

EPISODE 27

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:06] 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 you are at 10,000 Swamp Leaders, the podcast where we talk with people who've made a decision to lead in the world and the choices they've made about dealing with very difficult challenges in the world that come as a consequence sometimes of making the choice to lead.

Today it's a cool opportunity for me because I have somebody that I've known for a while here, Lea Ranalder. Leah, we met a few years ago at a different organization, Ren 21 in Paris, and I've been following your career and your work for that moment on. You're in a different place now. You're a Programme Manager Officer for Human Settlements, UN-Habitat. You're going to need to explain that to us as to what that is. But I know you're quite keen and interested in cities. And you are working in one of the craziest biggest cities in the world, Cairo, Egypt. Welcome to 10,000 Swamp Leaders. How are you?

[00:01:18] LR: Thank you very much, Rick, for having me. Pleasure to be here.

[00:01:21] RT: Before we get into any of the details of your work, share with people what you want them to know about who you are? What you do? Maybe a little bit about why you've chosen this line of work. Because you've been at it a while and you've got a lot of passion for it. What do you think people need to know about you to get them oriented for our conversation?

[00:01:38] LR: Sure. I mean, there are many things probably to know about me. But from a professional perspective, I'm an environmental scientist, who's always had a big passion for energy. A topic, by the way, that I just stumbled across. It was a course in university that was the

last leftover course to take because I was too late to sign up for any other topic. And I got absolutely hooked on the topic of renewable energy and the importance of renewable energy, not only for the energy transition's sake, but also for an opportunity for better socioeconomic development, job creation, air pollution, and so on.

I've been a renewable energy enthusiast now for the longest time, but not as an engineer. I'm not the person that you would see here constructing windmills, but more from a policy perspective and what it means for people. And so, I've worked for a while now on renewable energy policy, but then specialized on cities, and renewable energy in cities.

And for me, that was an opportunity to bring together two things that I'm really passionate about; renewable energy on the one hand, but then also people, communities, and the local level, and the collaboration at the local level.

And if you look at cities, I think everybody can – a city is a very tangible thing for most people. Most of us live in a city. Many of us might have seen our mayor or at least somebody working in a city government. Several people are involved in NGOs, in local organizations. The city is something that's very close to all of our hearts.

Yet if we look at what they do when it comes to climate action and renewable energy involvement, I mean, they're starting to be stakeholders on the scene but not to the extent that would be necessary. Cities account for almost three quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions and a similar share of energy demand, yet they don't really have a seat at the table when it comes to these discussions, nor at climate negotiations, or the cops, neither at when it comes to renewable energy choices and action.

For me, it was really – this is a very difficult, and crowded and – Yeah, space. But also, that makes it even more interesting to bring to be in that space and see what can cities do? How can cities be part of that global conversation when it comes to the energy transition, but then also tackling climate change as a whole? This is what has brought me then also in the end to UN-Habitat and here to this crazy, and loud, and polluted city, and beautiful city that Cairo is. And a very exciting place to be working here with UN-Habitat specifically on the cop27 preparations, which will be taking place in less than 30 days.

[00:04:52] RT: Wow! Give people some perspective, if you will. Because there will be some people for whom they're finding out for the first time that the UN is somehow involved in this initiative. They may have a more conventional understanding of what the UN work is. What is you representing the United Nations attempting to do and facilitate both in cop and beyond that?

[00:05:13] LR: I mean, I think the UN has always been seen as a convener and using its convening power and working closely with national governments. And that's what we're doing here. I'm here in Cairo working really closely with the cop27 presidency. What does that mean? And I think this is where it's incredibly exciting to be in Cairo right now, as the COP27 presidency has said, "We want to work on a topic of sustainable cities." That's a big, big shift in a discussion.

