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Helping Others and the World

*I get up every morning determined both
to change the world and to have one
hell of a good time. Sometimes, this
makes planning the day difficult.*

E. B. WHITE

EMPOWERMENT WITH THE WORLD



* **Laurie:** *I suppose you could call my professional experience of several years ago a “crisis,” but truthfully, I’ve been through such personal traumas that I don’t use the word lightly. I’m a mother of two, Luke (16 years old now) and Dylan (14), who are the loves of my life, along with my husband, Grayle. Luke is a surviving twin, and we lost our son Jason at 6 days old. That was a true medical and personal crisis, and it was unspeakably painful. My newborn babies were terribly ill, and Luke survived with significant special needs. After that experience, everything pales in comparison. This life experience, of losing Jason, and now having two precious children—one of whom has extensive special needs—has given me so much that is a blessing, and I’ve received real perspective from it.*

About my professional life . . . I started out in education. I was a first-grade and special-education teacher. That was the path I thought I’d take for my entire career. I believed I’d be principal of an elementary school, or start my own school someday. Candidly, my life and career changed directions because my boyfriend at the time dumped me. I was devastated, and knew I needed a change, so I decided to move my life back to New York. I then found my way into the world of publishing. I started on the sales side, then moved onto marketing and finally into management. I eventually joined Time Inc., in New York City, where I stayed for seven years until I left in December 2005.

In the initial years, I really enjoyed the whole experience of that career path. I felt I was learning something new every day, and the industry was fun. I was going through a real ascension, and it was exciting because I believed I was making a difference and a contribution. After selling for a variety of publications, I became the director of a large sales group. Most recently I was at Fortune magazine, as the marketing director. After several years, they made me a VP, and I took on lots of interesting and varied responsibilities. I traveled

- * **STEP BACK TO EXPLORE** Resisting the fact that you can make a difference.
- * **LET GO** of believing you don’t have what it takes.
- * **SAY YES!** to changing the world.
- * **BREAKTHROUGH**
“I help others and the world.”

* Laurie Howlett is a 53-year-old former Vice President of Marketing, Fortune Magazine Group; currently she is a special-needs advocate and author of a special-needs children’s book series.

as far up the ladder as I wanted to go and was really excited because I had “made it,” but I had done so on my terms, or so I thought.

Laurie’s story holds an important message. If we were able to chart all of the events in our lives from a higher perspective, as an outside observer, we’d see that we are being prepared for a purpose that isn’t readily apparent to us in the moment. We’d see that each of us is special, needed, important. If we follow what we love and what feels good—our authentic path—no matter how challenging it may seem, it will lead us to where we dream of going.

Laurie continues: *As a mother of two, with a son who had special needs, I created a flexible schedule where I worked from home on Fridays. I felt good about that . . . I was the only manager to do so, and they agreed to the terms that I needed. In the world of Fortune magazine, I was one of the lone women . . . the first working mom in the executive committee. Along with a colleague I launched a very successful women’s conference, which was a powerful event and proved very beneficial to women. So it felt great to be in a man’s world, but as a woman with a very strong voice.*

In the beginning, I know I surprised people—pleasantly, I think—particularly the men, and I found the work to be stimulating and enjoyable. At times, I had the sense that my male colleagues weren’t quite sure what to do with me, and often there was much posturing and pontificating. Frankly, at times I had to regard my male counterparts as if they were obstreperous clients; in which case, you have to figure out how to connect with them so they can hear you and you can hear them, in order to accomplish the business at hand.

