

JOURNEY of A FROG

by L.C.

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Introduction

This little book, as you can see, it is not an encyclopaedia. It will tell you my story from the day I was born to forty years later when my eyes opened and my life changed considerably. I can hear already some of you saying that this is the forties' crisis. Maybe I should buy a Porsche car [laugh]. Perhaps. But I have decided to do it another way. I do apologise in advance for the different technical paragraphs in line with my different professional experiences. Please, keep on reading till the end. I am sure you will like it. Thank you for your interest and bear in mind that you are the creative force of your life.

Childhood and teenage time

Born in 1979, the year Led Zeppelin published one of its last album (I will come back to that later), I was raised in France in a mid-class family.

My dad was working a lot in his father's company. Pretty often, if not every day, he had left home already when I woke up and was still not back when I went to bed. I must admit that my parents were young, early 20's when they had me. He had a job from his dad, but no money. He had to earn it which explain the long hours.

Raised in the east suburb of Paris between the light posh county 94 and the infamous 93, my childhood has been mixed between different social communities and holidays in various exotic places, as my grandparents on my father side had a house in the countryside and one on the seaside, and those on my mother side where living on a Caribbean Island. These eclectic worlds opened my mind to various cultures, building me as a lego construction with pieces from everywhere.

In April 1992, during my teenage years, I've had the chance to go with a friend of mine and his parents to Eurodisney Park's first opening week. My parents were spending the weekend with friends somewhere else. I am sure this day has been amazing, full of amusement, joy and colourful. I say that because I do not recall anything happening 10 seconds before I crossed the road to reach the car park on our way back. Full blackout day due to a car crash. Me against a sports car driving at 120km/h. Don't worry, as you can read this short story and notice that there is much more interesting stuff coming, it means the car's dead and I am not. Unfortunately, it didn't leave me uninjured as I have lost the acuity of my left eye. This event, at a young age, affected me physically of course, but emotionally, as I was always thinking about my injury, about the danger of the road, even more crossing one, about my eye's focus biased, about the fact that I cannot talk to people face to face

without them thinking that I was talking to someone else behind them. It affected my self-confidence, my self-love, my vision about the world, literally and psychologically.

School wise, I was definitely not the best student as, to be honest, my kind of rebel attitude and not so great marks were my best way to be negatively noticed by my parents and mainly by my dad. Believe me, it was seriously the worse and most stupid way to get my parents' attention. At the end of my teenage years, the big question of what do I want to do after school has been brought on the table. Seriously I had no clue at all. For me, to reach up to that level in school with a speciality in maths, physic and chemistry was already an achievement. What do I want to do after was a question for later. But the "later" was very close now, and I had to decide. With my father's help, we analysed the question: "Ok. What do you want to do, Son?" [silence] "Right...what do you not want to do?" There, many answers came. After a certain period of time, he concluded that as I like to meet people and to travel, the hotel industry would be an interesting direction. I applied to the different schools in Paris and to one in Lausanne, Switzerland, famous as being the oldest and one of the best in the world. As my dad said, if you aim for something, aim high. Not without difficulty, I have been accepted to Lausanne.

For already many years now, my parents were fighting on a regular basis. I was a young teenager at this time, but my brother, eight years younger than me, was growing up with this image as an only referral. Difficult to tolerate, I asked him many times to go to his room when the atmosphere was getting more and more electric or even explosive. A couple of months before I entered the school in Switzerland my mom asked for a divorce. Massive bomb in my life.

Studies abroad and first job in France

My eight semesters at the EHL, Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne or Swiss Hospitality Management School in Lausanne, looked like a very long time beginning of 2000, but so short by the end of 2003. Over this period, I had the opportunity to learn all the various aspects of the hospitality industry in both services and management, to handle social meetings late at night and still be ready and fresh early the next morning, to work in different types of kitchens from self-service to gastronomy and banquet, luxury bar, to travel and work in China, and to mix with many other students from other countries. I've learnt a lot but unfortunately, I was not aware of the most important added-value of this school: the network. I was totally ignorant of this subject at this time. For me, the other students were persons I was friend with or not. We could have some brainstorming regarding various disciplines, exchange of ideas or point of views or work together, but that was it. Never I thought

about them as potential development for my future carrier. Even the word “carrier” was not in my vocabulary back then. What a shame.