As I said before in the past, local governments have been fighting for their seat at the table. And now there's a cup presidency that says we don't only want to have you as part of this conversation, but we want to launch an initiative really speaking about sustainable cities. And that's an initiative that has been put together in collaboration with UN-habitat and also facilitated by ICLEI, which is a local government network.

Really, it's an opportunity to work across all of these different things, all of the urban fabric working on making our water supply more sustainable. Speaking about sanitation at the local level. How to build our houses more sustainable and more low carbon? Speaking about urban energy and more energy access. Higher share of renewables in cities. Recycling and urban waste and consumption in general. And using that as an opportunity to really think about how can we create cities that are better than our cities are today? How can we create cities that are more resilient to climate change?

We've seen the heat waves. For everybody who's lived in this city, the heat waves have been even hotter. I used to live in Paris, sixth floor, pretty much under the roof. In doing a heat wave, I mean, there was no way you could be in an apartment anymore. It just became not feasible anymore.

This link of climate action, climate adaptation, but also thinking about how cities can be key drivers of mitigating climate change is a very exciting space to be in. And also, as I think, a space that excites people, because they can see the changes also first hand.

Maybe just to say, we've seen some really cool stuff happening in cities. For example, some cities saying, "Okay, we're taking now away the space for parking, and rather turning it into a pedestrian street with trees." What is the effect? It's a space for community. It's shaded. It's safer, because kids can play in the streets and have a space to play in the streets. And also, it's green. It combats air pollution. You have fewer cars. You have more trees. And these immediate changes that can happen at the city level, also sometimes rather quickly, is something that for people in the climate space, if we speak about the cops, they sometimes can be so distant. And what national governments do, it sometimes feels like how does that even impact me directly as a human being? Whereas if I see these direct changes in my city, in my neighborhood, in my street, climate action becomes much more relevant for me, my family, my friends, my community.

[00:08:42] RT: You said something a few minutes ago that was all surprising to me. And I think, for me, mostly present, because I probably never thought of it. But the issue of cities, big giant Metropolitan places, like the one you're in, or New York, or you name it, these big cities, don't have a seat at the table. Now I'm just trying to comprehend how urban setting with these giant populations have no seat at the table. Define for people what the table is and who does have a seat and then maybe a little bit about why the cities are not at that table.

[00:09:19] LR: I mean, there are different tables, maybe to say that up front. Now if we speak about climate, there's of course the cop tables. And that has always been seen as a negotiation between national governments. You have observers. You have civil society there. We have cities there, but they haven't been taken often into account when it comes to these negotiations. And they haven't been offered a seat at that negotiation table. That's the one table.

But then of course, we're speaking about climate plan in more general terms. Just to say an anecdote, I spoke with a mayor, and I won't disclose. I don't want to speak badly about anybody. But I spoke with the mayor, and the city is responsible for approximately two-thirds of the national CO2 emissions. And she said, "Look, our government has just passed the plan for Net

Zero. Do you think anybody called us? We're responsible for two-thirds of the emissions. They're not going to get there without us. How will this happen if we cannot have a constructive conversation between national governments and local governments on collaboration on climate action? How can climate action happen if I, as a city government, cannot even finance local climate action? If I can't even finance anything without speaking directly with a national with my national government counterparts, I don't have access to national financing mechanisms. I don't have access to markets.

Because as a city, I don't have the right to have access to such markets. In many places in the world, cities have almost no tax base to collect money. How can they take these important decisions that need to be taken also at the local level? And how can they make sure they can collaborate with the national governments? That's always the million-dollar question, and what is referred to as this multi-level climate action and the importance of multi-level and governance.

And understanding that climate change is not something – it doesn't stop at borders. Climate change is not just because there's one country – there's not only one country affected by it. It's everybody on this world is affected by it. And that also means that everybody has an opportunity and must contribute to tackling it. And that's not only national governments. They have a very, very important role in setting the frameworks and allowing other stakeholders to come in. But it's also local governments. It's businesses. It's civil society. All of them must be in this together. And that's why collaboration on climate action is so important. It's absolutely key. That's what will get us there.

