EPISODE 33

[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 this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders, a podcast where we have guests on who have made a decision to raise a hand and use themselves to lead against really hard and difficult challenges in the world. Today, I had the pleasure of talking with a colleague, Larisa. I'm going to say a colleague, because we're involved in this program for the last couple of years together. Larisa Halilovic, who is coming to us today from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Larisa, welcome to The Swamp, as I call it.

[00:00:51] LH: Hi, Rick. Lovely to see you.

[00:00:54] RT: Let me give people a little bit of your background, and then I'm going to give you a chance to get in and say what you want to say about what you're up to. You and I met in a program that we're doing through the Hague Academy. In that particular program, you've had a position in the last few years to directly speak to core values with the people who are in the program. We should say it's a leadership program. I think that's relevant, because you bring a lot of experience to this conversation. I got it that you have been affiliated with the British Council for over 20 years. I'm trying to understand how a woman in Bosnia has been working with the British Council for 20 years. But here's what they say they're up to, "We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide." That's probably the link.

But you have a lot of experience working with teams and being a team leader. I will say to everybody, we'll put links in this podcast note sheet, but you have two cool TEDx presentations, one on core values and one on emotional intelligence. I know if people Google search you,

they're going to find you in a lot of other places. So you're up to a lot of stuff that I think is relevant to the people who listen to this. Welcome to the show. Let's start with, what is it that you want people to know about you that you think helps them get a starting point to what you're up to?

[00:02:14] LH: Thank you so much, Rick. Well, the first thing I'd like everyone listening to know is that you can be a leader, wherever you are, whatever background, whatever color, shape format, whatever starting point you have. You can be a leader yourself if this is something that you feel within you, and also something that you really want. That's definitely the biggest message for everyone listening.

[00:02:41] RT: Okay. Let's start right there, because you and I are at the same point of view on this. I say to people all the time, clients I work with that leadership is not a role, not a position, it's a choice. It's an activity. It can come from anywhere in the system. In the country, I come from most all our social changes began with people that know authority, and they raised their hand and chose to do something. I think that's what you're speaking to. Let's just go right into it, and share with people your own perspective about what does that take. I was just on a call yesterday, and there's a woman in this group, and she had a lot of self-doubt about whether or not she even had what it took to even consider that much less actually take the action. So let's start sort of in that perspective. In your experience, what have you noticed about people that caused them to jump from, "I'm not going to do this" to "I'm in now"? What are they made of or what choices are they making to get into that position?

[00:03:35] LH: Well, again, speaking from a personal experience, one of the biggest drivers for me has been the motivation to change something. Because I think all of us who feel uncomfortable with the status quo and who want to change something, clearly have the potential for leadership. If you add to that, the willingness not only to motivate yourself, but also to bring others along, that really makes a whole lot of difference. The third thing that has really made a difference for me is having understanding for different kinds of people who are with you along the way. Because for those listening who don't know much about me, I lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina for a while. I was there during the war, then I left and went to New Zealand as a refugee. Then I came back in a different role once things were settled here.

But the thing is, I managed to persevere with leadership at every single step of my journey as a young person, as a teenager, as a highschooler, in New Zealand as a refugee, as someone helping refugees who were then coming after me. But also then, later in professional career as well. I would definitely say you need to have the motivation for yourself and for others. You need to be inspired to change things for the better. Also, you need to really develop the skills of handling people. Of course, handling yourself as well, but that's almost taken for granted, although not for everyone. But knowing how to bring others along and do it gently, and in a way that's appropriate for the different kinds of people that we are leading.

[00:05:16] RT: Okay. You made two comments here or two areas of work, let's call it that, that I want to explore with you. One is, what is the work? What is the craft of bringing people along? Let's get into that. The second one that you mentioned is the recognition that that group of people you're trying to bring along is not monolithic. They don't all share the same agenda values, needs, wants, concerns of loss, so that's fragmented. So that's a different kind of work. Let's take it in turn. What do you know and what can you advise people about how you bring people along? What's the skill and talent you need to have in order to get these people from inertia into motion towards the purpose and the thing you're trying to get done?

