

EPISODE 23

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:05] ANNOUNCER: You are listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, leadership conversations that explore adapting and thriving in a complex world with Rick Torseth and guests.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:20] RT: Hi, everybody. This is Rick Torseth, and this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders. The podcast where we have conversations with people who have made decisions to lead in some challenging environments or build challenging opportunities in the world that may have initially little interest. To some degree, that might be what we talked about today.

I have this cool pleasure of reconnecting to, I'm going to say a friend, Elizabeth Filippouli, who I met I think in 2010 or '11, Elizabeth? We met one time in-person in London. You had an idea about making some stuff in the world. And we're going to talk about what you've done in the last 10 or 11 years, because it's pretty astounding. Welcome to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, Elizabeth.

[00:01:06] EF: Thank you, Rick. It is a pleasure to be with you.

[00:01:09] RT: I got questions, and we know we want to talk about the Global Thinkers Forum, and we want to talk about Athena40, because these people need to know what these initiatives are. But before we get into that, what do you think people need to know about you to start this conversation that's important to put the work you've done in context?

[00:01:27] EF: It's a very good question. I think what I define myself as is a time traveler and an explorer. And I started off my professional life as a journalist. And to me, journalism is that combination of traveling across cultures, and stories, and people, and through time. And so, everything I did later on in life with Global Thinkers Forum, with Athena40, that we're going to talk about that, has been inspired and informed by my journeys around the world.

[00:02:07] RT: Okay. Let's segue a little bit here. I'm going to let you pick which initiative you want to start with. And that I think will help us establish context for who you are and what you're doing. And then we can talk about the leadership inside that. Where do you want to begin? You want to begin with Global Thinkers Forum, which was where you began? Or do you want to go the other direction. It's your call.

[00:02:27] EF: Let's begin with Global Thinkers Forum, which launched in Oxford, at the University of Oxford, the year when we met, Rick, which was 2011. 11 years ago. And at the time, as you mentioned, it was just an idea. It was just a seed. And a seed that was blooming into a vision. But I still, at the time, didn't know how it would evolve, because it was just me. Someone who had this passion to launch an organization that would promote values-based leadership, that would promote collaboration, cross-cultural understanding, and would support women and youth through mentoring. But all this sounds great. But how do you pull everything together? And who is there as a board, as a formal structure for the organization to become an entity and to actually put programs together and deliver them? When we met, everything was still at this planning stage.

[00:03:35] RT: And then what happened? Because something happened then. What did you do to breathe life into it?

[00:03:40] EF: Well, Oxford, first of all, and Saïd Business School, was a major decision for me and a life-transforming time. Taking the courses, it was my diploma on strategy and innovation and how to build an organization that would engage people from around the world under a shared vision, a vision that would speak to their hearts, because they would find reasons to be part of it.

And to me, because a Global Thinkers Forum, as you know, Rick, is a non-profit organization. It's not a product. It is not a service. It's not something that has commercial value. It was something that had to win the hearts and minds of people.

And so, if we go back then, 2010, 2011, our world was facing a serious crisis in Europe, for example, with Greece being on the brink of bankruptcy, which was actually a very dangerous prospect for the entire European Union structure. Right?

It was two years after the recession in the States and the UK. And the very serious financial crisis, which affected the markets around the world, including the Arab world and Dubai. It was right at the heart of the Arab Revolutions.

And so, plenty of things were happening in Brazil, in China. And I felt that our world had to face the challenge of lack of proper leadership. And when I say proper leadership, I am referring to accountable leadership, to values-driven leadership. I had a network in place for which I should credit my years as a journalist with networks like CNN International and then Al Jazeera English. They both enabled me to create a network of thought leaders, decision makers, accountable citizens who were interested in promoting, affecting positive change in their societies.

And so, when I had that idea of creating, launching an independent platform that would not have affiliations with any corporations, would not be financially backed by any private business or any political entity, it would be independent and grassroots, I was able to call them, email them and say, "This is what my vision is. And it is a passion. And it's a person who does not have any financial means, but has that dream. Are you interested? Would you like to hear more and would you like to be part?" This is how it all started.

But of course, going back to Oxford and to Saïd Business school, the school gave me the necessary knowledge to be able to create the structure in a more formal and systemic way. And so, things were coming together in, I would say, a magical way, possibly because timing was right. I was ready for something like it. And people welcomed it.