After I graduated, another question came: what should I do now? My parents were not living together anymore. After a certain period of time with my mom, my brother decided to live with my dad but he was spending most of his time in a boarding school in the suburb of Paris, France and, at the same time, my dad was more of an entrepreneur than...a dad. After many and many emails sent all over the world to a lot of hotels as I had no clue about what I wanted to do, done few jobs here and there to pay the bills, I've got two contracts in my hands at the same time. Lucky me even if the choice was not so easy. One was a fix position as Rooms Director for a hotel in the Maldives. Amazing opportunity, isn't it? The other one was a seasonal job as Night Auditor for a luxury hotel in Megève in the French Alps. It could have been worse. After long hours of thinking I realised that the size of the island, about one by three kilometres, would definitely not help my social development and I decided to go to the French mountains. What a great decision, as following the tsunami end of December 2004 the island disappeared under the water.

Those six months were pleasant but just postponed the previous question. Not knowing anything else, I kept going for the hospitality industry and put my curriculum vitae with a cover letter into the letterbox of my dad's neighbour who was at this time the CEO of Accor, the main French hotel chain. I got a fix position as a front office team leader which was, I must say, rapidly easy to manage. During my day time here, one year and a half, I sympathised with the revenue manager of the hotel. Her role was to optimise the revenue, mainly from rooms, and also F&B and meeting rooms due to the groups coming into the hotel. I discovered the importance of revenue management. The power you have by manipulating clusters and numbers, you can be able to get exactly the type of customers you want at a specific period of time depending on channels than you decide to open or to close and on your pricing structure. This is what I wanted to do and so, applied all around the world, but France. Don't get me wrong, I love this country, but more for tourism. It was not easy without experience. Then how can I get experience if no one gives me my chance? How can I get my chance if I have no experience? Many of you know these questions, don't you? Expressing openly my desire to evolve, my hotel director offered me the position of assistant night manager “to be closer to numbers”. I spent another year and a half living in the night. My manager and I were an extraordinary team, certainly the best this hotel ever had, with great customer service without talking about our efficiency. The night world of the hotel industry is very fascinating and definitely not the same than the day time. The type of customers is much more, how can I say, extravaganza. Something very important that I discovered during this period is that day-people will forget about you really quickly as they do not see you. So I decided to continue to spent a bit of time in the morning with the revenue manager for my knowledge first and to stay in touch with people who were supposedly helping me with my progress. Yes, supposedly.

In November 2007 I got a call for a potential position in the United Kingdom. “The interview will happen tomorrow in London” was the main information. I was so enthusiast that I booked my Eurostar ticket, did my night shift, got my train to London, went to the interview, got my train returning to Paris and went back for my next night shift without any break. I didn’t get the position [laugh]. But the interview happened in the office of the Director Revenue Management UK & Ireland who welcomed me in the building and we had a five minutes’ coffee chat. He still remembers those five minutes as of today. Six months later, he contacted me for a position at an event hotel in London. My new professional chapter was starting for something that I really loved. Such excitement.

A new life in the UK

End of August 2008 my new life started in the United Kingdom, or I must say in London as, shame on me, I didn’t travel a lot in the country. Once again the start wasn’t smooth. Why would it be? I discovered upon my arrival, luggage overfilled with my short life, that the room I was supposed to rent was a fake. Something happening often apparently, but still not appreciable when you are the victim. Thankfully, my new hotel director offered me to stay in the hotel until I found a place to go to. On the other hand, he was explicitly telling me every morning that I should find something quickly as one of the main biannual events will happen very soon. Groovy start, isn't it? And, by the way, did I tell you that when I started my new role I discovered that my knowledge on the subject was close to none. Oh, and that two weeks after I started, the 2008 crash happened, bringing the world in a recession which was a killer for an events hotel, but an amazing school for me. Would it be possible to start this chapter more easily? Yes. Add someone you met at the same time who was turning your heart and head upside down and was leaving "definitely" the country two weeks after you both met. Here you have a perfect start [laugh]. I found a room, mastered my new job at extra speed, and negotiated with my new love to come back to London to live with me...in a room.