[00:05:56] LH: That's a really good question and a really difficult one. Because sometimes, these things are almost, they come naturally. But what's underneath all this is at first, people need to trust you. You need to be able to develop a rapport and develop trust with individuals and with groups. This is something that's easier said than done. In my experience, if there are shared values between yourself and the people who are leading, if you can actually build on that, or discover that, and build on that, that's a really good starting point. Developing trust in my experience is the number one thing, because people are not going to trust you. If they don't trust you, then they're not going to follow you. But if you're able to even speak to them, let alone bring them along with some sort of confidence, and also with a bit of inspiration. Because in my experience, leaders need to be to an extent inspirational one way or another. But you need to be able to also inspire others to come along and create a change, or join in the change you're making, then you have a good starting point.

Then, in addition to this initial starting point, in my experience, if you really want to be a good leader, you need to develop a set of skills that are rather precise and they have intricate details.

As you said, people we are leading are not all the same, we're all different. Again, in my experience, and I work with leaders across different industries globally. The skill of leadership requires you to actually be able to take into account the diversity of individuals that you work with, understand what motivates and drive them, and also take into account their preferences, working styles, et cetera. Then find the best way that works for them in order to move them forward. It's not that simple. It sounds simple, but it's not that simple if you really want to get it right. Of course, people try and fail and try again, which is a great thing to do, but it does require a bit of practice.

[00:08:13] RT: Got to practice. Therefore, we can make a case right out of the gate that part of what's needed to build this capacity is to design a practice, as if you're an athlete, or a dancer, or a musician where you show up and practice your craft. And then you play the game, and you practice craft and you play the game. Although, I always find my own metaphor, they're falling apart. Because for leaders, there's rarely a practice field where they can go and make mistakes or it doesn't matter. But let's come back, I want to see if what you think of as a possible connection between building trust and values. I mean, you're a shared value's person, you speak to this frequently. What from your perspective is that dynamic? Because there's something there that is fuel or possible ways in which to get people engaged, so they trust you based on these values. What have you learned about how you harmonize those aspects when you're actually doing the work on the ground and trying to bring people with you?

[00:09:11] LH: Well, when we talk about values, first, we need to go one step back and figure out, do people know what we're talking about? Because very often, in the workshops I run and you have been in a couple of them. When I asked a group of 20 people, have you ever thought about your core values or have you ever analyzed them systematically? Only about two out of 20 will say, yes. That's when we need to go that one step back and say, "Well, what is really, really important to you? What's something that's not negotiable? What is something that drives you but from within? And what are the characteristics of individuals you admire that make that person a good person, for example? These are all questions that help us understand what our common values are.

But at the same time, when you're working with a group of people, it's not that easy to just roll up and say, "Hey, what's really important to you?" Normally, there's a context. So if you're

working, for example, in the context of resisting this information related to climate, or preventing the spread of this information related to climate, then you know or you can be safe with an assumption that people who are interested in this are the ones who want to make the world a better place, who believe in a safe, and clean and green environment. You usually have some tips and tricks along the way. But in addition to this, I think we need to also keep in mind that trust differs in terms of the starting point, culturally. So in some cultures, and this is scientifically been researched and proven. In some cultures, trust is not a given. It's something that you have to earn, just like respect. In other cultures, trust and respect are there at start.

We as leaders, again, if we're talking about global leadership, we need to figure out a way of how to start with being trustworthy at the beginning, in cultures where that makes sense, but also, how to build that trust in cultures where you're not given trust at the beginning. So again, it's an interesting scenario.

[00:11:23] RT: It's a challenging path to get on and stay on in my experience. This person, this mythical person we're speaking to out there, not mythical, but they're out there summer, is thinking, "Okay, I'm with you so far and I have this purpose that I'm trying to make some impact on. I'm beginning to get a sense I need to pay attention to my core values. I need to pay attention to trust." But then there's this part about mobilizing people to come with you. Now, you have a lot of experience with teams. I think before we – I don't want to mush together at the outset, somebody who's trying to do work and mobilize people that that constitutes a team, because it's probably not a team at that point.

