



**By: Jules Lavallee**

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Larisa B. Miller is the CEO of Phoenix Global LLC, a global boutique consulting firm headquartered in Miami, Florida, specializing in international municipal and governmental consulting; sustainability and innovation strategies; business development and acceleration; as well as assisting clients in global market expansion and development. She worked for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, and later for the Pennsylvania Governor, Tom Ridge, in the office of public policy. Larisa spent several years working as a personal advisor and head of business development for a member of the Royal Family in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, with focus on sustainable development, energy and agriculture. Additionally, Larisa served as head of the Royal Family's large non-profit foundation, which focused on women, youth, literacy and education. Through her work with this UAE-based foundation, Larisa spent considerable time working with women and children in refugee camps in the Middle East and Africa. Larisa is an Award-Winning International Keynote Speaker recently named to the "Top 100 People in Finance," by the Top 100 Magazine, "100 Global Women of Excellence," by Sovereign Magazine, and "Top 10 Most Influential Friends to Africa," by For Business in Africa Magazine.

**When you were a little girl. What did you want to be when you grew up?**

I knew from a very early age that I wanted to grow up to see the world. I was (and still am) curious about cultures, landmarks, and people who were different from me. When I was a little girl – 7 or 8, I would watch the nightly news with my father, and then pretend to be Jessica Savitch, an NBC news correspondent. She was smart, well-spoken and beautiful, and I would imitate her, delivering a made-up newscast to my grandmother, who would record me on cassette tape. I would 'broadcast' from Egypt, Tehran, or Paris – whatever location was dominating the news-of-the-day. When I listen to those tapes today and I hear her voice, it reminds me how very much I miss her, but how fortunate I was to be surrounded by a family who helped to encourage my dreams – no matter how far-away or impossible they seemed. Through my pretend broadcasts, my grandmother was never condescending and she never laughed at me when she asked me very serious questions about the oil crisis, the plight of American farmers or the rising price of gold, for which my 8-year old self would answer with 'brilliant' and humorous, yet very grown-up responses.

**You have been recognized by several magazines and organizations as one of the most influential women in the world for business, your impact on Africa, and women's empowerment, receiving significant appointments, honors, and awards. Take us on your journey.**

I began my career in 1994 with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, in the Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission, and later as the assistant to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. Growing up on a farm in Central Pennsylvania and working for the PA Department of Agriculture cemented my belief that agriculture must be the priority sector as we

# The HOLLYWOODTIMES

move into the future. While energy, technology, infrastructure, and finance are central to our functionality, if we don't have food, nothing else will matter.

After my years with the Department of Agriculture, I went on to work for Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge, in his office of public policy. Governor Ridge was – and still is, one of my most significant role models. He was a middle-of-the-road Republican governor, who recognized the value in bipartisanship, allowing him to be one of the most effective governors' in our Commonwealth's history. He took the time to talk to everyone in our office, from the administrative assistants to the senior staff, valuing each one of us for our contribution to the team. It was not surprising that, when Governor Ridge was facing confirmation as the first Secretary of Homeland Security, he was confirmed unanimously.

Prior to joining Phoenix Global, I served as head of business development for a member of the Royal Family in Abu Dhabi, as well as head of their large nonprofit foundation. This opportunity allowed me to see the world from both extremes. I was witness to and experienced the beautiful and lavish lifestyle in the palace, as well as the sad and desperate life in refugee camps. One thing I can say for sure, as a first-hand witness, even with a life of plenty, the Royal Family prioritizes humanitarian contribution, with the UAE being one of the largest contributors to humanitarian impact in the world, and I am proud to have been able to make a small contribution to this during my time in the UAE.



Figure 1 - Larisa B. Miller in the refugee camp



As CEO of Phoenix Global, operating under the motto, “Vanguards of a sustainable future,” the mission of Phoenix Global echoes my personal mandate to sustainable development. I am committed to helping businesses incorporate forward-thinking strategies into their business models and operations, shaping them to become leaders in a disruptive marketplace. I prioritize sustainability, and a unique consulting service we offer our clients (governments, municipalities, and businesses) is the development of 2030 strategies and plans for resiliency – especially important during this time when conventional business operations are being disrupted. Businesses who integrate these strategies consistently outperform the market and have the tools to navigate tumultuous and unforeseen times. My goal is to position my clients to be the leader amongst competitors in a very crowded global marketplace.