[00:12:17] RT: Okay. Let's talk about collaboration then. I suspect that, officially and unofficially, part of your remit is to find ways to bring different stakeholders and different parties together in a collaborative conversation to see if you can make some progress on some of these challenges. Is that a fair guess?

[00:12:37] LR: Absolutely.

[00:12:38] RT: Talk about the challenges that you're experiencing with collaboration. And I suspect you've been in this collaborative conversation in prior endeavors and different entities that you've been part of. But what do you know about collaboration? What are the challenges of

it? What have you learned about maybe some of your own secrets about how you can begin to foster collaborative conversations?

[00:13:00] LR: That's an excellent question, Rick. And I think collaboration – we think about collaboration, when we speak about climate action at the very, very big level. Global collaboration. That's the one part. But then I would say when it comes to climate collaboration and collaboration in general, we need to first start small and think about how do we even collaborate with our teams? With our colleagues? With our communities?

And here, understanding that we all have differences and different things that we can put on the table, and different perspectives, and learnings that are – and that constructive criticism brings us further. That learning from each other brings us further. And that often, listening is the best medicine for any conflict or preventing any conflict. And that's something that I think we speak about the importance of multicultural and collaboration and the importance of being able to understand different culture contacts.

I mean, if we speak about climate change, this is so important. And maybe just to say an anecdote, that's back when I was a student, and we were sitting there. I did an international master's program. And we're sitting there. Mainly Europeans finding what we thought was the amazing and best solution for attacking climate change.

And then one of my colleagues from Ghana said, "Oh, this is very cute, you guys. This might work in Europe. But that's never going to work in Ghana." I mean, let's look the reality in the eyes. We can't only design solutions that are one-size-fits-all and that might work in one specific context but not in another one. We have to be realistic that Africa accounts, I believe, for two percent of the global emissions. But we are trying to put solutions from other places of the world into a context that might not even meet the needs of people on the ground. There's a need for clean water, for energy access, for many, many other things, for development in general. And how can we make sure we can enable the climate agenda to also be a development agenda at the same time?

This is something that shouldn't be forgotten. It needs to be tackled in conjunction. That's, of course, the one type of collaboration. And then when it comes to global collaboration, in these

times, in these times of crisis, I think speaking about global collaboration sometimes is quite hard and also hard, to be honest. And if I look at global collaboration around the climate conferences, on a bad day, it makes me really sad when we have cops after cops, we have conferences and events and we're signing MLUs left and right between national governments, yet missions are higher than ever.

This can be a really difficult space. And just as a side note, yesterday was mental health day. And I just learned about that there's a big movement for people in the climate space, for climate mental health, because it can be exhausting. And to see destruction, to see heat waves, tornadoes, floods, and to see that people are losing their lives. And it feels like we're not doing anything. That frustration is there. And I think it also needs to be acknowledged and spoken about.

Yet, at the same time, I'm hopeful that we do see a wave of more collaboration. And that we are seeing a rising importance of the importance of collaboration in the climate space. That we are starting to realize when it comes to renewable energy in specific, that renewables are actually a cheaper than fossil fuels. That we're starting to realize that climate change doesn't end at borders, but it's cross-cutting, it's global. Pollution of rivers doesn't stop just in one country just because there's a border. That, also, solutions need – it's a messy problem, a wicked problem, which needs, of course, also – It's not an easy solution. But the solution can only be collaboration. That's the only way out of such a wicked problem.

We can't criticize the climate conferences for what they are. I mean, I think there's a movement also criticizing them. But I still believe they're the best forum that we have to bring everybody together and also bring together a large community working on many different topics.

[00:17:44] RT: This idea of convening. Cop is a convening mechanism. It's a holding space. It's a container. People who travel to get there understand that. And you're meeting them when they arrive, you and obviously a lot of other people who put a lot of thought into what we're going to do when we gather, when we convene, when we're in that container.