Let's back up to come forward a little bit and put into the conversation, from your perspective, what are teams to you? What constitutes a team? What do you know about teams that work well, et cetera? So people have that orientation as well. Then maybe after that, we can start to link these two together for mobilizing and getting coordinated action. What do you know about teams?

[00:12:23] LH: I know quite a bit, I would say I've tried leading quite a few teams along the way in the 20 plus years you have mentioned. To me, teams differ from groups, because teams are basically a number of individuals who have a clear common goal. But also, within that, they have their roles, they have their purpose, they have their accountabilities. I often, especially

when I work with senior leaders, I drum on about this concept of accountability. Because in my experience, themes are only as good as the definition of the structure, and accountability and clarity of roles. Then in addition to this, in my experience, teams need to have someone who leads, it can be a formal leader, or an informal one, but definitely, they operate better when there is leadership. They also, as I mentioned, they need to have a clear goal, but also there needs to be balanced communication within the team. I mentioned structure. Again, structure doesn't have to be hierarchical, it can be horizontal. But we need to know what it is that we're trying to do, and what the start is and what the end is. Also, how will we know when we get there. There are different elements to what themes are. But at the same time, themes can be so different, a team can be a two-person team, or a team can have hundreds or thousands of people. The finesses and details really vary depending on the context.

[00:14:00] RT: Okay. Help people a little bit here too. What are your outside influences that inform your thinking about teams or did you create it yourself? That's cool if you did, but –

[00:14:10] LH: I've worked a lot in leadership, but I've also done a lot of professional development to do with developing themes and working with themes. There are a lot of, let's say, theoretical backgrounds to this. There have been a lot of studies. I mean, starting from Daniel Goleman, who has, let's say, he has his own school of thought on the leadership styles, and how you lead teams per se. But also, there is as you know, an array and a body of research, which shows what the key characteristics of successful teams are and what makes teams fall apart. I do consult the literature a lot. But at the same time, every time I work with a group, I get to see what they think is a team. In their experience, what makes a team work and what makes the team break down. Because again, I strongly believe in working with experience of people around us rather than hypothetical ideas and something that's relevant somewhere out there.

[00:15:11] RT: Yeah. Because I'm going to guess over the course of 20 years, you've been informed, and then added to your point of view about what a team is based on what you've heard from teams that are functioning well. Oh, that's a piece I can use. It's available. Yeah.

[00:15:26] LH: Yes. But also, from teams that have not worked well, because in my experience, you can learn a lot more when things go pear shaped. If you are in a position to have a chance

to fix it, and I've been in those situations as well. When something's not working, and you really know that it's not working, and you can see in practice, and you have to pull the right levers to fix whatever is not working, then it's a beautiful, beautiful learning opportunity. Such as the case with teams as well. If you have, for example, an individual who likes certain skills, or capacities, or motivation, or if there is a communications breakdown, or if it's unclear who makes the ultimate decision in a certain scenario, especially in case of risks. Then, it's a very quick, abnormally learning moment for those involved as to what makes a team work, or on the contrary, what makes them break down. As I said, people do learn well from errors, and from mistakes, and from challenges. We, as leaders need to be able to facilitate learning in such situations as well, and not go with punishment, because things go wrong.

[00:16:46] RT: Let's come back to that, we'll save that for a little bit down the road. We just kind of coming out of a very strange time in society's evolution, we went from working in organizations face to face in team meetings, all the stuff that we took for granted. Then that was not available to us. It's this platform that we worked. What did you observe and how did you amend your thinking about how you sustain teams when we were in the pandemic, and you lost physical contact with each other for long periods of time. Anything that emerged there that you said, "I want to keep that even though we come out of the pandemic." How do you do refresh your model of teaming based on the experience you had inside COVID?

[00:17:27] LH: That's a really good one, because I actually changed the role I was in somewhere in the middle of the lockdown. I went from being, let's say, within an organization with a very official senior leader title, to going into a role which required me to be an external consultant, but also a team leader, leading a team across seven different countries. Imagine, at one point, I had over 150 individuals all over the place, senior experts who were involved with me on this program we were doing. I needed to figure out a way how to first build that trust that I was talking about at the beginning, then how to establish a kind of communication that works for such a large, dispersed team. But also, without having the face-to-face element to it.

