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Our Next Evolution

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*Transforming Collaborative Leadership
to Shape Our Planet's Future*

L A U R A C A L A N D R E L L A



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OUR NEXT EVOLUTION

Transforming Collaborative Leadership to Shape Our Planet's Future

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To past generations of leaders who have guided me toward deeper wisdom.

To future generations of leaders whose wisdom will surpass my own.

*And to this beautiful planet: you will always be
the source of our greatest knowing.*

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PREFACE

Writing a book on collaborative leadership during a global pandemic and a rising racial justice movement shook me to my core. All authors face a moment in the book writing process where they wonder, “Does my voice matter?” But what I witnessed in 2020 was all of us grappling with that same question, author or not.

In our isolation, we hungered for connection. In our division, we longed for unity. All the while, each of us tried to understand, “What is *my part* in contribution to *the whole*?”

The decade did not begin as any of us expected, yet many of us knew that there would come a day when we would have to reckon with the issues that have been lying beneath the surface for too long. Now that the day has come for this generation of leaders, we can choose to view this time with a sense of fear, or we can courageously do the work to heal the wounds of our world.

I say, choose courage.

I started writing this book during a year of deep personal transformation and growth. In the cocoon of 2019, it was born out of my conviction that the answers to our biggest questions can be found within ourselves and in relationship to one another. I still believe that's true. Though life feels more uncertain than ever, my resolve strengthens when I commit to the practices in this book and trust in their power to create change.

Does my voice matter? I wouldn't be writing this if I didn't believe it was true. I wouldn't be sharing it if I didn't believe it was true for you too. Now more than ever, we need one another to make our voices heard while celebrating their many differences. Just as important, we need to sharpen our ability to listen with curiosity and openness so that all—and I do mean *all*—voices can be heard.

My hope is that somewhere in these pages is a spark of inspiration that helps you navigate the challenges that lie ahead. Evolution is possible...for everyone.

INTRODUCTION

The first Earth Day celebration occurred in 1970 amid dire predictions that seem to echo the urgency of the crises we still face fifty years later. There was a sense of panic around the state of the planet and a guarantee that our world would change forever without immediate, decisive action.

At the time, Harvard biologist and Nobel Laureate George Wald said, “Civilization will end within fifteen to thirty years unless immediate action is taken against the problems facing mankind.”¹

Barry Commoner, a Washington University biology professor and 1980 United States presidential candidate, wrote in the scholarly journal *Environment*, “We are in an environmental crisis which threatens the survival of this nation and of the world as a suitable place of human habitation.”²

¹ George Wald, “The End of Civilization Feared by Biochemist,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1970, <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/11/19/archives/the-end-of-civilization-feared-by-biochemist.html>.

² “Earth Day 2008: Predictions of Environmental Disaster Were Wrong,” Washington Policy Center, April 22, 2008, <https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/earth-day-2008-predictions-of-environmental-disaster-were-wrong>.

Paul Ehrlich, a Stanford biologist, was also fundamental in making predictions (and is still at work today). He shared in the vision that the path we were on was headed toward crisis. “Sometime in the next fifteen years, the end will come. And by ‘the end’ I mean an utter breakdown of the capacity of the planet to support humanity,” he told CBS News in 1969.³ It was this kind of energy that fueled the increase in production of food grains, a market response known as the “Green Revolution.”

Of course, this was not the first time society feared environmental devastation. If we track the epistemology of conservation—that is, the theory of knowledge that distinguishes justified belief from opinion—and the way our collective understanding of what’s at stake has changed over time, it’s clear just how far we have come.

OUR EVOLVING CONSCIOUSNESS

A little over a century ago, a camping trip became the spark that ignited a new level of environmental consciousness in the United States. Naturalist John Muir had the full attention of President Theodore Roosevelt for three days in Yosemite Valley. Muir was a vocal and poetic advocate for protecting the natural beauty of the country, but it was Yosemite that most captured his heart. He wrote that “it was like lying in a great solemn cathedral, far vaster and more beautiful than any built by the hand of man.”⁴ Under the giant sequoias, a conversation unfolded between the two men that would lead Roosevelt to

3 Charles C. Mann, “The Book That Incited a Worldwide Fear of Overpopulation,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/book-incited-worldwide-fear-overpopulation-180967499/>.

4 “The Camping Trip That Changed the Nation,” National Parks Adventure, <https://nationalparksadventure.com/the-camping-trip-that-changed-the-nation/>.

protect not only Yosemite but later sign into existence five national parks, eighteen national monuments, fifty-five national bird sanctuaries and wildlife refuges, and 150 national forests.

