

Lauren: Welcome to "52 Weeks of Hope." This is where you get to hear how to feel happy, balanced, and worthwhile, how to make that lonely ache vanish and feel empowered, confident, and secure. I'm Lauren Abrams, and today, we're talking to the groundbreaking leadership coach, loves [inaudible 00:00:15] cancer survivor and advocate for positive thinking and hope, Laura Rittenhouse. Laura's built a powerhouse advising top executives based upon the power of words. Her motto, "Our words create our future," is something we can all live by and actually it's how we manifest. Currently finishing her book, "The Blessings of Cancer," welcome to "52 Weeks of Hope," Laura Rittenhouse.

Laura: Thank you, Lauren. That's a wonderful introduction.

Lauren: Yeah. Now your business is based upon knowing who to trust and who not to, their candor, is how I understand it. And I believe our words create our future. Do you believe that in all areas of your life? Is that how you basically operate?

Laura: Absolutely. Absolutely. And it's not to say I don't engage in some BS at times. Sure, healthy BS is a part of life, but I also know that I've chosen...I've chosen to live a life of integrity. And what does that mean? That means my actions are going to be aligned with my words as much as I possibly can. And I look for that in other people. And if I don't see that in other people, I will not spend a lot of time.

Lauren: So what specifically do you look for?

Laura: Well, I'm looking for people who will...what are we... You know, what...first of all, what is candor? The word candor comes from a Latin word candere, and that means to shine light, to illuminate like the word candle. So candor is the act of shining light into dark places. And we, as I can't...I mean, I think we would all agree it appears that we are living at a time in history where there's a lot of darkness, and there's a great need to shine light into that darkness. The last thing I'll say about that is, okay, so darkness to me is a lot of BS, right? When people are not in integrity and just to say whatever is on their mind. And so it's important. It's so important in this time of darkness that everyone who cares about this chooses to be a champion of candor.

Lauren: I love the candle. That's...that works for me.

Laura: [inaudible 00:02:35]

Lauren: Yeah. Yeah. That's so great. So how do you know who to trust and who not to? You like that, huh?

Laura: Well, I mean, I think over time, if you have a low tolerance for BS, over time, you learn to trust your instincts because... Well, I'll tell you a quick story. A long time ago, I was invited to be on the board of this small...mid-size, mid-cap company. They were doing their first IPO and I was involved in the...as a board member, I was involved in supporting the CEO and doing all of

this. And as I was in conversations, I began to get concerned because I heard things that just didn't seem to add up.

You know, I'm a financial expert. I was an investment banker. And if it doesn't...I mean, you know, you know when you're getting...not getting the straight story. So finally, one day I realized I had to resign, I had to resign from the board, and the problem was they were in the middle of this IPO, which was not a good thing, to have a board member resigned, but I decided to go out to the company and do this in person.

I got on a plane, which as it was going up into the sky, the co-pilot ran out of the cockpit with a fire extinguisher. I said, "Oh my God, the plane is on fire. And I have to get out to Minneapolis to resign from this board. What am I going to do?" Well, obviously I'm here today, so that's another story. But as it turned out, I resigned. The IPO went forward, but then it didn't happen. And the CEO, some months later, he came to New York for a meeting and he disappeared. He disappeared.

And all I can tell you is that fast forward, a number of years later, he was picked up by the FBI for a litany of wrongdoing. In other words, you know, we all know, we all know when somebody is telling the truth and when somebody isn't, but what often happens is we're saying, "Well, I don't trust it. This person must be fine. So what I learned...what I've learned is that our words really create the future and they tell us who we can trust and what we can trust.

Lauren: Okay. So it's your intuitive sense? You trust your gut.

Laura: It's very much a gut feeling. Yeah. And what I find interesting is how many of us know this, and yet, then we don't trust that. And oftentimes that becomes a problem.

Lauren: Now, you've recently recovered from cancer or been declared cancer-free. Congratulations.

Laura: Thank you.

Lauren: Yes. And I know you are, you aren't very vocal about it, I'm not really sure, but you're writing a book about the gifts of cancer, which some people might not really get. Do you wanna tell us what those gifts are?