To be perfectly honest, I wasn't expecting it to work that well, but it did. Some of the key things I have learned is, first, the need to meet and understand the individuals who are part of your core team. Even if you're working online, this meant for me literally, to do a first survey of expectations and priorities amongst the team that I was about to take over leadership of. Then

the second thing was to actually schedule meetings one-to-one with every member of the core team. Now clearly, I can't have one-to-one sessions with 150 individuals, but I can with 30, even if it takes a whole week, or even if it takes two weeks. I found this to be really important.

Then once you understand at least the big picture of the priorities, and individuals, and what's burning in their house so to speak, and where you need to get the fires out, then it is the time to establish functioning meetings. Now, I strongly believe that we should only have meetings if they have a strong purpose. If they're agile enough, so that by the end of it, we are smarter, we learn something and we have an action plan. If we're just meeting for the sake of having a coffee, then let's not call it a meeting at all. I have introduced regular team meetings in different formats. I like to keep them short. They're usually – depending on the number of people, but half an hour is my favorite. If we can do it in half an hour, that really works well for me. Then, because I work internationally, and I work across the whole region of the Western Balkans, it is in my experience important that you're able to keep both the global and the regional view, but also the local view, because the people you work with, especially if you're leading them, they need to know that you care about their context. When it comes to COVID, that you care about their home scenario, rather than the world in general, because as you know, COVID experience was not the same for someone caring for elderly, and someone who is maybe on their own at home and every person had their own challenges.

But what I've taken away from that is, overall, that we can function with technology. However, the depth of the relationship, in my experience is not as deep until you see each other the first time.

[00:21:01] RT: In-person, yeah.

[00:21:01] LH: Yeah. Then, the second thing I've learned, I used to travel all the time. And sometimes I wouldn't even know where I was going. And where I was coming back from, it would be a flight to place, you go to the hotel, you go to the conference room, or the workshop room or whatever, you do your thing, then you have the work dinner, and then you're off flying again. I seriously wouldn't even know what city sometimes I was in. I've realized that in some cases, this is really not necessary. That sometimes it does not make sense to fly across the world for a few hours. When in reality, with technology, we can do so much. Of course, there are

benefits of face to face. But now, we have a bigger opportunity to weigh those out and figure out when it makes sense, and when it's maybe not necessary for us to do all that flying around.

[00:21:53] RT: All right. Let's go in a slightly different angle to all this stuff. Is there for you, and if so, how, and what a difference between building a team and doing community work for the sake of some cause that benefits the community. But you start with a place where there is not necessarily agreement on shared purpose, and common orientation, and structures, and processes that an organization inherently brings to a group of people. What's different about community building and leading that effort, as opposed to inside an organization from your perspective?

[00:22:27] LH: Well, there are differences in terms of the structures and maybe expectations to start with. But I would say that my approach is similar in a sense, that inspiring and building trust has to be the number one thing. Because I remember, when we had floods, I think it was 2014, really big floods in this part of the world. I was with a small baby at the time, and I couldn't really get out to the field to help physically. But I managed to get into action and motivate people using social media and connect people around the country to do amazing things. There was a rescue mission for a young boy who was with disabilities and who was left without a wheelchair during the floods. We somehow by motivating individuals online, and by connecting people around the country, and by fundraising, and getting onto the mission and wanting to change something, we not only managed to collect, money and secure a wheelchair for this specific young man. We managed to get five more for other individuals who turned out to have been in a similar position.

But in order to create that sort of momentum, I think, again, going back to what we were talking about before. People need to believe that you're being true when you're speaking, that you're not faking, fluking, et cetera. I know we sometimes believe politicians and others who are trained. I'm talking about pure, really pure leadership, where you are being authentic and true to yourself. Because at one point, I had all this money coming my way. People were giving me money for a cause without even ever meeting me ever, face to face. But clearly, I was able to build that trust, and keep that trust by delivering on what it was that I was motivating them to do.