And I know you're a veteran of several cops. How do you show up differently given just what you said that you've been down this road before? There's a lot of talk? A lot of aspiration and

then not much happens? I'm curious, A, how does Leah sustain herself? How do you take an angle into this conversation that may lead to a different outcome based on your wisdom and experience of how it tends to go? What's your plan? Because this is only – As you say, what? 30 days away? How do you plan to take your wisdom, and your knowledge, and your experience from prior cops and bring it here and see if you can get to a different place?

[00:18:46] LR: For me, this year is going to be very different. Because if everything goes well, we will have a ministerial meeting on urbanization and climate change, which would be the first ever to happen. And if that gets the participation of not only national government representatives of ministers, but also local government representatives, for me, personally, and for UN-Habitat as a whole, and for the entire city community, city and climate community, that would be a major breakthrough. That would mean that cities and local climate action indeed has more and more space at the table and is being recognized more broadly as having a space at the table.

Okay, space at the table is one place. But there's always a lot of stuff that needs to happen afterwards to make sure that you're not only sitting at the table, but actually also doing things, which is then of course the big discussion. But we're hoping that with this ministerial meeting, it's a first spark that can then be carried forward also. Facilitating more finance to the local level and helping to get the climate action that is needed happening at the local ground. That would be, for me personally, extremely exciting, and also give hope that there's a change possible, and that we can work on these issues.

A part, of course, that there's these discussions going on how can we move towards more implementation? How can we put a bigger focus also in Africa? I mean, this is an African cop. African voices will be there, loud, and strong, and clear. I do hope that this will be also heard and heard around the world, and will also lead to more climate action, and more support, and more, as I mentioned before, this link between having the climate agenda also go hand in hand with the development agenda.

[00:20:49] RT: I'm thinking you and I have had conversations in the last few years that have some aspect of what I'm going to say here, which is this distinction between being in an organization with a position of authority and leading. Because they're not always the same thing. Meaning that we've all had experiences in our organizational positioning to see a need for

some kind of leadership from above and it doesn't show up. And I'm sure this has been your case in your career. There have been times and places where you've made a decision to raise your hand and lead on something where you didn't necessarily have as much authority as you wish you had to back up your decision to lead. But you went ahead anyway.

In that context of choosing to lead and making decisions about how you take on, as you said, a wicked problem, like the ones you're facing now, one of those basic acts that comes with that choice is how do you mobilize a group of people who are inert, at least for the moment, and move them in a direction that you're seeking to make progress on a particular challenge?

And since you've been in this world and dealing with this kind of stuff, the politics of it, the power of it, the bureaucracy of it, the magnitude of the wickedness of the problem, I mean, it's hard stuff. Every day you get up and you make another – I think, make a renewed choice to say, "I'm going in again. I'm going to go do something here."

I'm interested, for people who are listening, about you, the person who's choosing to lead in this really difficult environment. One, how do you take care of yourself? How do you keep yourself renewed so you have what it takes to be in the conversation? And so, let's start there. There are a few other questions about how you do what you do from the leadership and authority standpoint that I think is important for us to hear about because that's part of what this conversation is about. You've chosen the hardest – one of the hardest roads in the world to work on, climate change. And you've been at it for a while. You're a battle-hardened leader. How do you take care of yourself?

[00:22:54] LR: Oh, Rick, that's a difficult question. Because they think for everybody who's in the climate space, I mean, you're not in the climate space to earn the big bucks, right? I mean, you're in the climate space because you're passionate about the topic. And that passion, of course, always comes with also you feel like there's more you can do and there's always more. And if you just had one more call, and if you write another 10 emails, and if you set up more collaboration opportunities, this will be even better, and this will bring the needle to swing.