Laura: Well, you know, it's so interesting, Lauren, it goes back to the conversation we just had. So knowing... And by the way, I have shown that people can get quite wealthy by analyzing the words of CEOs and knowing which ones they can trust and which ones they can't trust, just by words. So with this evidence, I said, well, gosh, here I am with cancer. I never expected this.

I was with three very close friends and relatives over time, walked with them on their journeys. The journeys ended and they succumbed to the cancer. And I said, okay, well, I'm going to focus on healing my cancer. And what I realized when I became part of the whole cancer

establishment, was that the doctors there, they don't use the H word. They don't wanna talk about healing. And I kind of understand it, right?

They can't promise anything, but I was determined that I would talk about it, and they could talk all they wanted to about the treatments and I would go forward with the treatments, but I was always looking for the hope. So, for example, one time I was talking with my radiologist and I started to cry. So he was a male doctor. And I could see he was getting uncomfortable with my tears. And I said, "Oh, Dr. A., please, don't be upset. These tears are signs of my healing. Can you help me to celebrate these tears?"

Lauren: And what was the reaction?

Laura: He did. I could still feel he was uncomfortable, but he did. He smiled. And we sat there for some moments, just in silence, kind of enjoying that space and for me anyway, feeling hopeful.

Lauren: Yeah. That must've been unusual for this doctor.

Laura: Oh yeah. Exactly right. That is exactly right. That's one of the lessons. Okay. So the book that you referred to is what I call "The Five Blessings of Cancer or am I Crazy?" And so these are practices that I invented, that I knew that in order to come out on the right side of the cancer, these are things I just instinctively knew I had to do. So how can cancer be a gift? How can cancer be a gift?

Well, blessing number one, what is that? Cancer, it's freedom. Cancer gives you the gift of freedom. It frees me from the delusion I'm going to live forever so every day I get is a gift. Every day I open the curtains and I see the trees and they're brighter than ever. I hear the birds, they're singing stronger than ever. I mean, every day you get is a gift, it's a glorious feeling. So, and then I added others as I went through the experience.

Lauren: So you get a level of gratitude you didn't experience before.

Laura: Oh, very much so. Very much so. And to be able... I, you know, I know, I know, I mean, it changed me. So even today, here I am on the other side of cancer and I continue to live with gratitude, with hope and seeing the evidence. Now, what I was also going to say earlier is that, you know, what it means is you have to take responsibility. You have to love yourself so much that you're going to be the director, you are the CEO of your healing. You're the CEO of your cancer experience. You are gonna decide what kind of experience you're gonna have.

So for example, the hospital, where I was, they had somebody called a patient advocate. And if you felt that your doctor was not supporting you, you went to that person and they got you a new doctor. I did that three times.

Lauren: Good for you.

Laura: And a lot of people would be afraid to do that because they say, "Well, the doctor knows everything. You know, what do I know?" But if you don't feel comfortable, if you don't feel that your doctor is on your team, it's time to get a new doctor.

Lauren: Well, that goes back to what you were saying with trusting your gut and your intuitive sense.

Laura: Exactly. Exactly. Which I think it's, you know, it's trusting your gut, but I think that gets strengthened by, and also inspired by a commitment to love yourself.

Lauren: Now, I have a question though, how would somebody get to that kind of gratitude level for every day and appreciation for life without getting cancer? You know what I mean? People don't wanna have to go through that to get to that level of, "Yay, I'm alive. I love my life," and things like that without going through...

Laura: Well, all you have to do is you would say, "Hey, it's a new day. I don't need cancer to remind me that this day is a gift. And I'm going to celebrate, celebrate. I'm gonna celebrate the thunderstorm. I'm gonna celebrate the traffic jam. I'm gonna celebrate seeing a friend I haven't seen in 15 years and we're gonna hug each other so tight."

Lauren: Well, that's gonna be true once the pandemic's over and we get to actually hug each other again.

Laura: Oh, I can't wait for that. I can't wait.