In 2012 was the year when I launched Global Thinkers Forum. It was registered as a legal entity, a non-profit organization in England and in Wales. However, I did not want it to be seen, to be regarded as another Western organization that would try to, I don't know, advocate for Western democracies and Western values to the world.

I wanted to host and organize conversations and invite people in other parts of the world where things and change was happening. And so, I decided to launch it in Jordan precisely because it was a time of the Arab Revolutions, as they were unfolding and people were taking to the streets and demanding change, and democratic reforms, and access to rights, and

opportunities, and education, and finance. Right? People needed to finance their dreams and their careers.

Jordan was a choice, A, because as you know, Rick, has been a country that has maintained its neutrality in a part of the world which is very complex and very unfortunately plagued by war and violence. Secondly, it's a fairly liberal society as compared to its neighbors or most of its neighbors, and a very welcoming society in terms of international ideas and initiatives.

The initiative was embraced by Queen Rania and King Abdullah, who gave the patronage, Queen Rania did. And in partnership with Colombia University, the research center, which is in Amman, we hosted the first forum and the awards for excellence.

The theme on the first year was Arab Women Power and Creativity, because I was very interested in promoting the very talented, and dynamic, and courageous women of the Arab world and how they could take things into their hands when it comes to reform and democratic progress. But also, initiatives, which are launched by the private sector.

Because what I learned when I lived in the Middle East, and in Qatar in particular, in 2006, 2007, was that media and people in general – Unfortunately, we have that in our nature. We tend to stereotype and then kind of replicate labels. And so, there is this notion that arab women are oppressed. They are only raising families and looking after children. And they do not get degrees. Or they do not launch careers. And so, and so, and so, which is very untrue. I have come across some of the most exceptional women leaders who are Arab women leaders and pioneering entrepreneurs, and scientists, and innovators, and philanthropists. I was very keen to find a way to promote that. That was a long answer to your question about how I launched the forum.

[00:09:49] RT: Well, I mean, it's an essential answer, because I think it lays the framework for not only the work of Global Thinkers Forum, but also is reflective of I think an element from a person who's deciding to lead. What it takes? It's not just brilliant ideas. There's a lot of stamina involved. A lot of resolve. A lot of grit to stay in this when you can't see that it's going to turn into what it's turned into, or others can't see it.

I'm interested in how you crafted the narrative of the possibility of what Global Thinkers Forum could be to those people who you were trying to bring in so they could be part of it and help you move it along to the next level. Because narrative is a big part of leading. It's how you bring people along. Tell people a little bit about the way in which you think about how you want to tell your story about what you're trying to do so people listen and may decide to come with you on this journey.

[00:10:42] EF: Totally. Yes. Narrative is always extremely important, because this is what wins or not people's hearts and people's attention. And as we know, attention in the current day and age is perhaps the most valuable commodity. Right? You need people's eyes, and ears, and engagement, and support if you are to launch something and make it successful.

And so, what I did at the time, I looked at the global landscape to see what other organizations were out there? And what was it that they were bringing to the conversation? And of course, some of them had been doing that very successfully for years, if not decades.

For example, it's been the World Economic Forum in Davos for 40 plus years. Dr. Schwab has been convening people to discuss global trends and to see how the private sector can promote collaboration and positive change. On the other hand, it's been regarded as an elite club, which those ones who are already established, and wealthy, and influential can have access to because they can pay their weight to it.

Then there was TEDx and all the TEDx initiatives and the TED platform giving voice and giving mic to people who are exceptional innovators. But there was no dialogue there. And then of course, you had other initiatives like the Clinton Global Initiative at the time, or Tony Blair's initiative, or Vital Voices under Hillary Clinton. But these were always affiliated somehow with a political leader. There was nothing that would bring together inspiring thought leaders and innovators, engaging them in conversations. They would come from different backgrounds and different industries. And they would discuss on an issue that cuts across society, but they would bring diverse voices. And they would disagree because it was not a matter of everyone being on the same page or sharing the same beliefs. But it was always about, even if we believe in different things, in different systems, we should operate under a shared value system, as in universal values, and try to find solutions together. That was the narrative and the way I

positioned Global Thinkers Forum, an independent, non-partisan organization, which was arriving to promote a values-based leadership as a genuine and authentic vision without any agendas.

