite different perspectives.
- In feedback, you catch yourself labelling someone → you focus on behaviour, not identity.
- In a decision, you feel drawn to the "safe" choice → you pause to consider potential, not just familiarity.

These moments practised consistently change how decisions are made, how culture is shaped, and how value is created through people.

A PERSONAL STORY



My first experience of the workplace

I entered the workplace with a kind of childlike enthusiasm. Open. Curious. I genuinely believed that if I did great work, stayed true to who I was, and built real connections, growth would follow. I was working at a marquee accounting firm and felt excited about what was possible. Then one conversation changed the direction of my future.

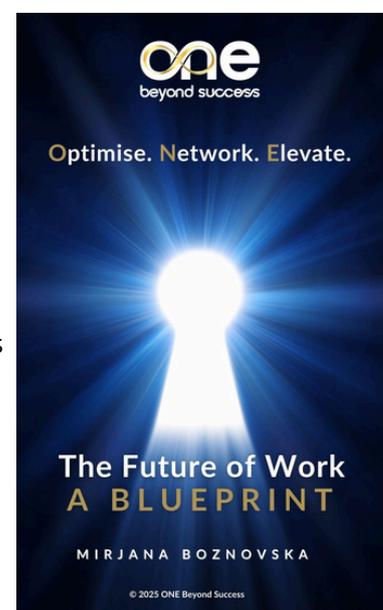
My manager sat me down and said, *“Mirjana, your work is excellent. But we don’t think you have the qualities for a leader’s role... you’re too nice.”* Then added, *“You’re also very friendly. And a bit too quiet.”* It landed hard. Really hard. I remember thinking, *since when did kindness become a weakness? When did human connection mean limitation? And who decided that quiet meant incapable?*

Maybe you’ve experienced something similar, where you felt judged for who you are. What I was witnessing wasn’t feedback about my ability. It was unconscious bias at play. A narrow, unspoken idea of what leadership was supposed to look like. I remember responding calmly, even though inside my insecurities were loud. **“I believe being human is not the opposite of leadership. I think it’s what connects us and helps us do our best work together.”** At the time, it didn’t feel brave. Looking back, I can see the quiet strength it took to speak from that place.

That moment was a catalyst. It shaped the direction of my work and life. It’s what led me to focus on people as much as performance. Because compliance shows us where we’ve been, but people shape where we’re going.

After more than 35 years in this work, here’s what I know to be true: when unconscious bias goes unexamined, it quietly shapes who gets heard, who gets stretched, and who gets seen as “ready.” That’s survival thinking. A scarcity mindset. And while it may have served us in the industrial era, it won’t carry us forward.

The future of work is human. It calls us toward greater self-awareness, inclusion, and a People-First way of **being**. I’m not immune to unconscious bias. None of us are. The opportunity is noticing it sooner and choosing differently each time.



The Workplace Reality: How Unconscious Bias Shows Up

Unconscious bias isn't about bad intentions. It's about fast thinking.

Our brains are wired for speed, not accuracy. They rely on shortcuts and familiar patterns to make decisions quickly. In the workplace, those shortcuts quietly shape who gets heard, trusted, and developed. When we're unaware of them, business value suffers through missed talent, reduced innovation, and decisions that feel safe rather than abundant. Here's how unconscious bias commonly shows up at work.

Affinity bias (familiar feels safe) is our tendency to gravitate toward people who feel familiar, who think like us, communicate like us, or remind us of ourselves.

At work, it can sound like:

- "I just click with them."
- "They're a good cultural fit."
- "They remind me of myself at that stage."

How it plays out: opportunities, trust, and stretch roles often go to the same type of people, not because they're more capable, but because they feel safer or easier to relate to.



Confirmation bias (we see what we already believe) is when we look for evidence that confirms what we already believe and unconsciously ignore anything that challenges it.

At work, it can sound like:

- "That's just how they are."
- "I knew they'd struggle with this."
- "See? This proves my point."

How it plays out: one early impression becomes a permanent label. People stop being seen as growing, learning, or evolving.

Groupthink bias (belonging over authenticity) happens when the desire to belong or keep the peace becomes stronger than the willingness to question & think independently.