As the first working mother on the executive committee, I shook things up, helping people get more connected with what they valued, and I found meaning in that. But over time, something shifted and I began to move away from enjoying “playing with the boys.” Don’t get me wrong. There were certainly some women I couldn’t work with. And I found it all really fatiguing, navigating through the lack of heart and emotional disconnection, and the competitive posturing. I was doing very well; that wasn’t the issue. It was a question of where I wanted to put my energies, and how I wanted to make a difference. After all I’d given at work to build my career to where I wanted it, there were days I’d wake up anxious, worried, and questioning, “Is this all there is?” I’d think about my son Luke. His needs are great—he doesn’t talk, the only word he says is “Mom” (though I think that makes him fluent, so I don’t have a problem with that!). He was in a real school crisis for a couple of years, and in serious distress. I got him through that, and I kept thinking to myself, “There’s no

more important job than this, than being a mom. There must be something else I can be doing, something more significant, to make this world a better place, for him, for children, for others.” I began to yearn deeply to make a change and a difference in the world in a much bigger way than I had access to, but I just didn’t know how to in my current situation.

Laurie felt at ease being one of the boys, and her big personality—her outgoing demeanor and confidence, talent, forthrightness, and humor—helped her achieve success in the corporate world. At first, she was accepted and highly admired for her strength and her points of difference among her male coworkers. It was all going beautifully. Her work seemed to be a good fit, until something changed. A yearning emerged, slowly and steadily, to apply her energies to something bigger, something more meaningful to her, something more influential to the world at large.

Laurie continues: *Several years went by in which I was truly restless, yearning, and didn’t know which direction to go. I was in a limbo that stretched me in completely different directions, and I couldn’t resolve which one to take. I tried some different things during those years to fill my heart, but those experiences led me to feel even more restless at work. Then, dealing with all the male energy just lost its appeal completely. I realized that I was spending too much energy on trying to change this corporate environment, breaking myself against it. I asked myself, “Why do I care so much about this?” I didn’t have aspirations to become a publisher, so I’d gone as far as I wanted to go there. And further, I wasn’t willing to sacrifice my heart in the process of being successful, and it was looking like the fight to keep my heart alive was requiring me to give up my soul. The men were just too uncomfortable.*

Over time, the fatigue wore me down. I was tired, depressed, and worn out. I’d ask my sister, with whom I’m very close and who was also in the corporate world, “How did we get here?” And then the economy took a major downturn and it affected the organization terribly. When business turns difficult in tough economic times, some wonky behavior in people gets exposed because they don’t know how to fix it. Instead of approaching the new economy with a collaborative spirit, it became very much cutthroat and a cruel, blaming world.

So, in 2003, I decided I had to find a way out, and leave, but I didn’t know where to go next. I was scared about it . . . walking away from what I’d created, leaving without a safety net. I’d worked so hard for what I’d achieved. At this point, the company was going through murmurings of staff reductions. At the same time, I met a great woman who ran a communications company in Connecticut, and she offered me a job. The commute was shorter, but the compensation wasn’t what I hoped it would be, and also I’d have to report to a man

who was doing a job I could've done. I knew if I were to take another corporate job, it would have to be as a direct report to the top. The whole experience helped me realize that I indeed did want to leave Fortune, but I no longer wanted to work in the corporate world. I was done.

My husband and I discussed all this, and we agreed to start planning for me to make a significant change. For two years I had been working on a book about my special-needs son, and I realized that this might be the time and place to begin focus on writing my book, and turn my heart toward the community of special-needs kids that I was so devoted to and loved. I said to my husband, "Not everyone has a capacity to work with these kids or to be a voice for this community, and is there any better cause than Luke?" I realized then that finishing the book—which I saw as a catalyst to create a platform for the special-needs community—was the direction that would tie my whole life together.

As luck would have it, in November 2003, through the rumblings of layoffs and packages, I decided to let fate take its course, rather than endeavoring to push a direction for myself. Thankfully, they offered me a package, and I took it. It had taken me years in the corporate world to figure out who I was and what I truly wanted, from the heart. There was a core of myself that I was in touch with, but parts of me hadn't been fully realized or expressed. I decided to take the leap and jump, without a net, into a world that finally answered the longings of my heart and soul.

