

## RESILIENCE AND RADICAL OPTIMISM

### MYRIAM BEN FARHAT'S JOURNEY IN TECH AND LEADERSHIP



**Myriam Ben Farhat Head of Leadership Development at Chess.com**

*In the bustling world of tech, where innovation meets relentless competition, few narratives resonate as deeply as that of Myriam Ben Farhat. A mother, entrepreneur, and resilient leader, Myriam embodies the spirit of determination and the power of radical optimism. Her story, shared in a recent podcast episode of "Empathy at the Table," offers invaluable insights into the intersection of empathy, negotiation, and leadership in the tech industry..*

#### **From Law to Tech: A Journey of Reinvention**

Myriam's journey into the tech world is anything but conventional. With 15 years of experience as a lawyer, her career took an unexpected turn when she moved to Barcelona in 2017. This move, precipitated by personal upheaval, became a catalyst for professional reinvention. Transitioning from law to tech, Myriam embraced the challenge of navigating a new industry, driven by her passion for learning and growth.

In her role at chess.com, Myriam leads the team experience, focusing on learning, development, and diversity. Her initiative, "Chess is for Everyone," underscores her commitment to inclusivity, both within the company and the broader chess community.

Under her leadership, the representation of women in the workforce has more than doubled, reflecting her dedication to creating a more equitable industry.

Myriam's story is not just about professional shifts; it's a testament to personal resilience. Facing the challenges of a new city, a new career, and single motherhood, she demonstrated that transformation is possible at any stage of life. Her journey illustrates that embracing change, even when it is daunting, can lead to profound personal and professional growth.

#### **From Manipulation to Collaboration**

Negotiation, often perceived as a battleground of wits and strategy, takes on a different hue in Myriam's philosophy. Drawing from her extensive legal background, she redefines negotiation as a collaborative process. "Negotiation should be about collaborating to meet our common needs," she asserts, challenging the traditional notion of negotiation as manipulation.

Her approach is rooted in empathy and understanding, principles that are essential for effective negotiation. Myriam's insights align with the core tenets of Emotionally Intelligent Negotiation (EIN), which emphasise empathy, active listening, and creating value before capturing value. By prioritising these principles, Myriam fosters an environment where negotiation becomes a tool for building stronger, more collaborative relationships.



In practice, this means viewing the negotiation table not as a battlefield, but as a collaborative space. This shift in perspective allows for the creation of value that benefits all parties involved, rather than a zero-sum game where one party's gain is another's loss. Myriam's approach encourages negotiators to see their counterparts as partners in problem-solving, rather than adversaries.

### Leading with Heart: The Power of Empathy

In leadership, Myriam advocates for a balance between empathy and accountability. Her experience in leading difficult conversations, such as layoffs, or performance reviews highlights the importance of aligning tough decisions with core values and empathy. "Leading with the heart but aligned with values and accountability," she explains, "is crucial for maintaining integrity and trust within the organisation."

Empathy, often misunderstood as a sign of weakness, is, in fact, a powerful leadership tool. By connecting with the emotions and motivations of her team, Myriam creates a supportive and inclusive workplace. This approach not only enhances team performance but also fosters a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

Myriam's leadership style is particularly relevant in today's corporate environment, where emotional intelligence is increasingly recognised as a key component of effective leadership. Her emphasis on empathy ensures that decisions are made with a deep understanding of their impact on people, which is essential for building trust and maintaining morale.

One of the most challenging aspects of Myriam's leadership was overseeing the layoff of over 130 employees during her tenure at Play Magnus Group. This daunting task required a delicate balance of empathy and decisiveness. Myriam ensured the process was as transparent and compassionate as possible, personally leading conversations with those affected and providing them with ample support, including career counseling and job placement assistance. She firmly believed that even in the face of tough business decisions, it was crucial to uphold the company's values and maintain the dignity of every employee.

This approach not only mitigated the potential negative impact on morale but also reinforced a culture of trust and respect within the organization. Through this experience, Myriam demonstrated that it is possible to navigate corporate challenges with a heart-centered approach, leaving a lasting positive impact on both the individuals and the company.

Embracing Change and Continuous Learning

**"Leading by the heart but aligned with values and accountability is crucial for maintaining integrity and trust within the organisation."**



## Commitment to Lifelong Learning

Myriam's story is a testament to the transformative power of continuous learning. From studying contemporary art to obtaining a coaching certification during the COVID-19 pandemic, her commitment to personal and professional growth is unwavering. This dedication to learning and adaptation is what sets her apart as a leader in the dynamic tech landscape.

Her recent venture into dynamic public speaking reflects her ongoing quest for self-improvement and her desire to inspire others. "I believe we all have a mission in life," she shares, "and staying aligned with that mission, through different mediums, keeps me motivated and excited about the future."

This commitment to lifelong learning not only benefits Myriam personally but also positively impacts her professional environment. By continually developing her skills and knowledge, she sets an example for her team and fosters a culture of growth and development within her organisation.

**“As leaders, we must remember that our toughest decisions can still be guided by empathy and respect. It’s about balancing the needs of the business with the humanity of those we lead.”**



***Tunde Onakoya . Chess in the Slums***

Myriam's collaboration with Tunde Onakoya, the founder of "Chess in Slums," is a prime example of her commitment to social impact. This initiative uses chess to reintegrate children in the slums who have left school, bringing them back into the education system through the game of chess. It's a testament to how a simple game can have profound social implications, transforming lives and communities. As Myriam continues to break barriers and lead with empathy, her story serves as an inspiration for leaders in all fields. Her approach to negotiation, leadership, and continuous learning offers valuable lessons for anyone looking to navigate the complexities of modern careers. By embracing empathy, collaboration, and resilience, Myriam not only leads by example but also inspires others to find their path and make a meaningful impact.

For those looking to connect with Myriam and follow her journey, LinkedIn is the best platform. Her work at chess.com and her passion for social impact initiatives, such as "Chess in Slums," continue to drive positive change and innovation in the tech world.



My name is Tony Anagor, and I am a certified coach and communications & negotiation skills trainer. I work with companies, leaders, and their teams to help them communicate and negotiate effectively. I also run a podcast where I speak to negotiation experts from around the world.

My fascination with emotional intelligence in negotiation (EIN) led me to co-author a course on EIN, which I now teach to companies globally. If you're interested in learning more about how my workshops can help your team work more effectively and create better deals, please feel free to contact me.



## RESOURCES

### [Myriam Beh Farhat](#)

Linkedin

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/myriambenfarhat/>

[www.chess.com](http://www.chess.com)

For those interested in exploring these concepts further, my podcast, "Empathy at the Table," offers a deeper dive into these strategies with John Dieffenbach sharing more about his experiences and insights into the world of negotiation.