At work, it can sound like:

- "Everyone seems aligned, so I'll go with it."
- "Now's not the time to question this."
- "I don't want to be the difficult one."

How it plays out: meetings where the same voices dominate. Innovation was quietly replaced by agreement.

Beyond Groupthink: A People-First Way

Groupthink doesn't shift because people suddenly become braver. It shifts when the environment reduces the cost of *being* brave.

What this asks of leaders: Set the tone.

As a leader, your influence is amplified. Your tone, timing, and reactions set the emotional temperature. People take cues from:

- how open you are to being challenged and new perspectives offered
- whether decisions are rushed or thoughtfully considered
- how you respond when someone disagrees or hesitates

Small practices make a big difference:

- pausing before you speak so others can think
- asking, "What might we be missing?"
- thanking people who challenge assumptions, even when it's uncomfortable.

These moments signal safety, and safety is what allows people to be brave and authentic.



*What this asks of us:
Daily awareness.*

A People-First way of **being** doesn't stop with leaders. It lives in everyday moments with each of us. It looks like:

- noticing when you default to agreement instead of authenticity
- questioning your first assumption about someone
- asking yourself, "What story am I telling, and is it the only one?"
- choosing to speak up with kindness when something doesn't sit right

It's about choosing awareness over autopilot.

A Being Human Truth

Culture doesn't change because one person becomes more aware. It shifts when enough people pause, notice, and choose differently. The leader may open the door. But it's the collective willingness to walk through it that creates real change. That's how workplaces move beyond groupthink: not through perfection, but through shared awareness.



A Human Reset: Becoming Aware of your Bias

Pause. Notice. Question. Choose

Pause before you respond, decide, or label. Bias moves fast. Awareness slows things down.

Notice and ask yourself:

- *What assumption am I making right now?*
- *What feels familiar, safe or “obvious,” and why?*

Question and gently challenge the first narrative:

- *What story am I telling?*
- *What evidence am I using?*
- *What might I be missing?*

Choose and decide consciously:

- *What response supports openness and growth?*
- *What would a People-First way of being look like in this moment?*

Real-Work Examples

Meetings—Silence → Inclusion

Old Pattern: The same voices dominate the conversation. Silence is read as agreement or lack of ideas.

Human Reset: Pause. Invite. Ask.

“I’d love to hear from someone we haven’t heard from yet. What are you seeing?”

By intentionally inviting different voices, you shift from assumption to inclusion. People feel seen, ideas surface, and groupthink loosens its grip.

Talent Decisions—Familiar → Fair

Old Pattern: You gravitate toward people who feel familiar or “easy to work with.” Potential is judged through similarity.

Human Reset: Slow Down, Question. Ask.

“What criteria are we using here, and who might we be overlooking?”

By naming the decision process, bias loses its power. Choices become clearer, fairer, expansive and more intentional.

Feedback—Label → Growth

Old Pattern: One behaviour becomes a fixed story: “They’re difficult.” “They’re not leadership material.”

Human Reset: Separate behavior from identity. Ask

“What’s the behaviour I’m responding to, and what support might help them grow?”

By choosing openness, this creates room for development instead of limitation. People feel supported rather than judged.

Groupthink—Agreement → Insight

Old Pattern: Decisions move quickly because no one challenges the direction. Alignment is assumed.

Human Reset: Pause. Open space. Ask.

“What’s another perspective we should consider before we decide?”

By welcoming difference, you replace compliance with thoughtful contribution, and decisions improve.



BEING HUMAN

a People-First invitation

If unconscious bias lives in all of us, then awareness is not about blame, it's about responsibility.

This is your invitation to lead a little more consciously.

To notice your first reaction and pause before acting on it.

To question the stories that feel automatic.

To stay curious where it would be easier to be certain.

People-First leadership doesn't ask for perfection.

It asks for daily presence.

Because every time you choose awareness over autopilot, you help create a workplace where people feel safer to think, speak, and contribute fully.

Culture doesn't change through policies or programs alone.

It changes through small, human moments practised consistently.

It starts with the leader.

And it becomes sustainable when everyone takes part.



“The future belongs to those willing to see themselves clearly and choose differently. Until next time, let your humanity lead.”

— MIRJANA