



## Her second act

**L**aura Steckler was made to wear many hats: She's a mother, a psychotherapist, an advisor – an entrepreneur.

### NO WHAT-IFS

"I don't like the cold," Laura said with a laugh quite typical of a New Yorker.

That's why, nearly two decades ago, she loaded a U-Haul and moved to a town more than 1,000 miles away.

"I didn't know anyone who lived in Miami," Laura recalled of choosing a city she visited during childhood. "I just have an independent spirit, and I tend to be rather resilient."

It should come as no surprise, then, that she established and grew her own practice in a place where she had no contacts but plenty of competition.

She had no fear.

"I didn't get overwhelmed or think about the obstacles," Laura said of becoming a solo practitioner in a new locale. "I felt very

determined, and didn't let myself get into the what-ifs."

But the relocation wasn't the only major change Laura made. She turned to financial advising as a second career.

Her first was psychotherapy.

### NO LOSS IN TRANSITION

Laura earned her bachelor's degree in psychology from Brooklyn College and her master's in clinical social work from New York University. She served the chronically mentally ill for a number of years in New York before focusing on psychotherapy.

Leaving that career behind was bittersweet.

"I found my work very gratifying," Laura said. "I practiced psychotherapy with individuals and couples as well as was in management in a not-for-profit in South Florida."

She also worked with holocaust survivors, indigent seniors, as well as more high-functioning individuals.

"I was able to sit in on very private moments with people and work toward a higher level of functioning and improved mental health," she said. "But at the same time, I always had a very

entrepreneurial spirit, and I always loved business, and I always loved people.”

When Laura decided she was ready for a career change, a friend who is quite successful at a major insurance company proposed that she consider the financial services industry.

“Unfortunately, like a lot of women, I had a number of misconceptions about what it meant to be in financial services, specifically as a financial advisor,” Laura said.

She came to find that it’s not all about numbers. It’s also about people.

“I knew I would miss the rewarding work I had been doing,” she said. “What I didn’t know was that working as a financial planner would be gratifying to me as well because I’m still helping individuals and families achieve their goals – just differently.”

## TENACITY AND TALENT

“I was always very interested in different aspects of business and finance, but I was also tuned into interpersonal relationships and having that one-on-one contact, so I knew I wanted to stick in that realm,” Laura said.

So she applied herself and earned her licenses, passing each test with flying colors. When she joined an advisor training program at Raymond James, she saw a room full of well-connected professionals with strong backgrounds who were deeply rooted in their communities.

It didn’t intimidate her.

“I did not come from a background of a financially secure family,” Laura said. “I came from a single-parent home. My mother was always ill. We were very working-class. But I just went for it.”

Not knowing the scope of what she was embarking on, Laura had no fear – because she didn’t know what might lie ahead.

“I was always very driven, no matter what I was doing,” Laura said. “I interviewed at various firms, and I decided that Raymond James was the place that I wanted to try to grow. I came on board as a standalone trainee advisor.”

Her first-year goals in 2006 were \$4 million in assets under management and \$50,000 in production.

“That \$4 million number might as well have been \$100 million,” Laura said. “It seemed like the hugest number in the world, and

I had no idea how I was going to attract clients because I hardly knew anyone in Miami.”

So she did a great amount of networking and met authentic and interested people. And she proved to them that she was authentic and interested as well.

“I applied my skills as a psychotherapist when meeting with prospective clients and talking about their short-, medium- and long-term goals and what’s keeping them up at night about money, about work, about the future,” Laura said. “That helped build the relationships that helped clients come on board.”

Those skills include empathetic and active listening, quickly developing a rapport, creating a nonjudgmental, open atmosphere, and the intangible qualities of building trust with strangers and engaging clients about their goals, their fears, their concerns.

“The way I practice is that I tell everyone at the very first meeting that I will not blink twice at anything anyone tells me,” Laura said. “That everything is 100% confidential inside of the room and that they can depend and rely on me and on us and that the more I know about them as they feel comfortable, the better I’ll be in a position to help.”

That helps people relax and open up.

“It’s not a therapy session,” Laura emphasizes.

Rather, it’s giving people a number of important elements that she believes are key to an advisory relationship

– because not many people care about the alpha and beta of a fund, but they care about whether an advisor understands their work, their family, their dynamics, their goals and what’s keeping them up at night.

“We’re very proactive and responsive,” Laura said of her team, “which I think gives people an increased sense of comfort and security. And I think the planning component is key. For clients, it’s not all about the investments, the numbers, but it’s about the problem-solving, trust, confidence and actually having a financial blueprint for their future.”