Lauren: I know. Yes. Okay. So keep going with the other gifts.

Laura: Oh, okay. So lesson number one, lesson number two is choose positivity, choose positivity. So if you've now discovered that, you know, cancer is bringing you to this grace gift, already you're in a positive mode, but a lot, again, a lot of people would say...you know, and there were some days, let me tell you, I was not feeling too positive. Cancer is not...I don't think any disease is logical. It's not logical. It doesn't say, okay, this is five days, so now is going to happen. It doesn't work that way.

So...but it was just...you know, we all have...it's... We can't change, we can't change what has happened, but we can change how we feel about...we can change what we choose to do about what's happened. And that gives us power and that's a really positive thought. That's a really positive action. Like, okay, I can't change the fact that for some reason, my body decided to go into cancer, but look at all these things that I can do, look at all these things I could learn that I couldn't learn before. Look at what a blessing I now see life is because I have been tested...I mean, I'm being challenged in a way that... Well, and of course, what's at the bottom of that? Fear. And what's at the bottom of fear? Death.

So I decided, and I still do, use a different word. I call...I didn't...I don't use the word death. I say, well, then these people transitioned. People transitioned. I mean, because the word death means like nothingness, extinction, right? That's the... But we know...what do we know about what's really happened? We know all of these people, thousands, if not millions of people, who had out of body death experiences, and they all had the same experience, they found themselves, they found their spirits, whatever it was, lifting up, looking down at their bodies, and then they saw this light, and then the light was beckoning them, and it was so wonderful they couldn't wait to...whatever. But there's so many...so much evidence that there's something else. So it's a great transition. It's a great transition.

Lauren: Yeah. I love... Years ago, Anita Moorjani...I don't know if I said her last name right. I could spell it. That was one of the first ones I ever listened to. And she's all about love. I don't know if you've listened to her talks, but I got together with a bunch of friends from high school quite a few years ago. And one had seen her in person, one's religion didn't allow her to listen, so she went to another room, and the rest of us just gathered and listened. And my kids got so sick of, oh, are you listening to her again? But it was the most uplifting, powerful...

Laura: I have to get it. I don't know her.

Lauren: She is so great. I mean... And she's funny and she's brilliant and just... Oh. She had fourth stage cancer. She was minutes, right, I mean...an hour, hours from dying in the hospital. She's so good.

Laura: She reminds me of a woman I met. She works as a cancer coach now. It turned out, she didn't live very far from me. And I went to see her.

Lauren: Cancer coach, I have never heard of that. There are coaches for everything.

Laura: Exactly. Exactly. But, you know, this was it, you know, like you need a coach to get your positivity going every day, get a coach to, "What should I... Does this doctor...should I trust this doctor?" Whatever, you know, all kinds of questions. And one of the...and here's her pitch. This is her pitch. She was diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer. She was in her early 40s. She had two teenage daughters. Say goodbye to your daughters, get your affairs in order, you know, "Sorry, this is not looking good." And that was 25 years ago. And I'm working with her as...she's my cancer coach, right?

So one of the first things I said to her, I said, "How, you know, how did this happen? What did doctors say to you?" And she said, she went to speak to her oncologist, her cancer doctor, and the first thing he said to her was, "How are you going to heal yourself?"

Lauren: There you go.

Laura: In other words, we invest all this power in our doctors. Like the...you know, we have to, but it's, you know, it's a partnership. It's gotta be a dance. It's gotta be...you are the...you are it. You're the star. You're the star of the show.

Lauren: She got lucky with that doctor.

Laura: She did. She did, but that's why I'm writing "The Five Blessings of Cancer."

Lauren: Yeah. No, that's so great. Well, you were coming from a man's world of investments from years ago in that jungle with all those men. Is it hard for you...? You must have gotten really tough from being in that world. Is it hard for you to get soft and relaxed and not have that tough kind of exterior and...or no?

Laura: Well, that's a very interesting question. I've never been asked that before. And what comes to mind is the irony of it is that I was such a successful investment banker because I was great at bringing in new clients to the business. And why? What made me great? Because I had also soft skills. I could create relationships. I would...instead of talking about me, I'd get them to talk about themselves.