[00:13:17] RT: Okay. I want to let people know that we will put links to both organizations in the notes of the podcast so they can go back and see. I want to do justice to Athena40, too. Give people – I know that we're really cramping your journey here of 11 years. But what is the status of Global Thinkers Forum today? Because I think it's worth these people knowing where you started to where you are today, because that's pretty astounding.

[00:13:45] EF: We launched it in 2012 in Jordan. And then every year, we were visiting and organizing conversations in different countries. We went to Turkey, with Greece, and the Emirates and Saudi Arabia. And then, of course, the base, which is the UK. And as of 2016, we brought the main conversation and the forum to the UK. And then we started launching other initiatives in the US. And it was the year when we announced our mentoring programs. Because to a great extent, what I have been doing over the years, and the knowledge, but also the confidence, which needed. Or the grit, as you mentioned before, which is sometimes necessary in order to make risky decisions. I credit my mentors for it.

I will include Marc Ventresca as my mentor, and also someone who, from Saïd Business School, as a professor, the whole structure and the strategy to launch Global Thinkers Forum as a financially viable organization and the vision that would have legs. It's been Marc Ventresca's courses on entrepreneurship and system building.

I was very keen to create an opportunity for women and youth around the world to have access to established visionary mentors. And in 2016, we launched Telemachus and Athena, our two mentoring programs, which are eight-month programs pairing between M&T from around the world. The program has launched in 75 countries. And a mentor who is there to support for eight months and set a specific target. It could be the launch of a venture. It could be the launch of a career. We prefer to work with emerging social impact leaders who are interested in supporting the sustainable development goals, because we always believed in accountability and, again, values-driven leadership.

Within those seven years, we have engaged 350 mentors and mentees. We have a pool of 113 mentors approximately, if I'm not mistaken. And I would like to hope that we have given the opportunity to women and youth from around the world to transform their lives through these mentoring programs.

Your question was around Athena40 and when that initiative arrived.

[00:16:17] RT: And why did it decide to show up in your life?

[00:16:20] EF: Yes, of course. And also, you asked me where Global Thinkers Forum is currently. Well, there was a pandemic, as we all know, in case someone hasn't noticed. We went through, all of us, a very rough time the last couple of years, longer than that. And it's still around, unfortunately. We're not rid of the virus yet. Not fully. Which means that some of the programs, the ones at least which were in-person had to be disrupted. The activities that Global Thinkers Forum has been hosting as of 2020 have been online.

Fortunately, the mentoring programs were online programs anyway. So, no disruption there. On the contrary, we actually agree with them, which was good. I see the programs as our flagship initiative. But meanwhile, Athena40, it was launched in 2018 as an initiative that would host on International Women's Month, International Women's Day every March the 8th every year. An initiative that connects women and men from around the world in conversations supporting female leadership. And that would be very specific. I envisaged it as a global conversation precisely because we have these networks of decision makers and influencers that have been growing over those years.

And I always was interested, and I am interested in two things, A, what is happening locally? Because every society and every culture has its own individual challenges and issues to address. But at the same time, how we are connected through challenges and obstacles as women? And talking about women now and female leadership, how we are connected regardless of the background? Regardless of the society that we have grown up in in terms of barriers that we raise ourselves either because of lack of self-esteem, or the imposter syndrome, or a lack of confidence? Because we did not grow up in environments that nurtured confidence and that belief in ourselves.

With Athena40, I wanted to try and connect women, give them access to new networks. Listen to their issues across different societies. Educate each other. And then find ways to say, "Okay, I live in the UK. You live in Pakistan, or in Jordan, or in the US. Hey, there are things in common that we need to find ways to battle together."

[00:19:02] RT: Okay. I want to come back to this. I think this a very important distinction you're making here. And before we do that, you have – As one of the goals of Athena40. And this one caught my eye for various reasons. One of them stems out of Harvard, by the way, is build a movement for compassionate, innovative, future-proof leadership. What does future-proof leadership mean?

[00:19:25] EF: Well, what a question, especially in these times, which are very unpredictable and precarious times. I think that it is about trying to create a defense for ourselves as individuals, as humans, but also our societies. These are the future crisis, and dangers, and risks which are looming. We cannot avoid crisis. But we can find ways to create some shield. And that shield has to be not only on an individual level, as in reinforcing ourselves and our own system from within to become more resilient. And therefore, more confident that we can handle crisis, which can be around the corner. And it can be a very serious one.