The question of how to take care of yourself is of course a very important one. I mean, maybe, first of all, to say it's the people. I think for me, being in this space and this community, it's the

people. Otherwise, the people are half the fun, or probably more than half the fun. You are asked before how you sustain yourself at the climate conferences. It's the people. It's the connections you've made over the years. It's a big family gathering. People in the climate space tend to understand that collaboration is key. And that of course also comes with a specific mindset of being inclusive, and being open, and being also open for constructive criticism, and being genuinely interested in collaborating. Yeah, and then doing stuff together and making that happen. That's the one part, the people.

The second part for me is, of course, some private engagement. I've gotten involved in, or co-founded, an NGO working on rural health and seeing how this work can change people's life on a daily basis is an inspiration that fuels me for everything else I do.

[00:24:40] RT: Your own work wasn't enough. You had to go start an NGO, right?

[00:24:46] LR: Well – But you see the tangible change, Rick. You see exactly sometimes what you don't see at the climate space where things sometimes tend to move so slowly. In my NGO work, it works on health, and you're supporting clinics in Uganda. And you see a change there. And it's supporting doctors and nurses there literally save people's lives. That gives me lots of – yeah, lots of hope, and good spirit, and energy.

And I think then, of course, I would say the usual stuff, which is I'm trying to sleep well, and eat well, and do sports. That sounds very idealistic. And is not often working out the way I envision it. And I think many people working in that community probably know what I mean. That's not to discourage. More people to join that community. Because I actually fundamentally believe that, in the future, almost everything that we will do in one way or the other will have to have a climate angle to it if we are really serious about turning the ship around and getting action happening.

[00:26:01] RT: Right. I was going to ask you a different question, but a piece you just said here at the end provokes. You've been in this conversation for a good long time now. Are we really serious about dealing with this?

[00:26:14] LR: Ask me on a good or a bad day. That's I think always the question. I think are we serious about this? I would hope to be able to say yes. But emissions are rising. Probably the answer is we should be serious about this. And we should be more serious about this. But we cannot only set targets and then not stick to them. Because that's what we see is happening. We see – by the way, not only at the national level. This is happening everywhere. We're seeing national governments, also local governments, businesses setting, first of all, these flashy nice targets. Have a beautiful ceremony cutting a ribbon. And then the action that's following up afterwards is not enough.

Or we look at what these targets actually mean and then we see that it's only for a tiny, tiny bit of their own – For business, it would only be a tiny bit of their own operations. Or for city government, it's, "Okay, we're going to renewable electricity." But it's hardly enough to get us over to really make sure we don't go over every single tipping point that our ecosystem can hold up with. Because in the end, I mean, if you take a step back, I mean, will our earth survive? Absolutely. Will we be part of it? That's up to us.

And I think the Earth doesn't care about our targets. It cares about our action. And I think sometimes we need to really put that in front of our eyes, that if we – it's up to us. It is really up to us. And I believe that this generation right now, we are the last ones who can really tackle climate change before it's too late. And that's a big responsibility, but one we need to take on.

[00:28:00] RT: Okay. Hang on here. Let's go there. What defines the last generation? Who is that group of people? Because we've gotten theory. Multiple generations are roaming the planet right now. Who are we talking about?

[00:28:11] LR: Everybody.

[00:28:12] RT: So, generational time. Meaning, if you're alive now, you're part of the generation, that is the last generation that has a shot at making a difference here.

[00:28:20] LR: It shouldn't only be up to the people who are now, let's say, turning 18 and slowly entering the workforce. This is a multi-generational issue. And if we speak about generational justice – and this is not to point fingers. But this is an interesting conversation I'm

having with my parents. Don't exactly quote me on the numbers here. But I believe between the 60s and today. Where my parents' generation have been alive, I believe 40% or 50% of our global carbon budget has been used. This coincides with a period of wealth creation in many European, and North American, and other countries. It coincides with a much better living standard, which is fantastic. It's not to say that people shouldn't live comfortably. But at the same time, that also means that's a reality, that a large chunk of the carbon budget has been eaten up.