The nation was at an inflection point in how it valued the natural world. In the East, colonization, industrialization, and urbanization decimated the forests, eroded the soil, and resulted in a rapid loss of fish and wildlife populations. The future of the American West didn't look much better. The result of Manifest Destiny was a wave of migration that was transforming wilderness into an unrecognizable landscape. This unchecked loss of resources raised alarm. The consequences were visible and impossible to ignore. A view of conservation began to emerge that included restoration, active management, and wise use of land.

Meanwhile in New England, Henry David Thoreau wandered the woods of Walden Pond. He, along with his transcendentalist friends, inspired a different sort of awareness. Through his writing, he spoke of nature as more than a commodity. He saw it as a way to transcend the boundaries set forth by society, find spiritual renewal, and "live deliberately." His words fed a generation of Americans who were hungry to celebrate their individualism. And so was born the environmental ethos of the day. By the time Teddy Roosevelt put pen to paper after his infamous camping trip, we were no longer solely driven by what we could extract from the land. We were also driven to protect it.

Our collective consciousness continued to evolve, yet always with the push-and-pull tension between managing natural resources for their use and protecting them for their intrinsic beauty. Once decimated forests became strategic assets during two world wars, heavily supporting our defenses by providing

wood to build everything from airplanes to army barracks. Soon after, Aldo Leopold gently nudged the average citizen toward a holistic view of ecosystems in *A Sand County Almanac*. A land ethic took hold that he defined as “a thing is right and good when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”⁵

And global consciousness rose too. In 1948, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) brought together government and nongovernmental organizations from around the world to protect natural heritage through policy and on-the-ground initiatives.

Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* was the precursor for a marked environmental revolution. Published in 1962, Carson wrote of a spring entirely devoid of birds singing after pesticides wreaked environmental havoc, demonstrating in a visceral way just how much was at stake. And people were listening. By connecting tactical needs to our tangible experience with nature, she was able to expose the massive health and environmental risks of unbridled use of DDT and other synthetic pesticides, leading almost directly to the formation of Earth Day, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and brand-new toxicity regulations.⁶

By the 1970s and 1980s, science brought environmental crises into view. We began to see our environment through this lens, realizing that our advances were maybe not so advanced after all. Our reliance on vehicles contributed to an energy crisis.

5 Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (1949; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

6 “The US Federal Government Responds,” Environment and Society Portal, <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/silent-spring/us-federal-government-responds>.

Our agricultural practices spiked water pollution. Our rampant development destroyed critical habitat for species. Rather than a dualistic focus on the use of or protection of nature, science helped us to see an undeniable interconnectedness. We looked to the future and saw what kind of world would be left for our children. In this context, we began to question the direct impact that we have and the ways in which our choices affect human health and survival.

Furthermore, as technology created an increasingly globalized society, we recognized that these choices extended well beyond any one nation's borders. In a 1987 report entitled "Our Common Future," the World Commission on Environment and Development focused on the global character of our environmental issues and the need to achieve "sustainable development."⁷

Today, our understanding of conservation continues to progress, with business taking center stage. Consumers are holding companies accountable for their sustainable use of resources, and many want to be receptive to science and be good stewards of the planet. The private sector has entered the conversation in a new way, recognizing the importance of reconciling that long-held conflict between use and protection. Although government and nonprofits will continue to be an integral part of the solution, corporations now have a substantial role to play.

Sustainability initiatives provide more than a social license for businesses to operate. Growing resource scarcity and degradation has a very real impact on the private sector's profitability and survival. We have a long way to go. A 2018 report from global nonprofit Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) states

⁷ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

that, “while 90 percent of CEO and C-Suite leadership has significant influence over the sustainability agenda, only 40 percent of sustainability teams were prioritizing engagement with the CEO’s office.”⁸

A new evolution is on the horizon, but unfortunately for today’s scientists, activists, and change-makers, the more specific of those fifty-year-old predictions turned out to be spectacularly wrong—just as many of our current CEOs and leaders were stepping into the beginnings of their careers. Our understanding of how to reconcile our relationship to nature is not yet fully formed. This makes it difficult for companies to know what sustainability efforts to invest in, especially if it hinders profit. When business practices become regulated based on science that doesn’t seem stable, we begin to bicker and balk about the present rather than working toward a shared future.