But also, how we can help our societies become stronger, and more resilient, and friendlier towards each other so that we can battle these challenges together in collaboration and in solidarity? This is what I mean by future-proof our societies. Does it make sense?

[00:20:42] RT: It does. And let's see, now I'm making a connection here to what you'd said just before this, which was – And clean me up if I get this even only approximately right here. But the two purposes of Athena, driven by two questions, what's happening local? But I'm interested in the second one, is how are we connected through the challenges that women have regardless of location, or culture, etc.? Is that an accurate reflection of what you said?

[00:21:08] EF: It is.

[00:21:09] RT: I'm wondering, based on what you just said, if it takes that work in order to build a more broad-based, future-proofed world, meaning we need more people who are doing this at least one to one to one to one and starting to weave together a network of people in this process of building this stamina and this capacity in order for the larger system to actually be able to start to take it on and feel the benefits of it.

[00:21:39] EF: Yes, yes. That is absolutely correct. It is about understanding and accepting that we are in this together. And that regardless of how each different country during that pandemic, which was an unprecedented and unforeseen, perhaps, situation, how effectively each government dealt with it, there were problems. There were issues. There was that fear of death. I mean, it was a very serious threat towards our lives, the lives of people we love. And we needed to know that there's someone out there, a friend, a partner, someone who could offer us the psychological support that we needed. But also, the practical support whenever that was possible. And I think if we take that and elevate it into a social level, our societies, how we care for each other, what is it that your society can bring to the table, what is it that my society can bring to the table, I mean, as a producer, as a service provider, as someone who brings a strong expertise in that area, with that area, we can join forces in ways which will make everyone's lives better and kind of mitigate risks and dangers in a better way. If I was to say that the biggest lesson out of this pandemic, what is it? I would say that, on a society level, it's been the importance and the imperative of collaboration.

[00:23:20] RT: I agree with you. I think something more here I want to try and pull out, if you don't mind, which is we have a lot of fragmentation. And that's not a pejorative word in this case. A lot of people attempting the same things scattered and not even knowing that others are doing the same things. And therefore, they can't leverage each other's knowledge and resources and synergies of multiplicity. Until somebody comes along, and that somebody, in two instances, has been you, with the two organizations you started. Where you have an idea, and I share my belief, which is a Harvard Kennedy School, adaptive leadership, Ron Heifetz perspective, which is leadership is always a choice in an activity, not a role, not a position in the organization. You would know that as well as anybody.

I mean, you've made decisions to raise your hand and take on these two initiatives with very little authority to make people do what you wanted them to do. That instantly puts you in the

mobilization of a movement work, which is a lot harder to do because you don't have any authority to tell people to go do this. You have to find ways to bring them into the conversation, to redirect some of their time and energy and resources away from what they're absorbed with, and give to this cause. And then if you get enough of them, you've got traction and movement, right?

So, you know something about how to take somebody like me, for example, and make a case that I should give up part of what I'm doing over here and give some of my precious time and energy to either Global Thinkers Forum, Athena40, whatever the cause might be, because of something. And that because of something is how you start to shift me. What do you know – Because these people out here who are behind us, they're trying to figure out how do you get people to do something when you don't have that authority? What secrets? What have you learned that they could benefit from? And some of them could probably be failures. We learn more from our failures than our successes what we're leading sometimes. What do you know about that that these people can benefit from based on 10 years of building two organizations and a pandemic and all the other crazy stuff that's been going on that you described? Long question. Sorry. Long lead to the question.

[00:25:31] EF: Great question. When you lack authority a way to make up for it is something that I believe, one, you should always keep in place, and protect, and maintain. And this is authenticity.

When people understand – And I believe in what is called a collective instinct, that what you bring to the table is something authentic. And then you give them a proposition that is generous and is one that listens to their needs and brings them something, offers them something, that will give value to their lives. Then you engage them.

What I mean by that? And what was the value in my case? Going back to how it all started, I did have those networks in place, networks of people. And I knew that I had to do something with these networks. Because everyone made themselves available. They were interested in becoming part of this vision.

And so, I went out and I said to people, "Would you like access to this market or that market to promote your own projects and your own ideas?" Mind you, I was very careful as to the curation of people. I did not allow people with political agendas. I was very careful that we would not be – Not ever accept any intervention by financial sponsors.