After Laurie's Leap

After twenty years in the corporate world, this has been a great opportunity to stop, relax, unwind, take a nap, or go lie in the hammock because I can. At first it took me a while to orient myself, but I was really ready. Keep in mind, my children had two parents who commuted into the city and were both in New York City during 9/11. In these times in the world when anything can happen, I decided I needed and wanted to be here for my kids more.

About my book on Luke, my writing process initially was that I'd think about a special moment in Luke's life and write it. A friend of mine called it "puking out the story." After puking out a tremendous amount, I needed to put structure around it. I started meeting and talking with many other moms of special-needs kids, and I discovered that, while we vary in the details of our situations, we are all connected in the feelings and the journey—these are very universal. I've found that other moms love this book and idea, and they tell me it's an incredible, inspiring story. I know I have to write this . . . I'm connected in my heart and soul to it.

And then one day I concluded that I'd written everything that I needed and wanted to

say (for the moment), and I wasn't sure in which direction I would take it. So I decided that, instead of pushing this, I would turn my energy inward and take time for me to rediscover "me." My decision happened to coincide with summer vacation for my younger son, Dylan, and we agreed that we'd play together during his break.

As always happens in my life, because I was completely connected to my heart during this time, my idea for my *Lambdoodle* children's book series was born. I came to it so easily and realized that it was there all along, but to see it required a full "detox" from my formerly overscheduled, exhausting life. As of this moment, my book series proposal is now complete. I've met with many publishing and media contacts, all of whom have been enthusiastically supportive of my endeavor, which has also led to a new business that is separate from the multimedia platform.

I talk to everyone about my book now. Today, one in five families has a special-needs child, yet it's still a profoundly underserved community—a forgotten community in our world of many experts who are often incompetent and uncaring. It is very easy for others who don't understand to stuff special-needs kids into programs that most often are barely adequate, leaving one to wonder if the rest of the world either doesn't care or is unaware. People say, "Okay, fine, put the child there, he'll be happy. He has special needs, so it's okay. He doesn't have to be as productive as other people." But this couldn't be farther from the truth. My dream is to be an ambassador for the special-needs community, because this community desperately needs attention and service, and I can help.

The ultimate goal for my project is to create a huge and powerful platform for special-needs families—complete with support groups for families, extensive resource connections, and an inspiring children's book series (now called *Lambdoodle*) whose shining heroes are special-needs kids. My work also underscores the special attributes of the wonderful school Luke is in now that took us years to find. I'd like to use it as a model to start other schools. There are shockingly few quality schools and services for special-needs children and young adults today, and I plan to do something about that.

About money—it's a necessity, of course, and it's important to me to be able to make a good living, and be financially independent. I'm still working through the financial reality, and the fear of the unknown sometimes surfaces. I continue to revere my financial independence, but I trust that my next journey will provide me adequate compensation. I'm not sure how it will happen, but I trust that it will. Relinquishing my salary and letting my husband support us solely for a while was a very big step for me. But I know I have strong talents and an important project that will translate to compensation. I'm not overcome with financial worries. I just trust.

Laurie says of her life now: *I've been through deep traumas. Every day I wake up and my life is punctuated with perspective. I go to sleep with perspective. I have learned to relax into life. I don't doubt for a moment my intent to transform the world of special needs, or the profound difference that I can make for special-needs kids, their families, and others who are connected to those with special needs. I have trusted for some time that this is my heartfelt path—my destiny. I am committed to being present, and savoring the preciousness of every minute of my life if I can. My life journey has shown me the importance of loving and accepting it all as a gift.*

LAURIE'S ADVICE

- Walk away from the fear or resistance of forging an authentic path.
- Enjoy the preciousness of life.
- Trust that you can help the world. Do not doubt for a moment that you can transform it for the better.

