

LAURA THOMPSON

A Global Citizen's Labyrinth of Life The Journey That Led to Compassionate Leadership

Laura Thompson is known as an award-winning author, a conscious leadership coach, a social impact advisor to CEOs of global companies, NGOs, and nonprofits, a board director, and a humanitarian. Through her coaching and advisory services, she co-strategizes with her clients' sustainable solutions.

Education, Travel, and Cultural Diversity

During my formative years, I lived in different states in the USA, mostly on the Eastern seaboard from Massachusetts to Florida. In middle school, reading Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, set in London and Paris around the French Revolution, ignited my inner revolutionary spirit with a desire to explore humanity. After Simmons University in Boston and a year abroad at the Sorbonne in Paris, my life began as an American expat traversing seven countries across three different continents. Living and working abroad educated me on cultural diversity and appreciation long before embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace became prevalent.

After a divorce in Geneva, Switzerland, I worked globally in public relations, focusing on strategic communications for Fortune 500 companies. That new chapter in my life was transatlantic between my two favorite cities—Paris and New York—with a passionate lover before I eventually settled down in Manhattan as a single woman and became an executive coach. Or perhaps I haven't settled down and I will soon be off living between two cities again.

Evolution and Expansion

Ever since I was a child, my universe has been reorienting, causing me to continuously adapt to my new circumstances. Sometimes the circumstances were external disruptions beyond my control like the death of my father from leukemia when I was eight years old. Sometimes the

circumstances were internal eruptions led by my soul's need for adventure and transformation. I must admit, when my daddy died, the first thought that traversed my young mind was, "Life is short. Enjoy it." And, I have pretty much lived my life taking the road less traveled. It has been a roller coaster ride with highs and lows, depending on whether I followed my heart's wisdom merged with my rational brain or made fear-based choices caused by the negative side of pride. My soul thinks big while my ego plays small—an eternal battle many of us fight.

Fear blocks us all from time to time. I created a mantra for an Egyptian friend from Alexandria overcoming thyroid cancer: "Focus on faith over fear." She was scared of the cancer metastasizing; this simple phrase gave her hope. I passed on the mantra to a colleague who had lost their job during the pandemic and was looking for a new position. I used it when I decided to reinvent myself rather than stay stuck in a rut. But more importantly, I have tried to remain mindful and make love-based choices versus fear-based choices. Occasionally, this has involved my heart and ego duking it out for ten rounds in the boxing ring with a lot of sweat and tears until my heart won. One of my life's lessons has been to learn to follow my heart's wisdom. I play big by having the courage to take that first step in the direction of my true north.

One morning, I was talking with a journalist friend of mine. I told her how a dear college friend and international businesswoman, Tracy Nickl once remarked, "Every time your family starts to understand you, you change." My journalist friend then wryly commented, "Did your family ever understand you?" Both conversations caused laughter to erupt in our bellies. People consistently comment on how they love the sound of my laughter which compels everyone around to laugh even more.

Having a sense of humor and a desire to have fun despite the curve balls thrown at you in life is a choice. Life is short. Enjoy it. Other ways to deal with harsh circumstances in life are exercise, entertainment, spicy food, love and blissful orgasms, changing one's environment, or even flying in a plane and looking up at the stars to gain a higher perspective. There are many strategies one can engage in to overcome change, uncertainty, and adversity while keeping the faith and daring to dream big.

Open to New Experiences and Exploration

I was single, married, and then divorced. I went from speaking one language

to being multilingual. I went from living as an American citizen to being a global citizen. I dated a Christian, a Jew, and a Muslim consecutively. I aligned myself with Catholicism, Zen Buddhism, and world interfaith harmony. I progressed from follower to leader to advocate for humanitarian causes. Dare I add, I might have shifted from heterosexuality to bisexuality. My sexual identity remains a mystery and may be linked to my soul memory of past lives with a couple of individuals. It could also signify that I have achieved a balance of my inner divine feminine and inner divine masculine based on self-love, self-compassion, and self-acceptance. This new experience turned my world upside down, but I learned to accept this part of myself, and my compassion for the LGBTQIA+ community expanded.

We are all multi-faceted human beings. It would be nice to celebrate all the things that we are rather than practicing limited thinking and putting people in boxes. *It's time to embrace our whole selves, respect human dignity, lead with compassion, and improve unity in global diversity.*

My contrasting cycles and circles of existence have allowed me to relate to people from different walks of life all over the world with empathy and compassion. This has proved beneficial to building an enriching personal and professional global network. I have friendships around the world for which I am grateful.

For some, my self-portrait might be confusing. When my story comes up, I have often remained quiet or chosen to portray only one aspect of myself—which aspect, depending on the context. In the artist world, I'm the author and poet. In finance, I'm an angel investor. In the nonprofit space, I'm an advocate for human rights. In academia, some Columbia Business School alumni call me a Renaissance woman. On LinkedIn, the term is multi-hyphenate. Many people are multi-talented. Accepting our multidimensionality requires stepping into our magnificence, being bold, and no longer hiding in the background or playing small. The world needs all of our unique contributions. It takes a village to thrive. This is the beauty of mankind's interconnectivity.

Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the whole world. When it hit, the agility, resilience, and ability to manage chaos I had built up through my life and work experiences kicked in. We often don't know what we are capable of until tested. Apparently, I respond to high-stakes crises with leadership, effective communications, and Zen-like calmness.