While it’s important to conserve our natural world, deepen our scientific understanding, and grow our sustainable business practices, underlying it all is a need to establish more responsive, adaptive ways of knowing and of connecting to the world and to each other. In other words, the way we approach conservation today is not and *cannot* be the way we approached it a hundred years ago.

A 2019 United Nations (UN) report on biodiversity concluded as much—arguing that as humans accelerate the extinction of other species at an unprecedented speed, there is a need for *transformational change*. The report went on to specify, “We

8 Aron Cramer, Dunstan Allison-Hope, Alison Taylor, Beth Richmond, and Charlotte Bancelhion, “Redefining Sustainable Business: Management for a Rapidly Changing World,” BSR, January 29, 2018, <https://www.bsr.org/en/our-insights/report-view/redefining-sustainable-business-management-for-a-rapidly-changing-world>.

mean a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic, and social factors, including paradigms, goals, and values.”⁹ Transactional changes are no longer enough. We cannot only campaign on behalf of the need for beautiful parks or tug on emotions with pictures of starving polar bears. We cannot think only of one place, one species, or the responsibility of one leader, organization, or sector to create change.

What we need is transformative change. We need system-wide deconstruction and reconstruction on all levels and in all facets of our behavior and operations. As with any evolution, this new paradigm will require us to adopt new thought processes, not for a single company or a single sustainability goal but for everyone.

This begs the million-dollar question: How does an *entire system* change?

I believe our next evolution—not only for conservation but arguably extending to all facets of leadership and life—will come through a practice of leadership that is centered around relationships. Put simply, we are growing beyond extraction. Protection and profits are increasingly driven by our relationship *to* the natural world, the many and varied relationships *within* the natural world, and our relationships *to ourselves and one another*.

Our epistemology is built through conscious approaches to our interconnectedness, knowing what we don’t know, and acknowledging what cannot be predicted.

9 E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo, eds., “Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services,” (Bonn, Germany: IPBES secretariat, 2019).

THE PREDICTIONS ARE NOT THE MOVEMENT

There were three thematic predictions that defined the environmental movement of the midtwentieth century: overpopulation and food shortages, pollution, and climate change. The rhetoric surrounding each of these threats was dire.

There were assumptions that the global population would outpace food production within ten years. Predicted threats surrounding pollution were so damning that they led to immediate legislation in the United States, such as the Endangered Species Act, followed later by the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. Finally, while climate change was as much at the forefront of the conversation then, as it is now, predictions at that time said that the Earth was cooling. Without swift action, we were almost certainly facing another ice age.

Here we are a full generation later, and while we haven't solved overpopulation, it clearly has not ended the world. The dreaded hole in the ozone layer has begun to heal, and we know much more about it now than we did then. And about that ice age...

On its face, the desperate predictions turned out to be completely wrong. Upon closer inspection, the lesson we can take from this is one about the complex impact of public awareness and what it looks like when up-leveled societal consciousness leads to new action. When the only thing that we can predict is the constancy of change, our responsibility lies with how we respond to it.

We don't have to look to the past *or* the future to see that our world is constantly in flux and that climate is only one facet of it. Turn on the news, look out your window, or simply exist as a person in this era, and the facts are difficult to ignore.

Today, we see natural disasters—fires, flooding, windstorms, and invasive species—with greater frequency and intensity than ever before. What’s more, there are segments of the population that are completely removed from the effects of these disasters, while other segments are completely devastated by them. A greater concentration of wealth has created a disparity that incubates a desire for change and creates vastly different perceptions of the world from community to community.

Within the United States specifically, we have a measurable impact on the environment that outsizes our population. Dave Tilford of the Sierra Club said, “A child born in the United States will create thirteen times as much ecological damage over the course of his or her lifetime than a child born in Brazil.”¹⁰ Now factor in the millennial generation, which is poised to be the largest American generation since the baby boomers in spite of our dropping birth rates, and that impact grows exponentially. The impact of Generation Z is yet to be seen.

As a group, millennials are the most diverse generation in history. Individuals who identify as multiracial contribute to that diversity now more than ever. As a result, their perspectives and values will influence the future of this world. Millennials are more focused on systemic change than previous generations—73 percent of millennial consumers would be willing to spend more on a product if it came from a sustainable brand, and 81 percent expect their favorite companies to make public declarations of corporate citizenship.¹¹

10 Roddy Scheer and Doug Moss, “Use It and Lose It: The Outsize Effect of U.S. Consumption on the Environment,” *Scientific American*, September 14, 2012, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/american-consumption-habits/>.