I would figure out ways, you know, where I could show that I really understood their needs, brought the right people in to talk to them, you know, got to know their families, what the kids' birthdays, all of that. And it's not, you know, it's not rocket science, not that you're a tough...yeah, they were tough bankers there, but they worked for me because I had the client. If you didn't have the client, you had no business, or for the traders, the tough traders.

Lauren: The answer to that is no, you didn't have to work at getting soft?

Laura: Not only that, it was an advantage. It was an advantage. You know, it was such a...because it was a time where there was...you know, women were not even made managing directors. So there was a lot of discrimination, gender discrimination. But, you know, that...now it's changed. Now, it's changed. So it was [crosstalk 00:18:06]

Lauren: No, it hasn't. It hasn't. That's the area where I...it's the area where I practice. And I have plenty of cases of gender discrimination that I am fighting, and equal pay for the same job, and the whole thing. It's awful. And pregnancy discrimination cases, I've always, in 23 years, had pregnancy discrimination. You'd think that there wouldn't be, but yeah.

Laura: Well, look on the bright side, Lauren. You have a thriving business.

Lauren: Yeah. I know. My practice is...

Laura: And your clients are very fortunate to have you, so...but, yeah.

Lauren: So as far as community goes, you speak a lot about your church, and I know you were very open with your church about everything you were going through. Yeah, I think community is so important. Do you wanna talk about that at all, what community does for you?

Laura: Well, I think it's a...well, there are lots of communities. In fact, over the months after my final treatment and I was still, you know, recovering, I would visit people and they would say, "Oh, my church has been praying for you," or, you know, "My Aunt Harriet in Kansas City is praying for you." I mean, I had people praying for me I didn't even know.

Lauren: How did that come about?

Laura: Well you have...you know, we have friends, they have friends, they figured that friend loves me, then they love me too. And I believe in the power of prayer so let's get the prayer machine going. Yeah. No, there's no question that the most important thing in the...you know, one of the...another one of the blessings is that it's...what I think is tragic is when people have cancer and they feel they have to shut people out because...you know, we're all, let's face it, we're all scared of it, right?

And so a lot of people find it's uncomfortable to be with you. And then sometimes you feel like, "Oh, I just don't wanna bother them." I'm telling you, bother them. Get them to... I mean, build your team. You need a team to get through this. You need a team to be cheering you, to... I did not go to one treatment by myself. Now, I don't have a family network so...but my friends and their...I mean, one, a friend of a friend, she had gone through cancer treatments and she heard...she knew me just not well at all, but she heard what happened. And she called me, she said, "I wanna go with...to a treatment with you," because she knew how important that was. So that's number one. Don't go to anything by yourself and let people in. People want to love you. People want to feel that they can be part of a miracle.

Lauren: That is so great. Is there something else that you would tell somebody that's having a hard time? It might not even be cancer, but...so clearly tell somebody and let them in.

Laura: Let them in. Let them in.

Lauren: Don't go through it alone.

Laura: Yeah. Yeah. And I think when bad things happen... I mean it's funny, I...you know, it's almost like I had training for this. I had three close friends, all of whom were going through I think I mentioned this, all of whom had different kinds of cancers and all three of them transitioned. But I was so privileged to be on their journeys with them and I learned a lot about courage in those experiences.

So it's...I think you asked the question. Well, it may not be cancer, but something else has happened that's really challenging, that's difficult, that's scary. You know, what's one of the most

important things to do is you have to get to acceptance. Sometimes that's hard. I mean, you say, well, why me? Right? No, this is not happening to me. I don't want this happening to me.

I remember early on, you know, at night I would just scream into my pillow and, you know, gradually you just say, okay, well, this is what's happening and it doesn't define who I am, but I get to choose how I'm going to deal with this. I get to choose how I'm going to embrace this and triumph over it.

Lauren: Acceptance and then an attitude shift.

Laura: It's so big, it's so big and it doesn't come easy. It doesn't come easy.