Then the second thing is, they need to see the benefit, the bigger benefit, the wider benefit for the community on the cause that you are getting involved in. Because at one point, okay, we

were doing something for a small group, but then we had another group within the community who were focusing on babies, who were left without food during the floods, and they were focusing on that. Someone else was working with women who didn't have sanitary products during that period. But all in all, the purpose was there. We wanted to help those who are in need, and who needed our support to get through the toughest time until things settled a bit. I think if you have that in you, if you're able to look at people, and if you're able to speak in a way that they trust you and believe you, and they want to come along and help whatever way they can, it doesn't have to be money. We had individuals who would literally pack up and go to parts of the countries to clean rubbish, because rubbish was piling up, being thrown out of rivers, and causing even bigger problems. Okay, you don't have money, but you have, if you're physically able, you have your 10 fingers and your two arms, you're able to do some digging. It's a contribution you can make.

Again, not everyone is ready to stand out there and say, "Hey, people. Let's do this. We can do this. This is needed. These other people need us." I think if you have it in you, then practice, and you can practice at school, you can practice with little kids, you can practice at university, you can practice in your local community. It can be about cleaning up in front of your household, or it can be about something bigger, as long as there is a clear cause and a common goal that brings people together.

[00:26:12] RT: Okay. It just takes me to another piece that I think you're probably very skilled at, but I want it entered into the conversation, because I also think it's a piece of crap that people don't think too much about. Which is, how you use your voice, how you use narrative to bring people along, to actually be able to verbally convey the purpose, and the opportunity, and how people can be helpful, is its own challenge, and its own task and its own skill. I've watched you work. I know you know how to use narrative and the distinction between narrative and story. They're not the same. What counsel can you give people out there about using your voice to get people into action, and what are some tips, or some things you've learned about how to do that well?

[00:26:57] LH: The number one thing I preach on quite a bit is keeping it simple in summarizing. Because very often, and especially if you're working with people in academia, or with people who are highly expert at something, they get lost in terminology. If you really want to

lead people, they want to understand, and they want to feel what you're saying. I could have been giving you examples with scientific references, and all those things that we were talking about earlier. But people normally relate to the emotion that you are able to produce in them, and to things that are familiar to them. If you are talking about babies not having food out there, because there have been floods, everyone understands what babies are. You can like them or not like them, but the understanding is there.

If I was talking about infants who were having challenges with their nutrition during an early stage, I'm sure half of the people wouldn't be listening. Keeping the message simple to the core, and very often, we react to a problem. Now, I am someone who naturally goes towards solving problems. But I think, if you want to bring people along, it's quite a skill to help identify what the problem is. If the problem is the flooding, then we need to talk about water is everywhere. If the problem is lack of skilled butchers, we need to name it that way. But whatever the problem is, I think it needs to be communicated in such a way that (a) people understand, (b) they feel something about it and (c) they want to do something about it. This really requires simple language, clear, short, and clear messages, and not scientific language. I do think you need science to back you up is evidence, but not when you're trying to motivate masses and when you're trying to lead, especially in community settings.

[00:29:03] RT: Yeah. Okay. All right. I have one more question in the professional context, because in preparation for our conversation, I watched your YouTube videos in which I recommend people do. I read some stuff. I've seen you work in a program that we've – and in almost every situation, you made a reference to Susan David, and her work on emotional agility. I take it that that's an influential piece of thought work that inform some of you. I'm just curious, personally. What is it about Susan's work that affects you, and has influenced you, and how does it show up in your work and what difference does it make?

[00:29:41] LH: It's really interesting that you bring Susan up, because I think the only reason why she stands out for me, and for those who don't know who we're talking about, Dr. Susan David is a psychologist. I believe she's based in South Africa. She operates globally. She has a TED Talk. She's written books. She is very active online. There's a lot of free resources. She also works with values. I think the main reason why I'm influenced by her work is that it really resonates with my experiences to date. Because for example, she talks about how important

values are and working with values. I've been researching values for over 15 years. And I know, even had she not turned up out there in the TED world, I know how these really are important in decision making, in basically choosing your certain moves in life, in everything you do, basically. But she's someone who has already scientifically done work around that, and produced resources, and put it in writing and she has spoken about it.