The room was in the East area of London called the Isle of Dogs. Bounded by the River Thames on its west, south and east side, and by Canary Wharf, business district, on its northern part, Isle of Dogs looks like an island enriched by many parks and docks which were possibly used for the firewood importation. Various stories can be found regarding where the name came from. Here are two of my favourites. The first one, simple, King Henry VIII was keeping his hunting dogs on the island explaining both parts of the name. The second one is a bit more...bloody. In the 19th century, IOD was an area full of morass and surrounded by wild dogs. As the London's prisons were overcrowded, some prisoners were dropped here and could earn their freedom if they were able to pass through the island and the wild dogs, cross the river, and reach Greenwich on the south side of the river. I didn’t find any

list of Prisoners who have been made free following this method. What is sure is that the Isle of Dogs is a little London into London, a very nice place to live and really easy to commute. To be honest, I like this area so much that even if I had four different addresses in ten years' time, in fact, four in three years [laugh], all of them were in Isle of Dogs. Even this story has been written in IOD.

Now it is time to give you a little tease about the woman who settled my life. As mentioned before, I come from divorced parents. My point of view regarding commitment and wedding was really, how can say, a no-no, a dead-end. Even if my previous relationships were good, great or even amazing, I have never done the little plus to commit. I was fine like this. Period. This was until I moved to London. Here I've met a woman who was, who still is, beautiful and even very sexy in her uniform, wearing high heels and running through the hotel, very direct when she interacted with me the first time in a corridor and very lovely when you get to know her. We talked and talked and talked for hours until I offered her to come back to London. At this time, the economic crash was worldwide. She would maybe not have a job here knowing that she currently had no job there, but we would be together. We could try to know each of us better by living together and start doing it in my single room [laugh]. In my all life, the only person I lived with was my male roommate in Switzerland who became one of my best friends. What a jump. For the fun of it, I even offered her everything I had at this time which was exactly 18 euros and 20 cents that I gave her when she arrived [re-laugh]. The trial was a success as we've got married a year and a half after. For those who would ask, we are still together and will be for the next seven billion years. It is our deal.

As I told you previously I discovered that my knowledge was close to none when I started my new role. It was sadly true. There is a massive difference between looking at what someone does and doing it yourself. Unfortunately, I had to learn this lesson the hard way, to which the recession added another level to the situation. In this kind of high-pressure environment, I must admit that your "why" has to be strong. You must know very specifically the deep reason why you are here, why do you want to be here, to focus on the main picture. I will use this opportunity to thank the regional revenue manager of London at the time who helped me remarkably during this period. He offered me a lot of his time with high-speed training, shared his knowledge and experience. When I look back on this hazardous period, I am sure that I kept my job thanks to him for the main part. During the same period, the general manager of another hotel closed by, one of the very few directors having knowledge in revenue management, gave me great advice that I try to always keep in mind: "When you create a new (excel) file, make it multi-usable.". He meant there that time is precious. So if you take time to create something, try to make it versatile, usable with different figures, different time, different hotel. The time you will not waste by doing this can be enormous. In a more general point of view, be efficient. Do not waste your time. Time is your most valuable asset. Thanks to him too.

I spent exactly three years there, which was a perfect timing regarding the enormous experience and challenges I faced and passed. If you summarise the process, it will stay nearly the same for all revenue managers joining a new property. You spend the first year learning the functionality of the hotel, the teams, the events around, the market and the competitors keeping in mind that, theoretically, the risk to mess up everything is small as the system has been correctly configured by the previous revenue manager. This was not the case for my hotel as my predecessor left nine months before I joined [another laugh], The second year, you put your touch, set up the strategy to follow and control what is coming to the property. Considering that you did well in the second year after a first year of analysis, the third year is your masterpiece as you will have to do better than the second excellent year. Simple I must say.

So after three years, I decided to move to a start-up providing revenue management and reservation systems to independent hotels located mainly in Tunisia, North Africa and few in the UK and France. In contrast to my previous position where I was dealing with one big property, I was this time overlooking a portfolio of ten small hotels located in Paris, France, but still based in London. Every month or month and a half I had to spend a week in Paris to visit my hotels. The properties were definitely not branded which means that each of them was unique, very unique. And in contrast with my previous experience, the directors of each hotel were generally the owner. The management of the revenue is different as it can become more emotional, something I didn't experience before. In total honesty, I stayed "just" one year with them. You noticed the quotation mark. They are here because the time in a start-up flies at light-speed. And with ten hotels to manage, it was even faster.

Unfortunately, I didn't leave because I did my time, but for the safety of my still young marriage and for my health. I've learned how to handle pressure and deadline from my various experiences. No problem with that. But here I spent a year in the middle of a crossfire between the owners of the hotels and my management due to many over-booking issues resulting from a technical malfunction.

