

Transcript

0:00

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0:14

I'm a lawyer and the wife of a diplomat.

0:17

You know what I'm pretty great at?

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Talking!

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You can get me into a room with almost anyone,

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and I can find something to talk about.

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And when I meet new people,

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one of the questions that I love to ask is

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"How did you come to be here?"

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And I don't mean by taxi or grab a motorbike,

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but how did you come to be here at this point in your life?

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And the answers always leave me riveted

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because I never could have anticipated that I would be here -

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in my life or in Vietnam.

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I grew up - I spent the most of my childhood in small-town Ohio,

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a state that calls itself the heart of America.

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And I didn't get my first passport until I was 18.

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A few years later, when I met the man who was to be my husband,

1:02

I had only ever left the country once.

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And when I met him - oh, wow!

1:07

He was smart, and he was handsome, he was witty, and he was going places -

1:12

literally!

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So, it took me a few years to convince him to marry me.

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I totally chased him.

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(Laughter)

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And at the same time, I was pursuing my law degree.

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Well, so when I graduated from law school, we got married.

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And in one year, the first year of our marriage,

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and the first year of my career as "Laura, the lawyer,"

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my husband came home, and he says,

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"You know what? I've got a job that can take us overseas.

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What do you think?"

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I said, "Oh, you know I'm kind of torn here."

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I mean a life of travel and adventure or a clear and distinguished career path?

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I don't know.

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I mean exotic locations, great food, new people, fun and exciting times,

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or I could stay "Laura, the lawyer."

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And I worked really hard for that, you know.

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I spent years and years of time,

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and thousands and thousands of dollars invested in that title,

2:04

in that career track, in that trajectory.

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And I wondered if I followed my husband in his job overseas,

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what would happen to mine?

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Well, I had to figure it out.

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So, off we went, and there we were:

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overseas, oh the fun, oh the adventure!

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Yes, there I was, at home, alone,

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with no job.

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Oh, what had I done?

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And I'll never forget the moment when I realized the impact

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this choice might have had on my career.

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I was standing in the elevator at my husband's office,

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and a woman comes in, and she says, "Oh, hi! Are you new here?"

2:42

"Yes, I am!"

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She says, "Great, welcome!

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Do you think you're going to be looking for a job while you're here?"

2:48

"Yes, I do!"

2:49

"You know, a job in the mailroom just opened up, you should check it out."

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"Wow! Thank you! The mailroom!"

2:59

(Laughter)

3:00

Was Laura, the lawyer destined to sort mail?

3:04

No, don't get me wrong.

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Sorting mail is a very important job,

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and one that can be lots of fun from what I've been told.

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But it is a job that didn't hold much meaning for me,

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didn't make me feel like I was fulfilling my life purpose,

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like I was living up to my full potential.

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And the question made me wonder,

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"Had I sacrificed my career, my chances for success by following my husband?"

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Now, at the time, it certainly felt like it.

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And I was sad and angry and resentful.

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And these feelings are not unique to me or to the ex-pat population

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or to anyone who considers themselves a trailing spouse

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or an accompanying partner.

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It can also be the parent who chooses to stay home and raise children,

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or the child who once grown returns home to take care of an aging parent.

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Here in Hanoi, it can be the educated woman

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who when she decides to get married,

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leaves her family to join her husband's.

4:00

It's anyone, anywhere who chooses to change their life course

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for the sake of, for the love of another.

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And of course, we love our spouse, we love our kids,

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we love our parents and we would do anything for them,

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and that's why we make those choices - it's to be with them, to support them.

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But when we do that, we sometimes also can't help but wonder,

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"Well, is this what I was meant to do?"

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Now, was I meant to sort mail? No!

4:28

I didn't end up work in the mailroom,

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and yes, I did find a job everywhere we lived:

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Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Israel and Vietnam.

4:38

And in every place, I have held some really interesting jobs.

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But I thought all of them were a big fat nothing

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because I wasn't moving forward as Laura, the lawyer!

4:48

And I was miserable.

4:51

Until I got to Hanoi,

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and within my first few weeks of arriving here,

4:55

I was invited out to a lunch with a few new friends.

4:57

And as it does in any getting-to-know-you conversation,

5:00

the question of work came up.

5:01

"So Laura what do you do?"

5:03

Ugh! I hated that question

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because I never knew how to answer, right?

5:08

Well, I was a lawyer but we moved,

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and I had this job and this other job -

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and ugh, I don't know!

5:13

Poor me, I don't know what I do, I'm not really sure.

5:15

And so this woman looked to me and she said,

5:18

"Well, if you could do anything, what would it be?"

5:22

Wow! If I could do anything!

5:26

Now, that's a question that I hadn't been asked since I was a child.

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And it blew my mind - I mean it had me stunned.

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It rendered me temporarily speechless.

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And when I thought about it, I thought, You know, I could do anything.