Stop Resisting Your New Path

For many women, fear and resistance become abundant when they think about doing something powerful, different, bold, or untraditional. I've met many women who have the inkling that they can indeed help the world, but they snuff it out quickly, doubting that this longing could ever come to fruition or that they are “big” enough to make it happen. Laurie had been working on her book for two years and had desired for even longer to help special-needs children. Thankfully, she said yes! to these longings when the opportunity presented itself to dedicate herself to them. Taking the plunge toward embracing a new path, if it's something you feel you can't live without, is a vital step.

What is behind women's reluctance to say yes! to themselves? Were we raised with an overly accommodating worldview? Was it ingrained that women should put others ahead of themselves? Or perhaps it's simply a comfortable and believable excuse to say that something outside of ourselves is holding us back. Whatever the reasons, women find it difficult to operate on their own instructions, on their own behalf, and move toward powerful action, especially if others are skeptical or less than accepting.

Laurie says: *What I discovered is that it requires a great deal of confidence and courage to travel the unknown path, and move away from what others say and think. It's very challenging, too, not having all of the answers or knowing exactly how it will all turn out in the face of the constant questions from others: for example, what are you working on, how is it going, when will it be published, etc. My spiritual journey is a constant in my life. And my daily practice allows me to connect to my heart, and to a source that is meaningful to me. I've become quite comfortable now with the fact that I've been working on my idea for about eighteen months and still don't know the exact details of how this will come to fruition but continue to trust that it will. I've let go of my linear thinking and thrown out any timetable that I may have once placed on myself.*

I was more affected by "tribal thinking" in my past (the thoughts and opinions of the majority group in which I lived or worked—whether it was religious thought, or male behaviors and views, or corporate dictates). But frankly, I don't focus often on these types of dominant thoughts and opinions anymore. I am devoted to living my own life, not theirs.

Laurie has found that her connection with her spirituality gives her the strength to persist in her own meaningful endeavors and tune out the chatter of those who would question, criticize, or judge. Finding what you need to help you move through fear and resistance is critical, so that you can step up to what you dream of being and doing. Whether it's changing the world to better serve the special-needs community, writing a book, cherishing your family time, or moving from a heart-deprived working world to a heart-filled one, understand what you long for most. Push forward to it, despite your fear and resistance.

Enjoy Life's Preciousness

Writing this chapter on Laurie's life has changed me, given me deeper perspective, altered how I view the little nothings that perturb my sense of calm and balance. I'm not sure how long this new perspective will last (forever, I hope), but I feel that I'm looking through different glasses now—ones that block out the trivial and help me see more clearly what is vitally important in living fully.

Imagine what we could be and create if we could let go of the trivial, meaningless stuff that clutters our minds and lives—the irritating boss, the jealous friend, the critical behavior of our siblings, the haughty neighbor—and dedicated ourselves to feeling completely alive and relishing the preciousness of every moment. This commitment to embracing the preciousness of life alters our experience dramatically. Losing a child

and having a special-needs son has given Laurie perspective like no other life events could. And it shows. She lives every day from a worldview that nothing matters more than loving your life, cherishing the heart connection and time you have with your special loved ones, and devoting yourself unabashedly to your visions of serving as an agent of change in the world.

Trust That You Can Help the World

If you long to help others and the world, then you are *supposed to be helping the world*. It's that simple. You wouldn't be fantasizing about it, yearning for it if you weren't capable of it. You resonate with something outside yourself only if it is already a part of you, something that exists inside you, wanting and needing expression. So many women do not act on their longings. Not acting on your desires to help others or the world simply means you are frittering away your precious chance to make a difference.

What do you long to do that is in service to others and the world? If it's a very large endeavor, great! Take small, bite-sized steps toward it—break it down into manageable actions that give you evidence you're capable of being the person you dream of being. If your way of helping the world doesn't fit your current situation, it's up to you to somehow incorporate your vision of helping so that it does.

You are capable of stepping up to help the world. You wouldn't be reading these words if you weren't. Trust me on this one. Your destiny is waiting for you to claim it.