The editorial agenda would always be decided by the board of advisors, an independent board of advisors consisting of academics, and journalists, and, again, people from all different walks of life, and countries, and cultures, and ages. That independent board would agree on our editorial agenda. And we would make sure that we would bring value to the people that we were inviting to be part of the programs.

And so, this is what I think. That combination of authenticity. Generosity in opening up our networks and making connections or even creating ideas for people, for partnerships, which they did not think about before. But with technology and with globalization, which I know perhaps it has become or is a controversial term for some, with all the benefits and with all the downsides that it comes along, it brings along, it did shrink the world in the sense that people have access to unprecedented opportunities to do things together.

And if sometimes you take people by the hand and you say, "Listen, Rick, you should meet Elizabeth with Global Thinkers Forum. They have this mentoring program. And it can benefit you know young people. And it can benefit emerging leaders. Why don't you have a chat with her and see how perhaps you can partner and what you can do together?"

I was doing that very proactively as Global Thinkers Forum. And this is how I started by generating value for people. And then we had sponsors and we had people who decided to support financially, because someone may wonder, "Okay, how did you make it happen in terms of money? Who was putting the money for this organization?"

First of all, I kept it very lean from day one. I made sure that the expenses would be at the lowest possible budget, because it was an organic grassroots organization. I went out sponsors, potential sponsors, and then people who were interested in supporting the mentoring programs and the conversations. I was very clear that they would have no say on the editorial agenda.

That they would be there as supporters and partners. And this is how it all happened. And successfully, we grew the organization into what it is today.

[00:29:32] RT: For those listening, the word that Elizabeth has used about six times is networks. And so, I think it's very important to highlight and underscore that word, because I suspect you built your networks long before you ever had to call on them. And when you needed them, they were there because of the work you did to foster the relational component of the network for its own sake rather than looking for something. There's a value there that's sort of slightly invisible to people, I think. I think to some shine some light on the power of networks for making initiatives move forward.

I have some questions for you. How have you taken care of yourself as the leader of these two organizations in the last two years? I mean, like you said, it's been hard. But you have a lot of people looking at you. You have a lot of people with expectations you're going to have to make good on. You're in a pandemic. You have two organizations. You're the founder. How do you take care of yourself during that last two years?

[00:30:28] EF: As everyone, I guess, I found the need to look at the things that speak to my heart even more in relationships. Because one of the lessons that came out from this pandemic is that we can suddenly find ourselves isolated and distanced from people who are very important to us, emotionally, psychologically important to us.

Another thing which I felt as a need was to express myself. Find ways to express my emotions and the stories that I have been coming across, thanks to Global Thinkers Forum and Athena40. But also, thanks to my career as a journalist, to express these stories through new avenues.

And so, one of the things which I did during the pandemic was write a book. The book is called *From women to the World: Letters for a New Century*. I reached out to women who are change makers. They come from 19 different countries. There are 34 letters. I ask them to think of the woman that has played a major role in their lives. And it could be a mother, or a daughter, or it could be a friend, or a figure from history, but someone who had an influence on them.

And I invited them to write a letter where they would speak about their own journeys in life, but from a very profound perspective, as in revealing things that they would not normally share if they were interviewed or on a panel publicly. And I think it worked really well, because everyone felt that need to be very honest about their lives, and the traumas, and the more difficult situation in life that shape them and help them become the determined and resilient when they have become.

From Women to the World was a book that launched last year in the UK by Bloomsbury. And then, I decided about a year ago to do a master's on creative writing, which is now, for me, another avenue to express my thoughts, my creativity. I believe in creative activism. I believe that we need to find ways to reimagine our societies together.

I am a strong believer in the power of arts and visual arts. Because, again, going back to what engages people and people's attention, but also their heart, and their feelings. When you have people's hearts, then you get them to be passionate about things. And so, I think that creative activism is a way to motivate people and mobilize them for good, for positive reasons for our societies. And this is what I have been focusing my energy and attention, of course, in parallel to Global Thinkers Forum and Athena40.

[00:33:34] RT: I'm going to support the – I'm going to put a little plug-in for the book, because I read the book. And it's wonderful. And I described it to a couple friends of mine. It's a wonderful nightly meditation before going to sleep. To read a letter from one of the contributors to your book had a really comforting effect to go to sleep. It seemed like somewhere in the world something was working. And I could count on it because I knew who that person was and I felt connected. I thank you for collaborating on that and getting those people together and producing that, because there's a lot of value in that for us.