That means for – what does that mean for the kids being born today? Or the teenagers? They have a municipal carbon budget left over if we're serious about tackling climate change. We need to find a way to make sure that we can live a good life while also live a low carbon life.

And for many people, that seems to be a clash. For me, it isn't. Because I actually believe that a low carbon life can be a really, really good life. because we've identified success and what we need. And we've conflated it with our needs and our wants with what is necessary.

Let me take you an example. I believe that, if the numbers are correct, in Germany, people spend more money on their car annually than on their kids. They spend on average one monthly salary per year on their cars. That is a lot of hours you need to work. If we have a society, if we have a good public transport system, if you live in a city that's well connected, where you can bike, where you can walk, where you can – if you need a car, you rent one. That would mean one monthly salary you don't need. You have more time. And you probably lead a more active and healthier life as well in parallel.

[00:30:46] RT: I told you before we started this recording, we might end up going some places that we didn't plan on. This is one of those moments in time. This is good.

Help people then. Give some attributes of a low carbon life. You've given a couple right there. If you don't have a car, some things like that. When you say not having – or having a low carbon life, what would be some elements in a person's life that would tell you, "Yep, they're on their way to a low carbon life." Specifically, what would it look like?

[00:31:14] LR: Not having a car. I think that's one start. And again, this is not to say that some people need cars. If you have a profession, you need a car. You need a car. I mean, this is not to say none of these are absolute categories.

[00:31:28] RT: Okay. We're a la carting it here. You can pick –

[00:31:30] LR: Exactly. And you know, I'm going right at it. And I know, I'm glad we're surfing with the conversation. Because I realize I've also been going rogue and collecting in a million thoughts, going in different directions. Okay, no car. Then square meter per person.

[00:31:47] RT: How much? What's a good number for square meter per person?

[00:31:50] LR: I mean, I think it's not about what is a good number per person. But I think, on average – I mean, I know the German numbers. But I believe on average, in Germany, every person has – it was a ridiculous number. At least 50 to 60 square meters per person. That means a really big apartment for a family of four. And of course, that's largely driven by really big houses somewhere.

And it's not to say that there shouldn't be big houses. Some people really need these big houses. But we see new buildings being built, because we have a thinking of this is my house, and I'm going to stay in it forever. I looked at my own family. In that street where my grandma used to live, there were big houses, and there was one person per house. And these are houses – I meaning, they're speaking about 400 square meters or whatever. Something in that range. That's crazy. Also, that needs to be cleaned and maintained.

That's the one part. More using public transport. Reducing the size of apartments or houses. Having cool housing opportunities and sharing space. And I would say in general, of course, reducing your own waste and reducing your own consumption. We live in a very consumerist society. Do we really need all of that? Is buying all that stuff makes us happy? Well, does it only make us happy for five minutes? Rethinking about what makes us happy. And if not, experiences make us more happy than stuff. I think that's the other part.

Food. I mean, I read the other day that the EU throws away more food than it imports. That is crazy. We're speaking about food insecurity currently globally. We're speaking about there are people starving, and the EU throws away more food than it actually imports. It's billions of tons. Because some of that is due to household waste. Many of that, much of that, is also due to supermarket waste. But lots of that is also being thrown away directly at farms, because it doesn't need a certain standard. And because it's an ugly carrot that would never be sold. I think it's also about that aspect. Lowering consumption and waste.

Then also, how we eat. I mean, it's always a very sticky point in the climate debate. And I feel like it's being politicized as everybody needs to be vegan. Veganism is the way to go forward. Yes, a vegan diet is a lot more low carb than the meat eating diet. But I think it's not about saying you can never eat meat. It's more about how can we reduce our meat consumption? Can we maybe go from eating meat twice a day every single day of the week? To eating meat only a couple times a week? And making sure that it's good quality meat.