Inevitably I brought my work nightmares at home creating another nightmare here with the time passing. Free advice for you, my dear reader, if you are in the middle of a nightmare, find the origin of it. If you can fix it, fix it urgently. If you can't, run far away from it. You can always find another business. Family comes first. Always. It is what I have done. I ran and found another job to a single property hotel in London which was another nightmare where I just stayed a week. Yes, one single week. I will not develop this experience as too short to talk about it. Let's just say that my mindset was not ready for a new messy challenge. I needed to rest, calm my mind, fix my relationship first. And so, I made the decision to take time off during the Olympic summer here in London and see for my next move in September. Time to refocus on myself.

Welcome to the office world

During this hot, sunny and relaxing time for myself, I wanted to meet the actual regional revenue manager of London who started his position when I left my first London event hotel. We had not been able to meet at all over the last crazy year. Then he invited me to the head office. As I said above it was a really hot summer. I went there for a coffee, holiday spirit on, my clothes reflecting that. The discussion was very interesting. So interesting that he even asked me if I had time for a test and for a meeting with one of the heads of the country for a potential position. I've got the job, thanks to the support of the director of my previous event hotel who helped me with a great referral. And then in September 2012, I went back to my last employer in France and first employer in the UK.

My new position was based at the head office in Hammersmith, central London. The new revenue management strategy was now focusing on the development of multi-site hotels revenue managers, which means that a revenue manager will have to manage more than one hotel located in different cities, but mono-brand at this time [Are you still with me?].

I had the economic hotels in London airports, three hotels located in Heathrow, Gatwick and Luton. An amazing opportunity as great challenging markets evolving constantly. As I told you previously, everything is fine for a revenue manager taking hotels already in place as the previous RM will have set up the strategy a year in advance at least. Theoretically [laugh]. Once again I got the winner price. We were at beginning of October and I went to see my new regional RM, the same one who offered me the position, due to a glitch I'd noticed in the on-the-book (or OTB) and configuration of the hotels, of my three hotels. In fact, they were all empty after the new year onward, all three of them, which was impossible for an airport hotel except if...they were not opened for sale. And here was THE glitch: none of these three hotels had any strategy or system configured after the end of the current year. A massive problem some people would say, a great opportunity for others. It was my chance to show what I would be able to do in a very short period of time. Implement three different strategies for three different hotels in three different markets to cover the waves of reservations missed for the last ten months. Added to that, two of my three directors were new in the hotels and on this type of market. Exciting! The directors and I implemented a new strategy and managed the recovery by bringing new groups and clients to the hotels, and by regulating the cost very carefully. We did it so well that after one year only, the new Director Revenue Management UK & Ireland offered me another new challenge: overlooking a portfolio of 45 small hotels coming from low hotel category, 25 managed by me directly, 20 by a colleague. Purpose: Analyse the strategies in place and review the full system to make, if possible, this portfolio a golden goose or a cash maker. My touch in the "light support" world started. It was September 2013.

Even if the 2008 recession was an old story, the world was still fragile. Regarding this impressive portfolio, I have to be honest, the challenge was as amazing as messy, I would even say crazy.

Nothing was in place except the teams that have been doing the same job for ages. No rule at all, each hotel was doing whatever they wanted without any regulation. All of that had to be changed. But not without the director of each hotel on board. With this high number of hotels to deal with, it was impossible to do individual deep analysis for every single hotel. A system regulating all hotels altogether had to be implemented. One of the agreement to accept this challenge was the installation of a revenue management system (RMS) for each of the hotels, the very same one I was part of implementing in 2009. During this period, the main purpose of the RMS was to centralise all data from the hotel's property management system (or PMS). To give a quick idea, this tool gives you access to all information the hotel has, starting with the reservations the hotel had, has and have been booked in the future, origin of the guests, length of stay, purpose of the stay, type of clients, revenue of the hotel per different clusters and departments, etc [I hope I didn't lose you here.]. The data are impressive and very useful for any strategic decision. But always keep in mind that if you feed the system bad data, your analysis and recommendations will be incorrect. Garbage in, garbage out. Clear and simple, isn't it? You definitely cannot change the past. Neither do we. But we can do something for the future [like in life]. It was time to put rules, regulations, training, systems, motivations, positive mindset in the many teams composing this large and motley portfolio. In a year time, the changes applied and the teams properly trained brought a revenue increase by 40%, £20 million. By the end of 2015, in two years' time, due to the massive revenue generated and the light cost of this type of hotels, this portfolio was representing 23% of the country's bottom line. These 45 hotels were no more just a miscellaneous line during the weekly top line meeting. They were altogether representing a big part of the success of the company. With the right mindsets, the director, hotel teams and I have not been able to move mountains, we created them. A mountain of cash for the company.

