

Orientation Over Bias:

Leading with Awareness and Intent



Everything has dimension. That's something I say often—not because it sounds profound, but because it helps me remember to pause and take a closer look.

If something has a front, it has a back. That's not just geometry. It's a way of approaching the world, including our work, our relationships, and the decisions we make.

When you only see one side of something, or someone, you miss the bigger picture. You lose the complexity. That's where bias takes hold. That's where our thinking narrows, and our potential shrinks with it.

So let's talk about the difference between *bias* and *orientation*—not just as a word choice, but as a way of navigating leadership, growth, and life in general.

Bias Is Automatic. Orientation Is Intentional.

We all carry biases. That's not up for debate. They're baked into how our brains work—shortcut thinking to keep us safe, to help us make quick decisions, to simplify a complicated world.

But just because something is automatic doesn't mean it should drive.

If you've ever let your bias steer the conversation, the hiring decision, the feedback you give—or avoid giving—then you already know how messy it can get.

A bias tells you, "I already know what this is." An orientation says, "I'm here to find out."

Think about the difference in those two approaches. One assumes, the other explores. One leans into patterns. The other checks for new context. One repeats the past. The other leaves space for a new future.

Let's take a common example: *success*.

The Problem with a Bias Toward Success

When your mindset is biased toward success, you start to fear failure. Not just a little—deeply. You start avoiding risks, talking yourself out of hard conversations, staying quiet in meetings, or saying yes when you know it should be a no.

You start measuring your worth based on how flawless you look to others.

That's the hallmark of a fixed mindset. It makes your work all about performance instead of growth. You stop learning because learning means *not already knowing*, and that feels like failure.

Now compare that to having an *orientation* toward success. That shift is subtle, but it's powerful. When you're *oriented* toward success, you're not running from failure—you're moving through it.

You start asking better questions:

- What did I learn?
- What needs adjusting?
- What's my next small step?

Suddenly, failure isn't a catastrophe. It's feedback. This is where growth lives.

The Difference Between Doing and Accomplishing



I'll be honest—my favorite personal bias is toward action. I like to get things done. Moving forward gives me a sense of control. It's energizing.

But here's what I've learned the hard way: when that bias goes unmanaged, it turns into busyness. And busyness, without clarity, leads straight to exhaustion.

You can spend a whole day crossing off tasks and still feel like you accomplished nothing. You were moving, but not toward anything. You were acting without reflecting.

That's the trap.

Now, an *action orientation* is different. It doesn't just mean doing a lot—it means doing with intention. It means building in reflection. It means stopping, too.

Yes, stopping.

Stopping is not quitting. It's not weakness. Stopping is you paying attention to what's happening in your body, your thoughts, your team, your energy. It's checking in.

Stopping lets you hear what your needs are actually saying. It gives you a chance to reorient—not just keep pushing through the noise.

And when you're leading, stopping becomes even more important. It's how you create space for others to speak. To be heard. To breathe.

The Trap of Conformity

Here's another big one: conformity.

We don't talk about this enough in leadership spaces, but it's everywhere. It shows up in meetings where everyone agrees, even though half the room has doubts. It shows up in performance reviews, the hiring process, the social habits we encourage or discourage at work.

The danger of conformity is that it pretends to be unity, but it's not. It's pressure. It's the kind of agreement that comes from fear, not from shared values.

Conformity is a bias. It's an ideology dressed up as professionalism. When we prioritize fitting in over showing up as we are, we sacrifice strength. We trade real contribution for comfort.

This gets personal. I've seen it in myself—times I've kept quiet, nodded along, followed the script because rocking the boat felt risky. And I've seen what it costs people: their confidence, their ideas, and sometimes their entire career trajectory.

You lose your voice when you conform too long. And over time, you start forgetting what it even sounded like.

From Weakness to Superpower



We talk a lot about strengths in leadership—but rarely about the strengths we’ve had to create out of our own so-called weaknesses.