With the personal motto “Unstoppable,” I am a proponent of the empowerment of women, and the need to stop seeing gender differences in the workplace. Equality in the workplace means ‘equally respected’. Men and women will never be “equal”, as we are so different from one another, however, if we embrace these differences, respectfully working together, uniting our diverse perspectives and thought processes, we will effectively end the need to discuss disparities in gender and equality.

### **What does leadership mean to you? How have you led?**

There are so many characteristics that make a good leader – many of the attributes come from years of experience, others simply come from being a human being – empathy, patience, compassion. In my opinion, one of the most important qualities of a leader is the ability to make a decision. Too many people get bogged down in what I call “the conflict of response” – asking others for the opinions, waffling back and forth. Multiple opinions only tend to muddy the water of thought, so a strong leader should weigh the situation alone or with one close confidant, consider options, then make – and believe in, the decision. Once you make a decision, follow it through to the end, regardless of the outcome. Sometimes the end is bitter, and sometimes sweet, but each conclusion you reach will leave you stronger than you were at inception.

As a leader, be resolute and do not quit. One of my favorite sayings is, “You haven’t come this far to only come this far”. Life is unpredictable and ever-changing. Be brave enough to change with it. As Darwin said, “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one most adaptable to change”. Do not be afraid to embrace change. Be strong in your convictions, even if those convictions are contrary to popular opinion. Do not be afraid to swim against the current. Sometimes a leader is very popular and well-liked, and sometimes they are the loneliest people – especially when you have to stand resolute behind unpopular decisions.

### **Share your perspective on Global Unity and how in these difficult times, we ALL stakeholders of our global future? How can businesses embrace unity to navigate this difficult time?**

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As we face this unprecedented time, where our health, society, and economies are in serious jeopardy, it is essential that we come together in unity and solidarity against this invisible enemy called COVID-19. This invisible enemy knows no gender, ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status, and the only way that we can minimize the impact of the COVID-19 is by coming together. While we will undoubtedly fight this virus for the foreseeable future, the uncertainty of what will be left in wake when it's over is anyone's guess. Ensuring that we all remain healthy, that our businesses survive, and that people can return to their lives, livelihoods and resume their known quality of life is the responsibility of all of us collectively.

We have this powerful resource that didn't exist through plagues and pandemics of the past...the Internet. While we are all self-isolating or quarantining around the world, we can use this resource to stay connected with loved ones, make new friends, learn a new language, take an online course, read an electronic book – or WRITE an electronic book. Even if we are stuck at home, we can use the internet to travel the world. Get to know someone on the other side of the globe. Maybe people will discover that we are not all that different, even though we wear different clothes, eat different foods, live in different houses, or pray in different ways. We are global citizens, and now...in this transformational decade, it is time for us to transform our thinking.

These tumultuous economic times are also the times when fortunes are made, and fortunes are lost. Many businesses – especially small businesses, are facing the anxiety of survival. But this is also a time of opportunity – to see that opportunity, all we have to do is adjust our perspective. Some businesses will wallow in the tragedy of this pandemic, some will lick their wounds and wait until it's over before they assess their way-forward, but the ones who will emerge as the vanguards of the future are those businesses who will take a deep breath, and look at things in an unconventional manner. How can you meet a need that is developing in this time of struggle? How can you adapt your model to incorporate greater resiliency to guard against future struggles? How can you shift your strategy to fill a gap in the market during this time when our access to products and services is limited? When it is our business or we are charged with leading a business, we often get so bogged down in the negative impact, and our linear thinking, trying to force our established business model on an uncharacteristically disrupted marketplace, that we fail to see solutions. As a business owner or leader, if your children are young adults, perhaps draw them into the dialogue of struggle. Present your challenges, and ask them to hack apart the challenge, and craft an out-of-the box solution. You might be surprised at the unique strategies that young people can architect, and they will be empowered through the respect and confidence that you bestow on them.

Business owners can also use one of their greatest assets to craft a creative, alternative pathway forward for their businesses. Your employees are stakeholders of your business' future, and when you shoulder the worry and stress, thinking you are protecting your employees from anxiety, you are actually making it more difficult for them. The fear of the unknown...wondering what the future holds, relative to your company, can be toxic to their mental well-being. Allowing your employees to be a part of the solution to a product, marketing or sales challenge, will give confidence, make them feel respected and appreciated, and in return, you will earn their

loyalty. You may just be surprised by their unexpected and creative approaches, concepts and ideas to your company's problems and challenges.