Lauren: Middle of the nights, never the best time, huh? Now you had some interesting messages of hope that you had mentioned to me earlier, before we were recording that you had seen.

Laura: Yeah. What was that? What was that? Let me see.

Lauren: And signs of hope that you had seen. Are there any practices that you do on a regular basis that help you maintain or keep a positive mindset?

Laura: Oh, okay. In fact I have right here, 99 healing practices.

Lauren: 99?

Laura: 99. Those are the ones that I developed. Okay. So for example, things that... Nobody does this. Why not? When you go to chemo, I go to chemo, set up an altar, bring your special things from home, you know, and put it on a shelf or something so you feel protected, you feel at home.

Lauren: So you could also do that maybe when you're traveling or if you're going someplace that you don't want to go, particularly the dentist, no offense to any dentists listening, or...and wherever it is...might be, not that going to the dentist...just anything close to as bad as chemo, but yes.

Laura: So let's see. So things like that... This is an interesting story. When I... You know, again, like you have to maintain the fact that you're the captain of the team, you are the CEO of the business. So one of my doctors kept telling me that she was worried that I was getting cognitively impaired by these treatments. And I said, "No, I'm fine. I remember everything. I don't forget anything." She said, "No, no, no. I want you to go see the..." Well, you're laughing about this. Did I tell you the story?

Lauren: No. But I can't even imagine somebody telling you that. What?

Laura: And so I said, "Oh gosh." So then she kind of twisted...I mean, she almost blackmailed me. I can't remember what she did, but I ended up going to see this cognitive person and, you know, it was supposed to be...she said, "Well, this could take two to three hours." And I said, "No way, Jose." And I was out of there in an hour and a half, you know? Boom, boom, boom. Okay. "What are these numbers?" "Five, seven, nine, nine, five, seven, nine, nine." "Okay. What about these letters?" You know? [inaudible 00:25:09]. So we went through all this.

And it wasn't until a few days later that I realized, I said to the doctor, I said, "What made you think that I was cognitively impaired?" She said, "Well, because you keep asking me questions about what is, you know, the prognosis of my cancer now, or whatever. You keep asking me the same questions." And I thought about it. I said, "Oh, now I get it," I said. And I didn't tell her this, but I realized that I kept asking questions because I never understood her answers.

So I would go to the nurse, I would talk to the nurse, and she would give me the answer that I understood. So in other words, the content, there's the context, right? Like again, it's really important. And this is something...I have to tell you. One of the... I could almost... This was like fun. This was fun. Okay? It sounds weird. But when I first started with radiation treatments and what would happen is I would go...it was in fact, this February, it was February two years ago.

So I would go to a place where I would get the treatment, and I'd walk in, and there was this large waiting room, and everybody's sitting there like it's a funeral parlor. Nobody's smiling, hardly anybody's talking, you know. So I would go in, I'd find an empty seat, and I'd sit down and go, "Hey, how are you doing this morning?" And we'd start talking. And then somebody else would talk and then somebody would talk. And I'd say something to make people laugh and someone else would laugh. And next thing you know, the whole temperature in the room changed. And it wasn't just because they turned up the heat.

Lauren: [crosstalk 00:26:55]. Right. You get the frequency, the whole...yeah.

Laura: Yeah. I mean, people wanted to be connected. They wanted to be alive. Be alive. We're alive today. Yay. So that was...it was a challenge, but it was so delicious to see how easy it was. And, you know, I challenge people that run cancer hospitals, why do you have...why does this happen? You know? Maybe... I don't know. I don't wanna judge, but it wasn't difficult to change that emotional temperature. And whether we know...we know that positive endorphins are healing. They're healing. They heal us.

Lauren: Yeah. And people need connection.

Laura: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. And here were all these people, we're sharing the same experience, you know. It wasn't the best... Oh, and by the way, like...so little, little things, again, tips for healing, Peggy Huddleston, who's written the most wonderful book about having the best surgery ever. Her book is now recommended by many hospitals. She worked with me on creating visualization practices, again, healing practices. So whenever I went to get the radiation, I would imagine the soft rain falling on the parched earth.

