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Dear *Women's Financial Edge* Reader,

Laurie Gardner is a motivational speaker, consultant, coach and writer who has traveled to 50 countries and speaks five languages.

In today's issue of *The Women's Financial Edge*, Laurie talks about what her life's journey has taught her: how we should stop settling for less than what we want and how we as women face unique challenges when attempting to follow our passions.

Enjoy, and please write to us at [editor@womensfinancialalliance.com](mailto:editor@womensfinancialalliance.com) with your feedback and ideas for topics you'd like to see covered here!

*Pamela Yellen*

Pamela Yellen Editor in Chief, *The Women's Financial Edge* and Women's Wealth Advocate

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## "Fun, Full, and Free"

by Sarah Perry, staff writer for *The Women's Financial Edge*, author of *Sand in My Sandwich: And Other Motherhood Messes I'm Learning to Love*



Laurie Gardner, Author, *The Road to Shine*

Laurie Gardner is a lot of things, but she also does a lot of things. Laurie is a motivational speaker, consultant, coach and writer. She has also traveled to 50 countries, speaks five languages, holds multiple Harvard degrees and has recently written a book that encompasses her life's philosophy.

Laurie's life might sound exhausting. But for her, it's nothing short of fun, full and free of regrets and fear.

*The Road to Shine* (Central Recovery Press, May 2014) is the story of Laurie's transformative personal journey and how she came to realize the steps necessary for a successful and meaningful life. Laurie poured the book into her journal during a four-day vision quest in the New Mexico desert.

To understand Laurie and her journey requires rewinding the clock 15 years to when she began her career by spearheading an international public school reform movement.

"I felt – and still feel – passionately that all kids deserve a free quality school," Laurie says. "We were riding the wave of the charter school movement, so I started my own organization, and before I knew it, I became an advisor to companies like Gap and Netflix, even the National Guard."

Laurie called her clients "edu-preneurs": those in business or industry who had a heart for the mission of public education and wanted to know how best to contribute to it. "It was mission-driven, and people cared," she says. "It was great to work in education because everyone was committed to the cause."

What Laurie found, however, was that most of her clients were men. In fact, it wasn't until she began advising local school districts and charter schools on issues like personnel, governance and leadership that she began to encounter more professional women. Laurie called these "line-level" employees, such as school directors, principals and teachers.

That's when things started to get personal.

Laurie notes, "I was raised by a powerful mother. She would tell me, 'Even when you get married, I want you to be able to manage your own money.' That's the example I had, so I was saddened to discover that women were still fighting for equal pay and equal titles in a modern era. In consulting with these women, our discussions went beyond school reform to things like finances, bad relationships and goal-setting. And I loved talking with them. It was such a rich tapestry. You can speak to women intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. We weave so many aspects together because we don't compartmentalize to the extent men do."

It was at this point that Laurie realized that she had a gift for relating to and motivating others. She also realized that some things in her own life had to change.

"I was literally running all over the world for work," she says, "but I had no life of my own. I was tired, not eating well, not dating. That's when I took the trip to New Mexico. I didn't know where I was headed next. As much as I loved working in education, I wanted to know how to impact people's lives more directly."

*The Road to Shine* was the result of that trip, and the speed at which it was picked up by a publisher might have been a gauge of how easy this life transition was going to be.

It wasn't.

Laurie's original editor left the publisher the day after Laurie quit her job in school reform to pursue a motivational career. For the time being, Laurie was stranded. She was trying to figure out the publishing industry on her own and now had to prove herself to a number of book reps. But she persisted because she felt she'd finally tapped into her life's calling.

"I knew I couldn't NOT write this book. Even when I lost the initial publisher, even when I knew it was a bad time to be a new author. It was clear that this was what I was good at and what I was supposed to be doing. I wanted to change lives."

After a bunch of closed doors that would have deterred anyone but Laurie, she reconnected with her old editor (now at a different publishing house). While they worked together to get the book published, Laurie discovered she was coaching her editor on goals of her own. It worked out well for both of them.

Her editor is now the head of the Oprah Book Club.

Eight years after Laurie's desert journey and resulting book, she's become successful yet again as a motivational speaker, coach and organizational

consultant. She uses a combination of vehicles in her new career. For some, Laurie uses life coaching. For larger groups it could be a leadership seminar. Laurie also makes media appearances and continues to write both a "words of wisdom" column and deliver two- to three-minute video lessons on her website.

As Laurie says, "It's all really about getting people to stop settling for less. I help people turn their lives around on both the macro level – with career and goals – and the micro level – with confidence and attitude."

The first step? Stop making excuses.

Particularly for women, Laurie finds that fear is a major excuse. Anxieties about money management, leaving comfortable but bad relationships and making major life changes can be extremely stressful. With some digging, the root of those fears can also reveal the personal triggers that hold women back. Often, these relate to how women are perceived.

For example, a personal trigger such as "growing up, I learned that people who value money are selfish and materialistic" could change a woman's entire financial perspective. Laurie calls these "shadow side" traits. "You know," she laughs, "the things you'd never want to show up in an obituary. Things like 'she was arrogant' or 'she was selfish!'"

These fears about perception go to the very nature of a woman's hard-wiring. Men, Laurie says, will sacrifice the relationship for the goal. For women, it's exactly the opposite. Because women are more collaborative and relational than

men, they often sacrifice their ambitions. Laurie wants to get women somewhere more "in the middle."

"You know," Laurie muses, "when I say something that I feel strongly about I can get vulnerable or tear up, and I've had women thank me personally. They tell me, 'It's so powerful to see a confident woman in tears!' I've realized it takes a lot of character to stand in your power and be vulnerable at the same time. It's much easier to slap on a mask!"

Laurie believes that women in particular have trouble waiting and hoping. "We wait and stress, we wait and get angry," she chuckles. "We have to practice patience, persistence and faith. There are always going to be things on this journey you can't control. So accept them. Only then can you get a clearer picture of your goal and follow your passions."

Laurie is a fan of The Women's Financial Alliance because she feels it does for women what Laurie is trying to do for them too: finding the courage to take that leap toward a more fulfilling life.

"I really feel deeply that there are some powerful, amazing women out there who are living way too small," Laurie says. "That's something that the WFA and I both want to change."