And if we buy meat, that we don't throw it away on top of that. Because that's just ridiculous. Having an animal lose its life for you to eat a steak, for that steak then to rot in your fridge. Making eating meat a special occasion. And the same goes for other dairy products. That's just a couple things. I think there's a lot more that can be discussed. And for people listening to the podcast might say, "You forgot this. And you forgot that." That's very true. But just off the top of my head.

Maybe as a last thing. I mean, we're speaking right now. Winter is coming. Heating crisis. How about we put on one more sweatshirt and another pair of socks before we turn on the heater? I mean, from a personal experience, I've seen people sitting in their t-shirts and shorts in winter in their own apartment. Or even worse, I've seen some roommates saying, "Oh, but it's so hot now. I'm in this room. Let me open the window while the heater is on."

I mean, let's use a little bit of common sense and see – I know the heating topic is a very, very touchy one because there's millions of people that will have a very tough winter and cannot afford to keep the heat on. But we can help them all if everybody puts on an extra jumper and thinks about how to really save heat, and use smart heating, and thinking smartly about how to heat. And that's not the only thing that's going to solve the heating crisis. I don't want to be

quoted saying, "Yeah, we'll just put on a jumper, and it's going to solve everything." That's not the point. But thinking about what can I as a consumer do to make sure that I reduce my heating consumption I think is a very valid question.

And I think if we all take a strong look into the mirror, I think we all might have realized, "Hmm, there were times where I forgot to turn off the heat when I left the house." Or, "Hmm, there were times when I was actually just in one room, but I heat the entire house. Oops! Not ideal." I think we can all do some work on, yeah, reducing our heat consumption.

[00:36:49] RT: I'm going to shift the focus here from your work to leading in the time we have left. Because you've been, I think, a pretty respected voice in your work. And that's the voice of leading, and mobilizing, and helping people move along in some difficult deals. First of all, for you, what does leading mean to you?

[00:37:12] LR: Leading means, to me, taking difficult decisions. And leading means, for me – by the way, as you said beforehand, you don't need to have authority in order to lead. For me, leading means opening up your mouth when everybody stays silent. That is, by the way, applicable to every topic. It means if you see a stranger on a bus getting harassed, you open your mouth. It means, in a meeting, when everybody stays silent, you are the one raising your hand and speaking out what probably everybody in the room thinks. It means constructive criticism. It means collaboration. And that doesn't need to be somebody who has authority in terms of having a fancy title.

I've always lived by the mantra, in many ways, don't always ask for permission. Ask for forgiveness later on. And it has worked to a certain extent. I mean, I think you don't always need to have everything cleared and green lighted before you do it. But if you sometimes take a risk and say, "Okay, I'm going to take a leap of faith here. I'm just going to do it. And I hope it's going to work out." Not always saying it's always bulletproof, but it can be – I think we need more people who will take a jump forward and risk things as well. That's, for me, leadership.

[00:38:37] RT: What surprised you about yourself in this work? When you look back on a younger version of yourself and who you are today, what did you learn about yourself that was a surprise?

[00:38:48] LR: I think it's exactly that. Several things. One thing is we often misunderstand expertise. That you don't need to be an expert on a topic in order to ask a question. Or you don't need to be an expert on every single thing in order to make a contribution. Sometimes it's also valid to ask questions. And I've often – a younger self was ashamed to ask questions, because I was afraid I was going to sound stupid. And now I've realized that only if you ask questions, and if you question the status quo, you can learn. You can also inspire other people to ask questions. And that is an opportunity to change the conversation.

I think that's the one thing, if I look now back at me you know 15 years ago, is I'm now a lot more comfortable. With also acknowledging, "I don't know this. I'm going to ask a question." And I've seen it, as I said, more times than not. That this has changed the conversation. That's the one thing.