## **Where did your desire to help others come from? What is important to you now?**

The sense of satisfaction you receive when you help a person in need, improve the life of someone who is struggling, or give to someone who lives without much of which we take for granted is almost palpable. I have always enjoyed the feeling associated with helping others - even as a child, but it was really only when I started visiting refugee camps in the Middle East, and rural areas of Africa, seeing how life-changing a small gesture of kindness could be, that I realized the true value and impact associated with meaningful giving. Visiting these places was also where I learned the biggest lessons which helped to shape my thoughts, influence my sense of humanity, and guide my personal responsibility and belief that we have an obligation to empower our fellow man.

There is a 23-year old young man named Lincoln in Liberia, who connected with me via Facebook. Shortly thereafter, when I visited Liberia with Akon, Lincoln made it a point to meet me. He shared his astounding story with me, telling me that his parents were killed by rebel gorillas during the civil war when he was only 11-years old. At that tender young age, he was left to raise his one-year old twin brothers and two-year old sister. He would work on farms at night while they slept so that he could feed and clothe them. Now, twelve years later, his siblings remain in school and are well cared for, all because of the strength, tenacity, and maturity of their big brother. He is a classic example of someone who realized how strong he was when being strong was his only option, and on days when I struggle to be optimistic and would rather pull the covers over my head and hide, I think of this remarkable young man, and it motivates me to get moving.

There is a young girl in a refugee camp in Jordan with a singing voice like an angel. She has an infectious smile, and proudly sang a song for us. I later learned from one of the refugee camp workers that this young girl was a true orphan, having watched her parents being murdered in front of her in Aleppo, Syria. She was left with no other family, and now lives in the refugee camp, circulating amongst the families for care and feeding. Here is a girl who has every reason not to smile, and yet she smiles. Every day, I remind myself that there is no reason for me not to be able to find something to smile about.

In Iraq, I met a young girl named Nala, who lives with her family in a refugee camp near Mosul. She was so happy when I showed her a little attention, affection, and kindness, and she was pleased just to walk with me and hold my hand. It was quite cold, and she had no coat and mismatched shoes. We spent quite a bit of the day together, with sheer companionship and touch as our vehicle for communication, as we did not speak a common language. Towards the end of the day, she was asked by a friend of mine in Arabic what she wanted. She clearly has needs...she doesn't have toys to play with, she could use shoes, correctly-size clothes, and a coat. And yet, she responded to Maktoum that she didn't want anything, she had everything she needed. This moment with Nala, humbled us both and was a significant moment in our

# The HOLLYWOODTIMES

friendship, as we were both impacted by her words. Young Nala and her bold declaration has been one of my biggest life lessons. We have everything we need, and yet we constantly want more, more – often failing to appreciate what we already have. Every day, when I think of her, I am reminded to be thankful, grateful and appreciative for all that I have.



*Figure 2 - Amb. Larisa B Miller in Iraq*

**As a leader in business development, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development, what is your recipe for success?**

While the point of business is to generate revenue and make a profit for investors, business must now have a conscience. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an urgent call to action and global partnership in order to ensure the sustainability

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of our societies, economies, and environment. Agenda 2030 is based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which is a blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and our planet.

Businesses must join forces to make a commitment to responsibility. While we understand that not all businesses meet the standard definition of ‘sustainable’ – and they are necessary for supply, demand or service, all businesses can infuse measures of sustainability into their operations, supply chain or social responsibility. Social responsibility is an obligation of businesses, creating value for their employees, stakeholders, clients, and customers, by making a positive contribution and impact to their communities, or helping to make a measurable impact to global challenges.

For entrepreneurs starting businesses in today’s very transformational and disruptive marketplace, I advise them to build a plan of social responsibility into their business model, making ‘giving back’ an organic habit. I don’t believe in charity, as the charity model is not sustainable, but if businesses can combine their business mandates with a strategy for responsibility, finding a way to make their giving sustainable, they create a social enterprise which can endure without the need for sponsorship, donation or funding.

We are all global citizens, and our businesses are a reflection of our regard for the planet and our fellow man – good and bad. According to Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, “We are the first generation to be able to end poverty and the last generation that can take steps to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Future generations will judge us harshly if we fail to uphold our moral and historical responsibilities”. We have an obligation to the future to use our businesses to be catalysts of change.

