President’s Message
by Edward L. Weiner

**Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People**

**THIS PAST SPRING** I borrowed my daughter’s car while mine was in the shop. “It drives really well, Dad,” my daughter said proudly, “and it doesn’t have that blind spot that yours does.”

“Blind spot?” I thought. “Sure, most cars have blind spots, but I never really noticed any in mine.”

Sure enough, the next day when I got my car back I saw that she was right. The back corners have blind spots, particularly for someone her height. Perhaps I had become so accustomed to them that I didn’t even notice them anymore.

While I have considered myself a good driver, something changed. It was subtle; maybe I started to check the side mirror for just an instant longer. No big deal, but knowing that the blind spots were there has made a difference in the way that I drive. An improvement, I think ... I know.

Shortly thereafter, I would learn about an even more important blind spot — my own.

At the Virginia State Bar Annual Meeting in Virginia Beach in June, the Diversity Conference sponsored *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. The session was led by psychologist Dr. Mahzarin Banaji, one of the principal authors of the book and an acknowledged pioneer in the study of implicit bias, and Professor James E. Moliterno, a professor of law at Washington and Lee University who focuses on legal ethics, professionalism, and legal education reform.

In introducing the three-hour session to a standing room only audience, Virginia Supreme Court Justice Cleo Powell, a member of the Diversity Conference Board, said, “Today we will explore a fascinating subject matter — looking into our hidden biases and how they affect our interactions with others, how they affect our ethics and professionalism as legal professionals, and most importantly, once we recognize them, how we overcome them.”

In *Blindspot*, the authors explore hidden biases that we all “carry from a lifetime of experiences with social groups — age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexuality, disability status, or nationality.” Banaji argues that a fundamental property of human beings is a “preparedness to favor the familiar.”

“Blindspot” is a metaphor to capture that portion of the mind that houses hidden biases. The authors use it to examine the extent to which social groups — *without our awareness or conscious control* — shape our likes and dislikes as well as our judgments about people’s character, abilities, and potential.

The title’s “Good People” are the many who strive to align their behavior with their good intentions. The aim of *Blindspot*, and the associated Implicit Association Test, is to explain the science in plain enough language to allow well-intentioned people to better achieve that alignment. As the authors say in the introduction, “Venturing into this book is an invitation to understand our own minds.”

Dr. Elizabeth Loftus, past president of the Association for Psychological Science and noted author of *Eyewitness Testimony*, describes the important message of the book: “Mental processes that we are not aware of can, in fact, affect what we think and what we do. *Blindspot* is one of the most illuminating books ever written on this topic.”

During the session, Justice Powell said, “This book is a must read for every judge, prosecutor, law enforcement officer, lawyer and all other ‘good people’ who want to know... ’Do I have a Blind Spot?’”

Reading this book, taking the Implicit Association Test, and attending this remarkable session at the Annual Meeting have been at the same time scary and incredibly enlightening for me.

The book review in the *Washington Post* said, “While we may not have much power to eradicate our own prejudices, we can counteract them. The first step is to turn a hidden bias into a visible one.”

Hmmmm ... Sort of like me and my car.

Further information and copies of *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* are available at www.spottheblindspot.com.