It's almost like a validation of my work through someone else who's already recognized. Another thing that I really appreciate about Susan's work is her reference to the space between emotion, and thought, and the behavior we choose. That space in between, when you feel something, and you think something, and then you go to act, taking that time to actually choose your behavior. Now, this is something that goes way back. If you looked in science and research, I'm sure you would find evidence even in the Greek times for ideas on how all of these concepts operate. In behavioral psychology, there are different again, theories and schools of thought. But she managed to explain it in such a simple way that fully resonated with all the research on, and practice on emotional intelligence that I had done, that basically, it's not enough to just understand your emotions. It's really, really important to be able to, okay, understand and accept emotions, which can be comfortable and uncomfortable.

But then, we have the power of choosing the reaction and action we take. That, for me, it's such a simple idea. But at the same time, it's very challenging and very complex. In her talking in her book, Susan describes it beautifully. For those individuals listening, and watching who like being given smaller bits of information one at a time, she does a lot of work online, a lot of free stuff. So through Instagram, and other platforms, where you can actually get bits and pieces of this work. It's easy to understand and it resonates really well.

[00:32:40] RT: Okay, there you go. I'm going to shift gears now. I want to talk about Larisa, personally. My first question is, what drew you to this work?

[00:32:50] LH: Well, it's interesting, because I've had a dual career for over 20 years. I've always known that I want to work with people, so it had to be something about people. That was very clear, because from a very early age, I had this, let's say, potential of motivating and leading people, but also helping them learn and develop. Very early on, I identified that there

was the potential for me to go in the direction of teaching, and training, et cetera. But also, in parallel to that, leading and managing teams.

I got into management when I was at the age of 17. I started working very early. I started working at the age of 15. Then, from that moment, I was always doing two things. One was learning how to teach and train others, and the other was actually leading and managing teams in practice. Over the years, basically, the more I worked, the more I realized that these are all skills that you can develop. If you help people develop those skills over time, then basically, my purpose is achieved. So I've done a lot of reflection. I have done a lot of professional development myself. Over the years, I specialized, I worked as a teacher, I have worked as a lecturer, I have worked as a trainer, mentor. I kept that developmental part of me throughout the years.

But at the same time, I think you're only good as the ranges of experiences you have. I thought I can be teaching leadership if I'm not pursuing that path as well. I took the hard way and I actually worked as a leader, as a senior leader, and then later as a consultant to leadership teams in parallel, making sure that I have the underground understanding from the industry and from the different industries around the world. But basically, very early on, I identified that my purpose is helping others achieved their purpose and develop their skills.

Clearly, the values which I identified as my core values helped me understand which direction this needs to be in. Because, for example, for me, doing good for the world is much more important than making big money. Making big money is good, if it fits with my other criteria. But it's definitely, you know, for some people, that's one of the number one drivers for me, that wasn't the case. I've come to a point in my career where I really do only what I really enjoy. I do work only with clients that I have compatible values with, and that I really want to make a difference with. It's a lovely position to be in, but it's required a lot of work, as I say, over the years.

[00:35:48] RT: Okay. It just dawned on me, as you're speaking. The question I didn't put down the sheet that we've got talked about, what are your core values?

[00:35:55] LH: Well, some of the ones that are really strong and that are not easy to live with involve truth. Truth, or some people might call it honesty, or related values to those, but they go into that category. Another one is respect. Again, respect is a really difficult one, because in some cultures, you have to earn respect. As I said, at the beginning, and others, you might be able to start with. For me, it's at the core, and it's closely linked to equity and equality. Now, you can imagine, for me, being a woman, and imagine 15 years ago, having to go into meetings with senior officials, with ministers in the setting where I live. It used to be very challenging, because I would come there, expecting respect, and demonstrating respect, but it was not always on the other side. It's a challenging value to have. Professionalism is another one. Then, doing things for good, so this whole making world a better place, I haven't found the single, single word. Maybe benevolence could be a word that's close to it, but I like to call it for good value.