11 “The Sustainability Imperative: New Insights on Consumer Expectations,” Nielsen Company, October 12, 2015, <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/report/2015/the-sustainability-imperative-2/>.

There is much more change afoot than how we are voting with our dollars too. Digital disruption is upending financial institutions, women are a growing component of a shifting political leadership climate, and political movements are beginning on social networking platforms. Add global pandemics and a worldwide movement for racial equality to the mix, and it can be said—without any sense of hyperbole—that our personal, societal, and political divisions are at an all-time high.

This is what current data and observations tell us: our world is changing in every way possible and will not respond to outmoded ways of thinking, leading, and collaboration. We are more aware, more diverse, and are struggling to communicate with each other through it all.

This is where we are. Where we go from here is up to us.

A FUTURE FILLED WITH HOPE AND INTENTION

As I was writing this book, my friend's daughter graduated from high school and declared an environmental science major in college. Each concept I present is with her generation in mind: What do we need to learn now so that, when she's my age in twenty years, she will have a solid foundation to collaborate with other leaders of her time? How do we embody a form of collaborative leadership that we know is needed so that we can teach it to her generation? What do we need to change about the world so that they have a place to go rather than a mess to undo?

This brought to mind early space exploration, when humans first left the planet. After astronaut Bill Anders snapped a photo from space—the iconic image now dubbed *Earthrise*—

he famously said, “We came all this way to explore the Moon, and the most important thing is that we discovered the Earth.”¹²

There they were, executing one of the biggest missions that humanity had ever undertaken—yet as they turned around to head home, it was the Earth that stood out as the most beautiful discovery. For centuries, we have looked outside of ourselves for the solutions to our environmental challenges. We sought to protect the Earth, and we learned to use and manage its resources. We found spiritual renewal, wrote legislation, called on science, and prioritized our business actions, but we did all of those things either as individuals or alongside each other. The one quest we’ve yet to undertake is to turn inward and toward each other.

Our most important discovery is and always will be the mysteries of this world. And we are part of that discovery. There is a well of untapped resources that exist within and between us just waiting to be found and applied.

There are no easy or definitive answers to our questions, but this is our home. Now more than ever, we recognize that we must do something drastically different to ensure an inclusive and sustainable future. The values that we hold so dear—both human and ecological—are at risk. A new form of leadership is needed. We are invited to evolve.

There are four leadership practices at the heart of our evolution. Used consistently, these practices strengthen our collaborative efforts and empower us to take collective action. I developed

¹² “‘The First Earthrise’ Apollo 8 Astronaut Bill Anders Recalls the First Mission to the Moon,” Museum of Flight, December 20, 2008, <https://www.museumofflight.org/News/2267/quotthe-first-earthrisequot-apollo-8-astronaut-bill-anders-recalls-the-first>.

this leadership model based on years of working in collaborative spaces, first as a conservation and international development practitioner, then later as a facilitator of transformational change. I've seen the success of this model to move our shared environmental agenda forward.

THE FOUR PRACTICES

Each practice has a central question that guides leaders toward mastery of collaborative leadership. They provide guidance at all stages of our growth and help us to remember how to navigate change.

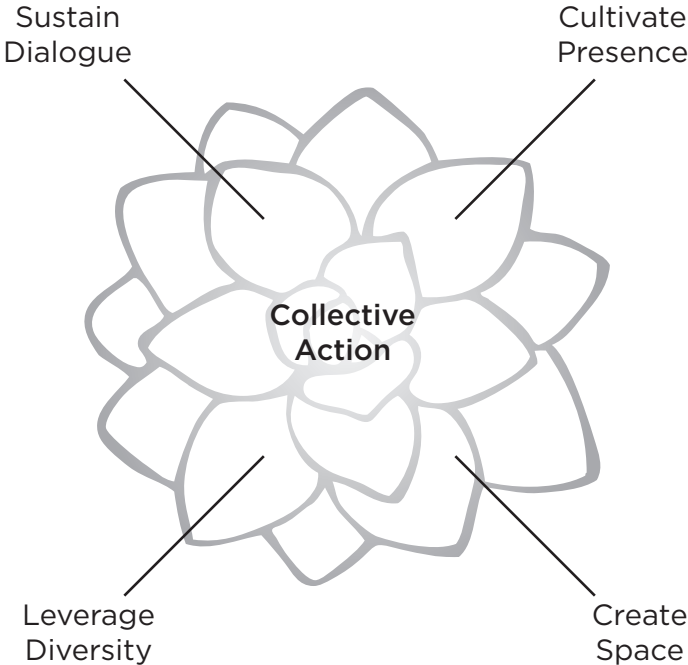
- **Cultivate Presence:** What is the compelling reason for doing this work?
- **Create Space:** How do we create environments that foster inclusive, trusting, and engaged partnerships?
- **Leverage Diversity:** What barriers need to be broken to ensure that diverse lived experiences are the fuel that ignite lasting change?
- **Sustain Dialogue:** How do we elevate our communication with one another in a way that consistently generates novel pathways to action?