MOVING FORWARD TO BREAKTHROUGH

* STEP BACK

Visualization: Remembering When You Made a Difference

Close your eyes, and take three long, deep breaths.

Think back over your life. Bring to your mind's eye a very important event that made a lasting positive impression on you, a time when you were of great help to someone. Go back as far as you'd like, even to your teen years or childhood.

See the moment clearly. Watch how you stepped forward to help. Who did you help? What did you do specifically? Observe how you made them feel better, gave them support and assistance when they needed it most. See how you took care of them when no one else did. See the strength, courage, and compassion you shared.

How did they respond when you offered your help? How did *you* feel? Feel it now.

You'll remember this moment for a long time, and most likely so will they. Why was it so memorable? Because you changed the world—their world and yours—just for a moment.

Whenever you think you can't change the world, remember this moment. Making a difference in the world is simple—it's doing what you did. It's stepping forward to help in any way you can that feels right. That's all it takes.

* **LET GO** of believing you don't have what it takes.

What do you think it takes to change the world? Is it tremendous ability, money, time? Or can we change the world with small steps, one at a time?

- Write down the many skills and talents you've developed over your lifetime that could be useful in your vision of helping the world. Include skills you love to use from all your jobs, volunteer work, parenting experience, hobbies . . . everything that makes you *you* that you love to do. Your list might include marketing, writing, leading, organizing, networking, researching, fund-raising, planning, public speaking, entertaining, teaching, or financial forecasting.
- Now write your bio with this full list of talents and skills. Read it over. See, you have what it takes!

* **SAY YES!** to changing the world.

Below is a list of ways people help the world. Review the list, and check off any category that appeals to you. Also write down specific areas that compel you (special-needs children, the environment, hospice, etc.).

<i>Ways to Help the World¹</i>	<i>Specific Areas I'm Attracted to</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Assisting in Creating Results	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Counseling/Coaching People	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting/Assisting Children	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting the Elderly	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Enhancing Health and Wellness Issues	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Political, Environmental, or Social Causes	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Bringing Creativity to Life	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Helping Family and Friends	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Increasing Others' Quality of Life	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Providing Quality Services/Products	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Enhancing Beauty	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Training Others	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching Others	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Enhancing Fun for Others	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Others' Organizational Capability	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Streamlining Processes and Organizations	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Creating New Businesses/Projects/Events	_____

Other ways to make a difference:

- Of the categories above, choose the top three helping areas that most strongly compel you, and list them in order of importance to you (1 = most important).

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- Take action this month to explore these areas: research them online, talk to people who do this work, call an organization, or take a class.

Your Vision of Helping

In reviewing Laurie’s story, we can see she had the following ingredients that helped her vision become a reality:

HEARTFELT CONNECTION	To her special-needs child, who needed her
HER VISION	To help special-needs children gain self-reliance and live empowered, joyful lives
ABILITY TO COMMIT	Room in her heart and her life to contribute with time and energy
TALENTS/SKILLS	Writing, networking, executing plans, marketing

Uncover your unique vision for helping the world, and realize all the abilities and talents you have developed over your lifetime that will help. Complete this chart today:

My Vision for Helping the World

MY HEARTFELT CONNECTION IS TO:	
MY VISION:	
HOW I CAN COMMIT:	
MY TALENTS I CAN USE:	
MY NEXT STEP:	

Your vision is waiting to be created. Don’t wait. Go for it!

Remember

If you long to help the world, then you are *supposed to be helping others and the world*. Being who you are makes a difference. Don't doubt it for a second longer. Take action today to push through your fear and resistance.

Laurie reminds us

"I've practiced celebrating each and every contact I make—no matter where it leads. My belief is that when one door closes, multiple new ones open and you have no idea where those will take you . . . and hooray for that! I find that the more I speak out loud about what I'm committed to, the more it takes shape, the more I own it, and the further I empower myself and my concept of helping the world."

✱ **BREAKTHROUGH** "I help others and the world."