So meanwhile, the radiation machine is going, [vocalization], and I'm thinking the soft rain is falling on the parched earth. So I mean, there's just different ways. You have to create your reality. You have to create your reality and you create teams too. What did I do? When I got the radiation, the people would put a sheet over me, so they would get to see my feet and my head. So I started wearing really crazy socks to entertain them. I had Beatles socks. I had, you know, springtime socks, all kinds. And my last day there, I brought everyone on the team a pair of socks.

Lauren: That's good. I like that. For some reason, you're making me remember, I've started...first time I ever heard about visualization, I must have been pretty young. My mom's mom passed away from breast cancer when she was three. My mom got it very young. And then she got it again, you know, maybe a decade later and she passed away. But I must've been 18, maybe younger, I started doing visualization of healing on my body and I don't know, have any idea...

And yes, I got tested for the gene and everything else and don't have it, which doesn't mean it's not my family, it just means that I don't have it, so my daughter doesn't have it, but I started doing visualization for like anti-breast cancer visualizations at a very young age.

Laura: What did you visualize?

Lauren: I don't even wanna say because I came up with it on my own and I...because I was just like, oh, I'm gonna do visualization. So I just did my own healing. It's not like I read what to do. I just started doing it very young. So yeah. I don't know why, you just made me remember that.

Laura: The spiritual lawyer.

Lauren: Yeah. Right? Hey, we meditate...my...well, back when we used to have...go to offices, we meditate in the afternoons.

Laura: That's great.

Lauren: But it's not required, but to us...so people can chill a little bit. So do you have any messages of hope that you would want to give that you haven't discussed?

Laura: Well, okay. Let me tell a story. This is a really important story and particularly for the mission that you've taken on in the world, Lauren, you know, "52 Weeks of Hope," what a gift. Now, that's a gift. Well, one of the most...one of my most hopeful stories, okay? So imagine 9/11, okay? And it is the day after...2 days after 9/11, you know, and at nighttime, I can still smell the burning buildings, the burning bodies. I mean, you know, you close the window, but it seeped into the window. I went to...I decided to meet up with one of my ministers from the church I was going to at Bryant Park, which is right behind the New York Public Library.

And so I was arriving to greet him. I started walking upstairs and there was this long stair...long, long pathway in front of me. And at the very end, there was an elderly man with a sandwich sign, hold...you know, wearing a sandwich sign like people did back in the depression. I mean, he didn't even look like he belonged in this century. We're in...you know, that time frame and...but he had the sign. And on the sign, this was the day after 9/11, it said H-O-P-E in letters down one side of the sign, and then after each letter were these words, help other people everyday.

Now that is powerful because I would say that, you know, what I knew to boost my healing. That's one of the ways to boost my healing, you help other people everyday because it makes you feel good, and it makes them feel good. And it's how hope gets created. It's the hope incubation tool.

Lauren: That is a great story, Laura.

Laura: Thank you. Isn't it? I saved it for you.

Lauren: Yay. Thank you so much for being a guest today on "52 Weeks of Hope."

Laura: Thank you, Lauren. And to everybody out there, never give up hope.

Lauren: Yeah. I hope you enjoyed this week's episode, and take with you Laura's message that our words are how we create hope for ourselves and others, and to stay open and listen to what's really going on, what your gut is telling you. Be sure to tune in next week when the amazing acupuncturist, Teresa Wozniak, joins us discussing how we can heal ourselves from the inside-out. Teresa heals everything from stomach issues, to fertility problems, to menopause and perimenopause, neck problems. She's just amazing. Hear her suggestions for how to feel better right away and reach your optimal state of health right now. You'll love her calming presence and energy. You can feel it even virtually.

Be sure to tune in next week to hear Teresa. She's amazing. If you're on Clubhouse, be sure to join me in a room on Tuesdays and say hi. Be sure to let me know that you're there. Please remember to subscribe to the podcast and leave us a positive review and send us feedback on our website, 52weeksofhope.com. I'm Lauren Abrams. Thanks for listening.