I advised two organizations to pivot to digitization—a non-governmental organization in Europe and a nonprofit in Asia. They helped hundreds of thousands of people worldwide overcome challenges and thrive through education. Digitization is now embedded in their business model. Being part of causes larger than myself makes my life more purposeful and meaningful.

Since we were often in lockdown, it was a good time to write. I contributed a chapter on *The Future of Work: How to Prepare for It* with co-authors from Harvard, Stanford, MIT, and INSEAD for the Center for Asia Leadership (CAL) which became a great resource for employees. Later, with the same leadership institute, I co-founded the CAL Coaching Council which after one year has received excellent feedback from senior decision makers in Asia.

For me, 2020 turned out to be a productive year, characterized by work for these two educational nonprofits and CAL, pro bono due to their economic hardships. Overall, the pandemic was a crucible moment which tested us all, causing us to examine our values, draw strength from within, co-create strategies, and engage in critical thinking to make decisions and overcome uncertainty and adversity. It's a choice to transform crises into opportunities. It took courage for all of us to adapt to our new world.

Compassionate Leadership

From 2020 to 2021, a startup US nonprofit focused on saving lives and alleviating human suffering gained traction through the work of philanthropist, humanitarian, businesswoman, and founder Mitzi Perdue. I am fortunate to have established a friendship with Mitzi as we served two years together as board members. I was on the board as both treasurer and secretary.

In September 2021, my universe spun out of control. I was lying on my bed with the room rotating like I had a severe hangover but without having had anything to drink. It was diagnosed as positional vertigo and became something I've now had to manage long-term.

One Friday, my cell phone rang. When I answered, it was my eldest brother Bob. He said, "Mom had six strokes. Her left side is paralyzed. She has less than a week to live. Don't bother to come. They won't let you see her because of COVID, but WhatsApp, FaceTime, or Zoom works." Although he relayed this message in a matter-of-fact way, I could hear the tears in his voice. I wondered if my body's recent extreme dizziness and nausea were picking up on my mother's condition, as I'm highly empathic.

I received another call a bit later. It was Mitzi as the board chair of the

aforementioned humanitarian organization, checking in to go over items on the agenda for Monday's board meeting. She asked, "How are you?"

I replied, "Do you really want to know?"

She said, "Yes."

Normally, I keep my private life separate from business, but this woman had demonstrated to me that you can lead with compassion. I value her as an amazing and enlightened human being, so I opened up and told her my mom had days left to live.

Mitzi turned out to be my Earth angel and helped me in numerous ways to prepare for the loss of a parent. She shared her own touching, personal experiences of loss. Monday's board meeting came, and she mentioned to the board the condition of my mom. Again, this was a first for me—a leader showing humanity. It was wonderful to witness compassionate leadership in action. I had been coaching leaders to lead with values, show respect for others' human dignity, and communicate mindfully. I share the ideals of conscious and compassionate leadership because I saw firsthand as a former corporate employee how often they were lacking.

After the board meeting, I called the chaplain to facilitate a Zoom call with my mom, but she preferred I remember my mom in her angelic state and would only let me speak through the mobile held up to mom's ear. I heard my mom's staccato breathing and knew this was a sign she was near death. I expressed how much I loved her and assured her I would be happy in whatever I chose to be or do in life.

I ended the call. Then, I wrote up the board minutes. As I proofread the document, I felt my mom's presence standing behind me, as though she were reading what I wrote. And then I heard her say, "You're doing interesting work."

Seconds later, that fateful day, I sent the minutes to the board chair for her review at the exact time my mother died. To me, this was Mom's message that confirmed life exists between worlds beyond our concept of time, space, and dimension. The labyrinth of life expanded from an Earthly existence to one of other worlds where life-after-life and life-between-lives exist.

Later, on Zoom with the chaplain and the two 24/7 nurses who cared for my mom during her decline, I mentioned my gratitude. They told me they were touched by my stories and my love for my mom. We all learned and grew together. We walked the talk, practicing loving kindness and compassion centering on Mom's human dignity until her final hours.

THINK BIG!

I learned some people are blessings in your life, like Mitzi, my brother Bob, and my brother Mark. They were there during some of my darkest hours. Others are there for you to learn lessons and practice forgiveness. Everyone plays a role in our lives, providing learning and growth opportunities so we evolve into higher states of awareness, consciousness, compassion, and love. Let's embrace becoming more conscious human beings, aware of ourselves, others, and our environment. Through this stratagem, we can be our best selves, creating a network of harmonious relationships.

Everyone's journey is unique. I have dared to consistently leave my comfort zone and step through countless thresholds spiraling upwards, downwards, and sideways. With great conviction, love-based choices were the true north on my compass, while my values of love, forgiveness, joy, and gratitude represented the north, east, south, and west positions. Curiosity, bravery, and open-mindedness nudged my progression onwards toward evolution and expansion.

I am grateful for all the people who have touched my life and caused me to continuously learn and grow, be my best self, vibrate at my highest, and live life with joyful energy. I appreciate all who have acted as catalysts for me to share my insightful messages through my writing, coaching, and strategic advising for nonprofit and for-profit organizations worldwide.

What are you going to do to spread your wings?



Connect with author, coach, and senior advisor Laura Thompson, MA, for her coaching and advisory services for individuals, groups, and companies. She specializes in conscious leadership development, strategic communications, creative foresight thinking, and social impact strategies.

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Tweetable: It's time to embrace our whole selves, respect human dignity, lead with compassion, and improve unity in global diversity.