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I didn't have to stay on the track of being Laura, the lawyer.

5:42

I could be and do something different.

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And when I thought about it, I started realizing

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that all the things that I had done along the way,

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all the titles had been very different,

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but I had been doing the same things all the time.

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I suddenly saw that each of those pieces were fitting together.

6:01

And it felt fantastic!

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True, I had not accomplished the same things

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that my law school classmates had accomplished.

6:10

But I had done a lot.

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I had lived all over the world,

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and in every place, I had found a way to move forward, to grow.

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I may not have succeeded at moving forward as Laura, the lawyer,

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but, wow, did I do well at being Laura, the motivator;

6:26

Laura, the advocate; Laura, the writer; Laura, the persuasive speaker.

6:32

And looking back and looking forward, if I could do anything,

6:37

well, I think I would like to help other people

6:42

gain this amazingly empowering perspective

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that I had just been gifted.

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And so here I am!

6:51

And it took me 16 years and jobs in seven countries

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to get here and to realize

6:59

that I had found success in every place.

7:03

So please, let me save you some time in your journey.

7:08

There are three key steps

7:09

that you can take to find success anywhere you are.

7:14

Step 1:

7:15

Be open to and ready for change.

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In 1989, Charles Handy wrote a book called "The Age of Unreason."

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And in it, he predicted that careers would be a portfolio of different jobs

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rather than one position that lasted for decades.

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Guess what?

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He was right.

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In 2007, the New York Times recognized that when it comes to careers,

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change is the only constant.

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If jumping off track once was stigmatized,

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it now has cachet!

7:45

Career change has cachet!

7:49

At that time, they predicted that people would change jobs

7:52

an average of three times.

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But by 2010, the number had jumped to seven.

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By 2015, the number had jumped to 10.

7:59

And in March of this year, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics

8:02

estimated 12 to 15 careers per person.

8:07

15 careers per person!

8:11

That's right, if you haven't changed job not just once but a few times,

8:14

you're behind the times!

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(Laughter)

8:17

Changing jobs can be a strength.

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It can be an asset in your professional development.

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It can show that you're flexible, adaptable, resilient,

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and that you have creative problem-solving abilities.

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In Handy's words, change, after all, is only another word for growth,

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a synonym for learning.

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We can all do it, and here's the key:

8:38

Enjoy it if we want to -

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which leads us to step number 2:

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Embrace the experiences, ditch the titles.

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Today, a successful career is not based on a single job title,

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the same job in different locations.

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It's the process of diligently developing and then quickly adapting a set of skills

9:01

to answer life's challenges.

9:03

I might not have been Laura, the lawyer every place we lived,

9:07

but in every location, I served as a talented writer,

9:10

a persuasive speaker, an advocate for those who needed my voice.

9:15

These were the common threads

9:16

that tied my professional experiences together.

9:19

So ask yourself,

9:21

What are the skills you consistently use in every thing that you end up doing?

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Therein lies your strength, your story, your path to success.

9:33

Author Jeff Goins wrote the "Art of Work" recently.

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It's a really great book you should read it.

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In it, he encourages you to think about your work as an artist's portfolio,

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where each piece stands on its own and is its own beautiful work,

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but when compiled into a portfolio,

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clearly illustrates the progress that the artist has made,

9:54

the growth that she has come through in the years.

9:57

In your work, your careers,

9:59

each seemingly unrelated experience stands on its own,

10:03

but can also be viewed as a contribution to a collective whole,

10:07

a beautiful collage of a career that you are creating.

10:12

By ditching the titles and embracing the experiences,

10:16

you expand your employment options,

10:19

and you can better enjoy the journey.

10:23

"But, okay Laura, how do we land a job?"

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Great question!

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And this is the key.

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Step number three:

10:30

Make meaningful connections.

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All theory and warm fuzzy feelings aside,

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on a very practical level,

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creating real life connections through actual conversations

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can enable and empower you to find success.

10:46

Despite the plethora of internet-based job boards that are out there,

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85% of jobs are still filled by word of mouth,

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by personal connection.

10:56

Is it really a surprise that someone needs to know you

10:58

in order to recommend you, in order to want to hire you?

11:02

So plug-in!

11:04

Not with devices, but with people.

11:08

Ask questions, seek advice,

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tell the world what you want to do

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so that when those opportunities arise,

11:15

they think of you.

11:17

Start today.

11:18

Go and have a coffee,

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or get crazy, have an entire meal

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with someone whose job really intrigues you,

11:23

someone whose activities interest you,

11:25

someone who you just think that you'd like to get to know better.

11:28

Start a conversation.

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And if you're looking for a way to get that talk going,

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I've got a couple of great questions that can start you on your road.

11:37

When I meet new people I love to ask, "How did you come to be here?"

11:42

And if you could do anything,

11:44

what would it be?"

11:47

Thank you.

11:48

(Applause)