**ABOUT OUR CEO**

Recently named one of the:

- **Top 100 People in Finance**  
by The Top 100 Magazine
- **Top 10 Most Influential Friends of Africa**  
by For Business in Africa Magazine
- **100 Global Women of Excellence**  
by Sovereign Magazine
- **U.N. Sustainable Development Goals' Partner**

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PG  
PHOENIX GLOBAL

Sovereign  
Larisa Miller  
100  
RE FINANCE

Global Woman  
Ask the expert:  
Empowering women by example  
Larisa Miller  
EMPOWERING  
WOMEN BY EXAMPLE

Figure 3 - Amb. Larisa B Miller - Phoenix Global

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**You have been a personal advisor and head of business development for a member of the Royal Family in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, with a focus on sustainable development, energy, and agriculture. Tell us about your work.**

Working for the Royal Family was an honor and a privilege afforded to very few ‘outsiders. The UAE is a model to be followed by global businesses and governments. They respect and encourage women to make contributions in both the public and private sectors, and they encourage and reward concepts of future innovation – regardless of gender. Women, and the diverse perspective offered by women, are embraced and regarded as essential to a strong and thriving society and economy, and I was fortunate to work with many strong and visionary women.

Additionally, the UAE recognizes the importance of education, particularly literacy, progressive agricultural investment to mitigate food security, technology, and STEM, and have introduced several significant educational-incentive programs, such as the 1 Million Arab Coders program, designed to provide training for one million Arab youth to become coders. Coupled with an economy-growing vision for the future, the UAE – and the Royal Family specifically, are exceptional humanitarians, believing that it is important to take care of those less fortunate.

**How is your company Phoenix Global uniting the world?**

Phoenix Global is a consulting and investment company based here in the United States, but the majority of our projects are in Europe and Africa.

On the consulting side, we work with governments, municipalities, and businesses to help them formulate plans of revitalization, resiliency, and develop their 2030 strategies. We also help new businesses to craft solid business models which will allow them to grow and emerge as leaders amongst competitors.

At Phoenix Global, taking pride in our strong relationships with heads-of-state in Africa and Europe, we assist businesses with their global expansion plans, we unite investors with investment projects important to the growth and development of nations, and we help governments in developing nations to accelerate their growth by giving them innovative solutions to their systemic challenges (food security, energy, technology), etc. Additionally, with technology being the nucleus of every industry and sector moving forward, we serve as principal partners in global technology parks, the first of which is in Skopje, North Macedonia. These parks are complete live/work/play ecosystems, uniting e-commerce, AI, blockchain, cybersecurity, IoT, robotics, and data centers.

**Share a story or two about how Phoenix Global has impacted the world.**

I have a personal commitment to youth and women, and the critical need for education, skills-building and opportunity – particularly in developing nations. We make a commitment in all of the countries where we have projects, to utilize the native human capital, making sure that there

# The HOLLYWOODTIMES

will be mechanisms in place to train youth and women to fill the employment needs. Not everyone will be a college-educated corporate leader...there needs to be trained labor, and jobs for these individuals once they are trained. This highlights the need for vocational-technical training and apprenticeship. All of our projects and technology parks are designed with the local workforce in mind, partnering with academic institutions and universities to provide the skills-building programs necessary to fill the job requirements.

As CEO of Phoenix Global, personally, I commit to mentoring youth and women around the world, helping to shape their thinking and strategies, guiding them into entrepreneurship or entry-level executive positions. When a young professional participates in a mentoring relationship as a mentee, their leadership capabilities grow, and they have quantifiable increases to their productivity and performance. I believe that all senior-level executives and professionals should mentor, serving as the accelerator in the life of a young professional, recognizing and benefiting from the reciprocal value to these mentoring relationships. The young professional gains the confidence, skills, and tools necessary to accelerate their climb up the leadership ladder, and the seasoned professional can benefit from the non-linear, out-of-the-box perspectives that young minds can contribute to age-old challenges.



*Figure 4 - Amb. Larisa B Miller, CEO Phoenix Global*

## **Who is responsible for the woman you are today?**

I've been impacted and shaped by many people in my life. My first-grade teacher, Mrs. Souders, was integral in shaping the way I felt about going to school and learning. If a teacher ever doubts their impact on young minds, take it from me, the time your students spend in your classroom directly and indirectly shapes their habits, confidence, and views of learning for the rest of their lives. My parents influenced the interests I have and the way I see the world. And while the list of influencers on my life goes on-and-on, and as I have learned lessons and had take-aways from many people who have intersected my life, the person responsible for who I am today is me.