What else? I've mentioned respect. I've mentioned professionalism, honesty. Oh, and responsibility. Responsibility, I linked closely to integrity. Again, these are hard values, and when I say hard, it's because in my experience, your values actually, if they are at threat, they activate some of the hardest emotions in you. People who have these hard-core values, such as integrity. For example, if you get disappointed that integrity is not being fulfilled in a certain scenario, you can get very, very strong reactions. Again, thanks to all the work that we have done over the years, you learn how to deal with those things. But it's interesting, what I do with the workshops were different, and I've been so lucky, because I've worked with young leaders, senior leaders of different age, different color, different shapes and forms all over the world.

When they discover, for example, that if integrity is important for them, and then it's attacked, in a certain scenario, how upset they get. When they discovered that this is actually shared with others who have the shared value, you somehow feel at ease, because you're not alone in this.

[00:38:28] RT: Not alone. Yeah, exactly.

[00:38:30] LH: No. But they're beautiful values to have and beautiful values to be aware of. Because it was very soon obvious of this for me that I couldn't work in a setting where things were done that were harmful to people, or animals or the environment. It was very easy for me to understand that profit cannot be the number one thing if it went against all the other things

that were important to me. The sooner I realized what my values are, the easier it was for me to make life choices after.

[00:39:01] RT: Yeah. Okay. I agree. In all this work, you've been doing what surprised you about yourself in this work? What did you learn about yourself that was there inside you, but the work brought it out that you go, "Oh"?

[00:39:13] LH: Well, what really surprised me is the amount of resilience and stamina, and I even thought of possibly writing a book at some point. Because I mentioned, I started working at the age of 15. I left my hometown at the age of 14, and I went to the other side of the world in New Zealand. I had to start fresh together with my family. The amount of resilience, I feel that if you throw me into a situation, I somehow managed to bounce back, and get my stuff together and keep going. This has happened so many times during my life. As we get older, we have different experiences, losses of people we love. We have different settings that change. That's one thing that really surprised me, that you can bounce back, and you can go through however many hard times. I mean, not many people can say that they lived through a war, that they left their city through a tunnel, and mud, and over a mountain to get safety, that they went to the other side of the world and managed to actually get their stuff together.

Then, for example, when I got into leading this international organization, I was one of the first local women. I think, the youngest ever at that point to be in the director's role, to be doing that sort of stuff, to be breaking the glass ceiling, and I do that a lot. If I don't like something, I will push until we find a way to make it better. I'm always surprised that we can do it. I know, I feel that we can. But considering all the things that I've been through, I suppose the biggest surprise has been the amount of resilience and the amount of success, however far you bend that you can then back up and keep going despite all the challenges.

The second thing that I've learned is that we have time for everything. Because I was in the situation that I was in, I was rushing and I did everything ahead of time. I started school too early, I started working too early, and I was always rushing, rushing, rushing. I finished my studies at a very, very young age. I was doing two jobs for a million years already. I've realized now, I've done things that some people will not do in their three lives. It's okay to slow down. We need to slow down and there is time for us to do whatever we want.

[00:41:39] RT: Okay. You raised this question, or you raised this concept about 20 minutes ago. It's a question that I ask everybody here because I agree with what you said. But I'm going to turn the question on you to ask your answer yourself, which is that, I think as leaders, we learn more from our failures and our successes. What are a couple of failures as a leader that you can share with people, and what did you learn from them that's informed how you lead.

[00:42:05] LH: There have been lots of different failures along the way. One of the ones I often talk about, because we live in a world where entrepreneurship is such a big thing. World is changing, entrepreneurship is becoming a big priority for many of the younger individuals. I mean, the age doesn't have to do with it much, but I think that my experience in the world of entrepreneurship is a really useful one. I once went into a business partnership, where we had a – let's call it a startup, which part of it was dealing with IT services, and another part was dealing with training and development. I absolutely loved the whole arrangement. I was dealing with the training and development, and my partner was dealing with the IT services. It was the perfect scenario. We were completely complimentary. We were working together for 10 or 15 years. I know some of our listeners or viewers are going to laugh about this.