[00:34:04] EF: Thank you for your endorsement, Rick, and for reading it.

[00:34:08] RT: Some more questions here. Have you changed as a leader in the last few years either in these initiatives from where you started to now or the pandemic? Maybe induce some leadership attributes that you didn't know you had? Or you learned something about yourself as

a leader that you didn't know that's been useful? How are you different? We're all different. But in the context of leading, how are you might be different?

[00:34:28] EF: I think that both as leaders, but also as organizations, we need to keep adjusting all the time. We need to make sure that we are listening to what's happening out there and the weak signals and make sure that we are ready to change at any moment.

It's something, a mantra, let's say, that I have been following or implementing throughout my entire life as a professional. I've always made sure that I was flexible and I was agile. And making sure that I could adapt to situations which would not always be pleasant or not always what I expected or desired. Because adversity, again, is around the corner. It can take many forms. It could be financial adversity. Markets, as we know, fluctuate. They go up and down. That means that, today, you have sponsors. Tomorrow, you don't. It means that, today, you have programs which are growing. But then a epidemic happens, and you have to cancel events or initiatives which you were planning and had invested in. Things happen on a personal level. Again, what we learned from the pandemic is, suddenly, you are unwell.

I think it is always important to have a plan B or even a plan C in place. And as a crisis manager, is something that I always advocated for, I'm sure you, too, that a leader is always necessary. It is essential that they have two plans in place in case plan A doesn't work.

Now, the other thing, because we live in a world that is changing so fast. I think it is important to understand that knowledge gets outdated very quickly and new knowledge is being produced all the time. It might sound exhausting, because we're being bombarded with information and new things and trends constantly. Right? But it's very important to keep listening to what is happening in the markets. Keeping our antenna open. And making sure that if we need to change, if we need to adapt, we are going to do it. Because if we resist change, it's going to break us.

[00:36:54] RT: Is part about adaptation learned or nature inside human beings? What two or three recommendations do you have for people about what you can do when plan A is not working, plan B is now on the table. Maybe plan C is not far behind and you know adaptation is

coming. What do you know about those transitions from this to that? And how to just get through that in a healthy way?

[00:37:22] EF: I would say that I always tried to find, identify the second best or even third best opportunity out there. There are always opportunities out there. Even if what we currently plan is being our ideal strategy or our ideal target does not succeed as planned, then there are things and there are signals that guide us towards the direction of the second best, which we can turn into something very interesting, and very fruitful, and productive.

And I would call myself, Rick, as being a bit spiritual. And I like to keep my ears, and eyes, and my third eye open to the universe. And I'm very open to signs. And I try to listen to things, which perhaps are outside of my immediate control. But this way, I can adjust myself and the project or what I currently have my hands on and somehow find ways to adapt to the changing realities. I don't know if it makes sense.

[00:38:35] RT: I think it does. Therefore, for people who they don't know this right now, because you're telling me this before we start recording. You're not in London right now. You're in Cambridge, Massachusetts. And you're there to learn creative writing.

[00:38:49] EF: Correct.

[00:38:51] RT: You followed the muse. You followed your third eye. You're here and you're learning creative writing. Probably premature for me to invade this question on you, but how does the work of creative writing perhaps inform the future of the two organizations or where you're going do you think? As you sit here now, I know the classes aren't over, but what are you seeing now because you're in this creative writing space that opens your eyes to some possibilities you wouldn't see if you weren't on this journey of creative writing?

[00:39:19] EF: First of all, I think I have become a better listener, which I think is very important. We need to pay attention to what people have to say, their stories, their narratives. We learn a lot. And we discover ourselves. And I would say that this was a big lesson for me when I invited those women to write the letters. And so, I was listening and reading their stories more carefully again and again and again. And I discovered that this was self-exploratory journal.

And so, I realized that the narratives, which I had about the world, about social issues, about other women in different countries, although I have been working with people from different countries for many years, they were giving me new direction for my thinking. Again, because the world is a place that changes constantly, and perhaps that is the only constant change. How it informs programs in Global Thinkers Forum is it informs narratives and how we adjust what we offer through the programs and the needs that are out there in our societies.

Again, talking about the social, which I think is the most injured part, if you like, from this pandemic. But also, because the pandemic brought about a series of problems. Unfortunately, it has been followed by a war in Ukraine, which has now created, generated more issues. And they're not going to go away. I think that the political has become hyper political in ways that creates more rifts in our societies.