I learn from my experiences, I explore my interests, refine my talents, and I am always looking for unconventional ways to 'connect the dots'. I talk to the people around me, many times finding fortuitous synergies and potential collaborations. I consider ways-forward with unexpected strategies, and I am not daunted by 'the impossible'. If I make a mess of today, I forgive myself and start fresh with the sunrise. I've learned that what you expect to be...the life plan that you've drawn for yourself...will be as ever-changing as a Dubai street map. Be open to adjusting your route, relishing the unexpected detours that life bestows. These detours lead to unimagined experiences, destinations, and people, often missed by those who are too inflexible, fearful or distracted to see these diversions as opportunities. Put down your phone. Look up. SEE the world. Destiny will walk right by those who are too busy taking selfies.

## **How does collaboration play a role in solving global issues? Can you tell us an example?**

Collaborations and partnerships are the single most important catalyst of positive change that will drive the future of our planet. Goal #17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is *Partnerships for the Goals*, encouraging cross-sector, cross-country collaboration. As the UN explains, "*A successful sustainable development agenda requires partnerships between governments, the private sector, and civil society. These inclusive partnerships built upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals that place people and the planet at the center, are needed at the global, regional, national and local level.*"

To receive the full impact and value from the power of collaboration, we have to see beyond our differences. At times, we must even see beyond our similarities and find the value in working with our competitors. Strategic alliances lead to expanded markets and customer-bases, valuable knowledge transfer, capacity building, shared risk, with both partners recognize that collaboration with a competitor is not necessarily threatening. At times, coming together can make both parties stronger on their own. While competition is the basis for business, sometimes, joining together can help expand the market, which benefits both parties independently moving into the future.

As we charge forward in this UN-declared *Decade of Action*, in order to achieve measurable impact to the SDGs, recognizing the complexity of our social, environmental and economic transition, collaboration will be essential, especially between the public and private sector. Governments and companies will be most effective if they recognize the value in Public/Private

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Partnerships (PPP), mobilizing and leveraging the value in business and regulatory unity – particularly important in the developing economies. PPPs help both parties leverage financial mechanisms, promote job creation, better manage resources, and encourage sustainable development, all of which lead to a significant impact to the SDGs.

## **What changes do you want to see in 2020?**

During this, the UN-declared *Decade of Action*, as the world now stands teetering on the edge of planetary failure, it is now time for us to recognize that this is the single most important decade in the history of mankind. We don't want future generations to look at this decade and say, "that was the decade where we ALMOST saved the world from climate change". We need this decade to BE the change.

Collectively, we must all embrace the responsibility of sustainability. NOW, it is time for action. Every person, every business, every government must recognize that we are the stakeholders of the future. We have spent years talking...planning...throwing around the word, "sustainability", which is one of the most overused and least understood buzzwords in the English language. Climate Change and the systemic failings of our planet are not "fake news". With our lakes drying up, superstorms and unprecedented natural disasters, population growth which magnifies our global food insecurity, rising temperatures, increasing greenhouse gas concentrations, what we do in this decade will determine whether we survive and thrive, or push our planet over the precipice toward an unrecoverable future of destruction. Does this sound scary? It should. Do we still have time to save the future? Barely, but we can. We are the authors of this chapter in our lives. We determine whether our story has future chapters, or if this will be the last chapter. The future is up to us, together. Period.

I knew from a very early age that I wanted to grow up to see the world. I was (and still am) curious about cultures, landmarks, and people who were different from me. When I was a little girl – 7 or 8, I would watch the nightly news with my father, and then pretend to be Jessica Savitch, an NBC news correspondent. She was smart, well-spoken and beautiful, and I would imitate her, delivering a made-up newscast to my grandmother, who would record me on cassette tape. I would 'broadcast' from Egypt, Tehran, or Paris – whatever location was dominating the news-of-the-day. When I listen to those tapes today and I hear her voice, it reminds me how very much I miss her, but how fortunate I was to be surrounded by a family who helped to encourage my dreams – no matter how far-away or impossible they seemed. Through my pretend broadcasts, my grandmother was never condescending and she never laughed at me when she asked me very serious questions about the oil crisis, the plight of American farmers or the rising price of gold, for which my 8-year old self would answer with 'brilliant' and humorous, yet very grown-up responses.

**Reference link:** [www.phoenixglobal.co](http://www.phoenixglobal.co)