But at the end of the day, when we sold the company, it really turned out that it wasn't a partnership, because we did not have a predefined contract as we were starting. Of course, there were contracts for every client that came around, it was legal. But in terms of the business arrangement, because this was an arrangement with a friend and someone I really trusted. At the end of the day, when I look back, this was really not an entrepreneurial experience. It was a learning experience. But you know, if you want to go into the world of entrepreneurship, you need to have lawyers, you need to have accountants, and you need to have roles very clearly defined in advance. Now, in this part of the world, when you do business with friends and family, it can get really messy. Luckily, for me, I was not left with short sleeves, so to speak. I was not left bitter when this partnership finished, but I learned a lot. Because if you want to be a leader, things need to be organized and defined in a clear way. Now, whether this is a business leadership, or some other kinds of leadership, things need to be specified and clearly defined at the outset.

The second thing, which I think many of our listeners and viewers will be able to relate to is to do with wellbeing. Because I have been in this work, work, work mode, and because I love the stuff I do. For many years, I was really going hard with all the things I was doing. I wasn't taking time to stop and listen to my body when it was telling me, "Hey! Whoa! Slow down." It was only when I ended up in the emergency room with blood pressure that was beyond all the acceptable scales and without heart rate that was not normal at all. When the doctor said to me, "Well, you can choose either a heart attack or a stroke, or you change something." It was only then that I realized, well wait, your body has been telling you something for quite some time, and you haven't been doing anything about it.

Ever since I have really made a big turn, so not a U-turn to go back the same way, but a turn in the opposite direction. Basically, I think all those things that we hear in general about the importance of exercising, eating well, sleeping, listening to your body, meditating, doing breathing. All those things that when maybe even when you're younger sound like, "Oh, yeah, right, airy-fairy stuff." If we don't look after ourselves, especially if we are serving individuals. And as leaders, I feel that we are serving individuals, we really need to look after ourselves. If we don't, then the balance – when I say work life balance, I don't mean the number of hours. I actually mean, the balance of our body, and soul, and mind and all of that then goes off.

Luckily, I'm well now. I look after myself, I did my training this morning. I'll do another one later, and things like this. But it took me down this route, where I almost had a point of no return, that I had to stop and say to myself, "Oh, okay. Time to change." So this is something I would really love for people to learn better than I did or quicker than I did and start to actually observe, and listen to the signals, and live in the moment and understand how their body is reacting to the severe stress that we are all putting ourselves under.

[00:46:51] RT: Okay, good counsel. Definitely last question for you, especially now that you've publicly declared on 10,000 Swamp Leaders that you're slowing down and you're taking more time for yourself. What is ahead for Larisa in the world, whether work or personal, when you look forward? Because you got a long time to go. What's ahead for you, do you think?

[00:47:13] LH: Well, I definitely want to continue working with leaders, and I really enjoy working with the IT industry, I think there is so much to contribute in that industry. I think I will be

there for some time to come. I also really love working with aspiring leaders. There are some amazing young people around the world whose ideas are just mind-blowing. When I was working with the master's students at Oxford University, I got to work with a cohort, which are some of the most brilliant minds of the whole world. They were talking to me about their purpose and their ideas of the change they want to bring. I definitely want to help serve those who want to solve big problems. I think that's definitely ahead. Then who knows, maybe a book. I can't believe I'm saying it out loud, but maybe because I am, maybe it will actually happen. I don't want to plan too much. I'm currently finishing a project working on developing independent media in the region. Again, it's an amazing team. It's an amazing setting. It's such an important cause to be working on. But who knows, who knows.

[00:48:25] RT: Larisa, thank you so much for making time to come into The Swamp and tell your story. There are so many pieces of conversation you just had in the last stretch of time that people can profit from. So thank you for sharing your wisdom with this clan as well.

[00:48:40] LH: Thank you, Rick. It's been a huge pleasure and an honor to be able to share my insights. Hopefully, some of the viewers or listeners will get in touch and let us know how we got on.

[00:48:50] RT: We will put some stuff in the shownotes, where they can find you and the resources, and yeah, I think you're going to have some people who'll chase you down. Thank you.

[00:49:01] LH: Thank you.

[OUTRO]

[00:49:03] 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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