TAKING COLLECTIVE ACTION

These practices create momentum and progress toward our shared vision. Collective action is more than a strategy. It's a journey of continuous learning that leverages collaborative leadership to produce innovative results.

- **Taking Collective Action:** What is the process we must follow to make substantial gains on our most pressing issues?

There is no one way to look at these practices. I present them in a linear way—the way our brains like to follow along—but you’ll also notice their cyclical, sometimes simultaneous, nature. This cyclical pattern is more reflective of the collaborative leadership experience. I offer the following image as a way to think about that pattern. Collective Action is the center that holds us together, but each leadership practice is an outgrowth that reinforces our ability to lead collaboratively.



In the chapters that follow, you will see that these practices begin with a personal commitment and then extend outward to how we work together within teams, organizations, partnerships, and society as a whole. They each call us toward a fundamental truth: the collective impact that our world needs

can only be created through relationships—to ourselves, to each other, and to the natural world.

These are practices that I implement in my own life and embed in my work on conservation and sustainability strategies. I teach individuals, teams, and partnerships how to use them to strengthen their leadership approach and stay the course on intractable issues. They are the necessary and missing links in our ability to create a resilient, healthy, thriving planet.

Notice that I have chosen the word *practice* very intentionally.

It's easy for us to accept that things like playing the piano require skill-building over time. We don't expect a four-year-old to play Beethoven within a year of starting lessons. Yet we also recognize that in ten years, that same four-year-old may have developed an incredible mastery of the instrument, may quit altogether, or may be somewhere in between. It all depends on how much she practices.

Leadership is a practice as well. Attend all of the leadership classes and read every leadership book you want (*yes*, even this one)—and you are still only at the beginning. Excellence emerges through habit. As individuals, that means we commit to it in our daily lives and routines. In collaboration with others, that means we integrate it into our culture and processes.

Practice gives you wide permission to be imperfect. *Practice* means learning is in process and that you'll almost certainly strike a few wrong keys along the way. And *practice* is required by everyone—even if you're a master pianist or an incredibly mindful leader.

Some of the principles are going to challenge you, your organizations, and your partnerships. Each of them is grounded in ways that are practical, applicable, and directly connected to results. However, this book isn't a formula, nor does it promise immediate results.

You should also be aware that there is nothing here that you can measure definitively by numbers. You'll feel and see the difference before anything else, and in a world that's increasingly hungry for connection, that measurement should be celebrated. For those who are already saying, "That will never work for me," hang tight. I'll give you some very scientific reasons about why it will. There is a body of leadership research that shows a statistically significant tie between the leadership effectiveness gained through these practices and organizational performance.

As you join me in this effort, please trust that you are far ahead of much of the world in your readiness. Having worked with thousands of leaders, I know that people who have a love and appreciation of the natural world tend toward an intuitive understanding of how to apply what I will share with you in these pages. There is something about the time we have spent in nature, our knowledge and observation of its inner workings, the stillness it provides, the awe it inspires, and all of its wonder that has primed us for this deep, transformative leadership work.

Lastly, the full impact and intent of this book is only partially for the people who will read it. In fact, any leadership work is only partially for us. At the heart of it all, our evolution as leaders creates a world that's adaptable to the change that will inevitably happen. That resilience extends beyond our natural resources, to our ecosystems, and to society.

I posit that the necessary next steps in collaboration and our leadership evolution is not to restore ourselves to a point in time but to value the undeniable intersections we have with one another *and* our natural world in a way that completely reshapes our future.

Fifty years ago, we celebrated Earth Day for the first time. Fifty years from now, the children who are born this year will be the adults contending with the planet we leave for them. Let's rise to the occasion, like the Earth rose over the Moon that famous day in space. We can leave them with more than what we have now. It's time to embrace and challenge our differences, to learn together, to work together, to act together, and to *be* together.

This is what collaborative leadership looks like. And this is our next evolution.



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to Shape Our Planet's Future*

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For more information please visit

www.lauracalandrella.com