And so, by listening to these stories and by developing my own creative writing skills, I would like to write about collaboration and understanding and finding those threads that unite us as people, as women, as individuals, as citizens, as souls, and try to promote that idea of collaborative societies in a very confusing and dangerous world.

[00:41:40] RT: Just last night I read this quote by Kurt Vonnegut. I pass it on to the writer in Cambridge here. He said, "Oftentimes, I feel like an armless, legless man with a crayon in my mouth."

[00:41:50] EF: Oh my gosh. Yes.

[00:41:54] RT: I take it, if Vonnegut felt that way, he gives lots of breathing space for the rest of us.

[00:42:00] EF: Absolutely.

[00:42:01] RT: All right. We're kind of coming down to it here. What should I ask you that I didn't know enough to ask?

[00:42:09] EF: I guess about journalism and networks. Because one of the people who inspired me and actually showed me the way to developing those networks of people and how they could, and we, can generate value for each other was Ted Turner, the founder and creator of CNN and CNN International. And not only. Of course, he's a business mogul. He's a philanthropist. And I was very lucky to have the opportunity to work with him when I was in the beginning of my career and journey as a journalist.

And Ted had created a gathering of about 300 journalists from all around the world as part of CNN's world report program. And so, this is how I initially found myself working with CNN. And so, he was bringing people who were experts and decision makers and media people from Egypt, and Greece, and, Brazil, and Argentina, and China, everyone together in Atlanta.

I still remember, he would always wear this tie that had all the flags of the world. And he would bring us together and engage us in these conversations and engage us with each other in a very visionary way. And so, it is thanks to those networks that my thinking and my mind opened up. I established some great friendships through these gatherings in Atlanta. And Ted also was among the first philanthropists who went on to give very large amounts of money to actually do good for our world.

If I'm not mistaken, in 1988, he donated \$1 billion dollars to UN to launch the UN Foundation. This is something that perhaps you didn't know about. And talking about networks, and vision, and bringing people together, this is what inspired.

[00:44:14] RT: Ah, very nice. Very nice. I'll give you a chance to advice. We talked a little bit about the younger generations of followers in the leadership world, and you're a little head on the trail. What advice do you have somebody? I have a 28-year-old daughter who lives in Brooklyn, New York. What advice, people of that sort of cohort age, about life, or what's ahead, or leading? Anything that you can provide as a wisdom keeper? An elder in the tribe, if you will, to those people? You've earned the right.

[00:44:40] EF: Thank you for that, though. That's privileged. I would say that trying to find a mentor. One of the most valuable things in my life has been receiving the guidance and mentorship of people who have been values-driven leaders, who have done great things in their

lives. And when I say great things, I do not necessarily refer to financial success or business success.

One of my mentors was an art collector. And what I learned from him was that dedication, and discipline, and commitment to promote culture, and art, and artists, and history. And so, I think that finding a mentor in life, regardless of what age you're at or what stage in life you're at, is one of the best things that one can do.

[00:45:33] RT: All right. Last question. We're sort of moving out of the pandemic. What's ahead for you?

[00:45:40] EF: Are we?

[00:45:40] RT: Yeah, well, let's hope so.

[00:45:43] EF: Hopefully.

[00:45:44] RT: What's ahead for Elizabeth as you sit here right now in Cambridge when you look out three, four, five years? What do you want to do?

[00:45:51] EF: Well, that idea of creative activism, I think it's very much about the future of our societies and how we can mobilize people to do good by doing well. It is also about engaging people's imagination. And we're going to need a lot of imaginative thinking in order to reframe our structures, as in political and social structures, but also our human relationships and how we regard these and how we prioritize the human, which I think is very important.

This is where I see my direction moving towards. I see books and writing being an important part. I would like to write a theater play that will be inspired by the stories of some of the women that I have met and they are part of my book. Again, about raising awareness around social issues and how to engage people to invite their support and engage their support. Because we are going to need all hands if we are to change our societies to the better.

[00:47:07] RT: Elizabeth Filippouli, thank you for coming here. It's so good to see you in-person after 11 years. It's been a joy to have this conversation.

[00:47:15] EF: Thank you, Rick.

[00:47:17] RT: Thank you very much.

[OUTRO]

[00:47:20] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders with Rick Torseth. Please take this moment and hit subscribe to follow more leadership swamp conversations.

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