And the other thing is, as well, if you always give – it's not a surprise, but more a learning that I've taken, is if you always give more than you take, you get ahead, and you build a community, and you can inspire people. And if people see that you're doing something with passion and that you are in this topic because it's a passionate topic, they're more likely to join you and follow you. And showcasing that it's not only about the topic, but the people, and the community that you build around a topic has really been, yeah, something that I've learned over the years. As I mentioned before, the climate community is a great community to be in. Very collaborative. And using that as an opportunity and learning from that is great.

[00:40:41] RT: Right. I'm also a card-carrying member of the school of thought that says, "As a leader, we learn more from our failures than our successes." And given that we've got people behind us who are listening to this and trying to develop some skill and some capacity to lead, they learn from their peers and their elders, of which you qualify.

What's one or two things you've learned the hard way about leading because it didn't go so well for you? And what counsel do you have for people with regard to that?

[00:41:08] LR: Did you just call me old?

[00:41:12] RT: I didn't use that word. I euphemistically referred to it that way. But I didn't use that word.

[00:41:21] LR: I think my biggest failure has been not to ask for help. It has really been thinking that I can do everything. And that asking for help is a sign of weakness. And I really want to encourage everybody to ask for help when you need it. Because, I mean, not only does it save you from a potential burnout, but also there's always something that's not as important as you think it is. There's always something where you can say, "Okay. Well, if that is not going to happen, it's really not going to change the world." That's been my biggest failure.

Whenever I look back and I see, "Okay, well, I didn't do well there." It's because I didn't open my mouth and ask for help. And I paid a big personal price in the process.

[00:42:07] RT: Right. Last question for you. When you look ahead, what's the future for you?

[00:42:11] LR: Oh, Rick, that's a difficult question. Yesterday, I wrote down some bullet points to myself. Where do I want to be in 10 years?

[00:42:19] RT: Oh, okay. You're ready for this question then.

[00:42:22] LR: I'm not. Because I always see myself torn. On the one hand, "Okay, do I do I want to have a leadership position within the UN? Could I imagine becoming a mayor?" And then there's a part of me saying, "You know, maybe I'll just buy a house in the middle of nowhere and have a little farm with a donkey and chickens and build a community gardening." By the way, I don't have a green thumb. I kill a lot of plants. I'm not sure if that's really a good career path for me.

But I think what I've come to realize in that, the common threads for me is it doesn't matter which position I will be in. Again, it goes back to authority versus leadership. For me, I want to inspire people. And I want to inspire change. And I want to inspire change at the policy level, at the national policy level, at the local policy level. And there's many different ways doing this. It's speaking about the topic. Writing about the topic. Building a community around the topic. Implementing projects. And nudging the policy agenda forward. But ultimately, there's many

different ways to get there. That's where I see myself. And that's the road ahead for me has really, yeah, inspired change. And hoping for the best.

[00:43:43] RT: Well, I'm going to say that the aspect of you from the moment I've met you to this moment and the time in between is just what you said a little bit ago, using your voice. I've always found you quite willing not only to speak up, which I agree is a really important attribute. But oftentimes, people who speak up can't communicate very well what they're trying to say. And it puts people off rather than brings them along.

And I have watched and experienced you knowing how to use your voice so that people, A, stop, slow down and listen, and then move in a direction that could be useful for the cause. There's something about your capacity to mobilize people with your voice and be inclusive, or collaborative, a word you've used several times in our conversation today, that I think is something for all of us to benefit from. I just appreciate that about you is what I'm saying.

[00:44:36] LR: Thanks, Rick. I'm glad listeners cannot see me blushing now.

[00:44:42] RT: All right, Lea. Thank you for coming into the swamp and giving us your thoughts and ideas about the world, about climate change, about cities, collaboration. It's just been a pleasure to have you here. I really appreciate it. Thank you.

[00:44:56] LR: Thank you, Rick, for having me. Pleasure to having this conversation and having fun while doing it.

[00:45:01] RT: Go figure.

[OUTRO]

[00:45:05] 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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