In finding they are able to trust Laura and her team, clients get a solid sense that they are committed to them long-term and that they have the strong technical knowledge base essential to helping clients navigate complex financial matters and

### Laura’s three tips for women considering financial advising as a second career:

- ▶ Seek out successful women in the field and talk to them.
- ▶ Build a strong network. It’s all about relationships.
- ▶ Have a deep sense of faith and confidence that you can do it.

## Laura's take on seeking out a mentor

*"Women should seek out mentors whom they respect and view as bright and accomplished. Someone who perhaps has a different set of skills than the person seeking. They have to take the initiative to say, 'Let's sit down, let's meet, let's talk.' As a woman coming in as a second career, developing advocates and mentors is necessary. We work best when we collaborate and when we support one another, so as a new female advisor, seeking that out is key. Drive is necessary. Tenacity is necessary. Being comfortable initiating conversations and in general just having a dynamic personality and being interested in and engaging with people on a daily basis is key. And women must understand that it takes years to build a successful practice but that it can be very rewarding and flexible from a personal and family perspective."*

their families and providing a lot of support as they transition into and through retirement – and seeing them enjoying their lives and doing the things they want to do, knowing that they have a solid plan and a solid team in place," Laura said. "That's what I'm really proud of."

And she's more financially stable than she's ever been because she pays more attention to her finances than ever before.

"I was in the dark and did not focus at all on financial planning matters when I was a psychotherapist," Laura said. "It was more month-to-month paying the bills. Now, I'm trying to build a financial legacy for my family."

And she finds deep satisfaction in serving her clients every day.

"Coming out of a divorced home, I think I'm pretty sensitive to those needs," said Laura, who recently earned her Certified Divorce Financial Analyst designation. "Being able to sit with the spouse and address the fears, the concerns, the unknowns, and provide a sense of comfort by telling them, 'I'm here for you. You're going to be okay.' Some of those phrases may seem obvious, but often they aren't spoken.

"Divorce is one of the most emotionally, mentally and financially impactful events in someone's life. And to be present with them throughout that process and provide them with the technical knowledge they need in addition to the support and a sense of hope and empowerment is important. I think that definitely translates to the way that I practiced as a psychotherapist."

That's just one way she forges connections that extend far beyond the office.

decision-making. Indeed, while building and maintaining relationships is the backbone to a successful advisory practice, Laura is a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ professional and CERTIFIED DIVORCE FINANCIAL ANALYST® who has obtained her Certification in Long-Term Care and continues her education – all while balancing her avid reading habit and her perpetual quest to improve processes and deepen her knowledge base to better support clients – oh, and motherhood. Laura is the proud parent of two small children.

### REAPING THE REWARD

Choosing financial advising as a second career has opened up a world of satisfaction, security and strength for Laura, a four-time Chairman's Council member, the highest level of recognition at her firm, which is achieved based on a combination of assets, production, competency points and net new assets.

Having grown a successful practice from the ground up and built a team of her own, Laura now sits on the firm's Executive Council, serving as a voice for fellow advisors in the Eastern region.

"That was a milestone for me," Laura said. "That the firm's executives value my opinion and want me at the table when I've only been in the business for 12 years is very gratifying. It's always meaningful for me when people want my perspective, especially as a younger woman who grew a standalone practice."

She also takes pride in effectively bringing clients from pre-retirement to post-retirement.

"I truly enjoy helping them develop comprehensive plans for themselves and

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“I’ve been able to build some meaningful relationships with clients,” Laura said. “I’m invited to baby showers, retirement parties, weddings and different life cycle events.”

### PAYING IT FORWARD

Today, Laura wants to share what she’s learned with other women who are looking to re-enter the workforce or make a career change.

“Being a financial advisor can be tremendous for women considering a second career option,” Laura said. “Women who have experience in another area have skills that can be transferred from their first career. And I think that women, bluntly put, make some of the best financial advisors for a multitude of reasons.

“They are better listeners, more nurturing, better at establishing and maintaining relationships and understanding key issues as well as having the ability to go beyond the numbers to the person,” Laura said. “Those are all strengths that women have that can be applied, and that’s why I think we need to move the needle. Women should make up more than 15% of financial advisors.”

A lack of education and information may prevent women from discovering what a wonderful, rewarding and flexible career the advisory business can be.

“They need to know that they don’t need to be excellent with and love numbers. They’re not going to be staring at a computer screen all day trading,” Laura said. “I wish that the industry as a whole would embark on some education initiatives to that end, specifically as it pertains to women and second careers.”

In the meantime, she’s taking matters into her own hands. Whether that’s helping a young advisor or sitting on a committee or board, Laura is always happy to give back.

“I’m very proud to have the opportunity to mentor,” she said. “And through all my service, I have been rewarded tenfold because I’ve met so many wonderful professionals, and I’ve been able to grow personally and professionally as a result of getting to know some of these tremendous people.” 🎯



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