Here’s the truth: every weakness, when worked with honestly, can become a strength. Not in the cheesy “turn your flaws into features” way, but in a practical, grounded way.

If you struggle with anxiety, maybe you’ve learned to prepare more thoroughly than most people ever do.

If you’re introverted, maybe your quiet presence gives others space to open up.

If you’ve been underestimated your whole life, maybe you’ve built resilience most people don’t even understand.

But these strengths don't emerge through conformity. They grow through orientation. You have to own your experience, define your terms, and choose what you want to develop.

That takes courage. And it takes unlearning the lie that leadership has one look, one tone, or one type.

What Happens in Biased Workplaces

Let's zoom out for a second. When you work in an environment shaped by social dominance or group favoritism, you start to feel it. It's subtle at first, then sharp.

Maybe you notice the same voices being lifted and others being brushed off.

Maybe your ideas get ignored until someone else says the same thing in a different tone.

Maybe you feel like you're playing a game where the rules keep changing—and no one tells you when they do.

This kind of culture feeds tribalism. People cling to cliques. They protect their own. And the cost is massive: trust disappears, collaboration dies, and engagement flatlines.

For those outside the dominant group, this kind of culture becomes emotionally expensive. Some people detach and stop caring. Others stay, but with a low-grade hum of self-doubt that eats away at their confidence over time.

The worst part? It all gets justified. It's just the way things are. You've gotta be strong. You've gotta deal. You've gotta keep your head down if you want the job, the raise, the stability.

That kind of resignation is what keeps biased systems running. It's what makes it feel impossible to make that shift toward something better, something new. Something. Anything at all.

But that's a lie. Things can shift—when leaders start to see with dimension.

Leading with Orientation, Not Just Intellect

If you're in a leadership role, even a small one, you already shape the culture around you. The way you respond to feedback, how you make decisions, how you talk about failure—all of it creates a ripple effect.

So ask yourself: are you reinforcing a bias, or creating space for *orientation*?

- Do your team members feel safe sharing what's real?
- Can they challenge you without punishment?
- Are differences seen as strengths, or problems to manage?

You can't fake this. People know. They can feel it in how you speak and how you listen.

Orientation, in practice, looks like:

- Taking that second look instead of jumping to conclusions.
- Slowing down enough to notice your own patterns.
- Asking better questions, especially in moments of tension.
- Being willing to shift your approach—even if it makes you uncomfortable.

It's not about being perfect. It's about being awake.

Reframing Power

Let's talk about power for a moment. Because this all comes back to how power is used, shared, or hoarded.

Leadership isn't about holding all the power—it's about *how you use the influence you already have to create better outcomes for more people*.

And when you lead with orientation, you start to share power by design. Not just through policies or slogans, but through daily actions.

You share power when you hire with open eyes instead of unconscious assumptions.

You share power when you admit what you don't know—and invite others to teach you.

You share power when you make room at the table, even if that means giving up your usual seat because that informal leader has an affirming influence on the team.

That's not easy work. It requires practice, reflection, and a lot of humility. But it also builds something worth working for: a culture where people can grow, contribute, and lead without losing themselves in the process.

Choose Orientation



Bias is inevitable. It lives in all of us. But *orientation* is a choice—a way to move through your work and your life with more clarity, intention, and depth.

It's choosing to ask better questions instead of clinging to old answers.

It's choosing to stop when stopping is the most responsible thing you can do.

It's choosing to define your experience for yourself, not just inherit it from others.

When you lead this way, you create room for others to do the same. And that changes more than just your outcomes. It changes your culture. It changes how people feel when they show up every day. It changes the work itself.

So the question isn't whether you *have* biases. You do. We all do.

The real question is: are you *willing to trade automatic thinking for intentional orientation?*

Are you willing to stop just long enough to see both the front *and* the back of the thing?

Because that's when and where the real work—and the real growth—begins.

The way I think about culture is that modern humans have radically changed the way that they work and the way that they live. Companies need to change the way they manage and lead to match the way that modern humans actually work and live.

— Brian Halligan, CEO, Hubspot