After three positively challenging years, I moved to a more senior role. Still in revenue management and for the same company, it has been decided to split the portfolio I was overlooking and to give me six hotels and an assistant to train. The company mantra changed again. Now the Revenue Managers were not overlooking random hotels any more, but a single market each managing the revenue of all hotels in the area. All portfolios changed to set up this new vision. Then all markets were split, but some hotels were outside of this setup. And guess who got them? Yes, my new Assistant and I. Six hotels in six different markets. Why, would you ask? Why not I would say. Just another challenge in line with my previous ones. Fair enough, isn't it?

I will not bother you again with the revenue management side, I think you had enough. Let's focus more on my Assistant and what his arrival brought.

Years after years, I've noticed how my other senior colleagues were training their assistants. In my point of view, they were efficient, but the method used was too long, too soft, too conservative. To be

direct and clear, my assistant was and still is a very clever and intelligent person. So, I wanted to test him, to push him, to challenge him. I explained to him the various systems [don't worry, I will not develop this point] to enable him to handle all possible situations. With the right information, structural time management and the proper mindset, I was convinced he would be able to manage our full portfolio by himself in a very short period of time. Don't get me wrong, it does not mean that I had nothing to do as it takes a lot of time to be sure that everything was in place and properly done. Which means check, double-check and triple-check after him. It would have been faster to do it myself, but that was not the main goal. And yes, I was right. Very quickly, with the right training and just by guiding him to find the right answers by himself, he has been able to excel to the point that a short year after he started, he got his own portfolio. See, with the right guidance, a clear and unstoppable mindset, strong support even against the management, all limits can be surpassed. Well done to him.

Interlude

Thank you for still being here. As you noticed, my assistant spent a bit less than a year with me. We have now done the two-thirds of 2017 when the company decided to take another direction, again. In fact, two very important decisions had been made. One, no more assistant which means no more trained persons ready to take over hotels when needed. And two, complete change of the RMS [you remember, Revenue Management System]. As I promised you earlier, no more technical blah blah about revenue management. The main point here is highlighting my frustration created by these two decisions as, one, my desire to train and to pass my knowledge was unfulfilled, and two, my purpose to bring revenue moved to set up software.

I was unhappy at work, sad at home due to work, making stupid decisions caused by a depressed mindset affecting family, relatives, friends and colleagues. Being close to me was a very bad place to be. So bad that everyone who could was avoiding me. Certainly one of the darkest time in my short life. And this was it until January 2018 when my eyes opened during a single conversation.

When my eyes opened

Between 2013 and 2017, I had the chance to report to the same manager, an extraordinary person I must admit. As a proper subject of His Majesty, his words were carefully measured and weighed, his

patience was with no equal, and he was never showing his emotions. We had been able to create a true trust between us over these four years even if, sometimes, our tempers were definitely opposite.

As every year, we sat together to do my professional review of the past year. As every year, I was expecting a nice and easy meeting, thirty minutes reviewing last year and two hours' chit-chatting. I had no idea what was coming my way. I do not remember the meeting at all, just a single sentence from him which changed the face of my future: "Your attitude affects me". First time ever that he did implicate himself. No "I heard that...", or "The team says that...". Just "Me". Even if many persons highlighted my attitude, this "me" was the electroshock, the realisation of my current situation, of the terribly bad vibrations I was spreading all around. It was urgently time to change that.

When you read it written like this, it seems that I've suddenly switched from the dark to the light side one day to another. To be totally honest, yes, my manager's sentence affected me drastically, but was I really ready to change? Let's say that I gave it a chance which was already a big step for me. Worst case scenario, I was still able to go back to the sad, dark, unhappy, depressed person that I was before this virtual slap in my face [laugh]. I decided to put in practice something that you have certainly already heard of: I started to consider the glass half full instead of half empty. It can seem ridiculous, but just by focusing on this easy idea, your mindset evolves. Your attitude becomes more positive; you will face your problems as challenges; your conflict with others will become some exchange of points of view not looking to know who is right, but what is right. In a very short period of time, I felt better, less stressed, but more importantly, the eye of others changed. The law of attraction showed its powerful efficiency. Colleagues were coming to me for advice; they were offering me to join them for lunch or even for a drink after work. Once again, it seems ridiculous, but it was an enormous evolution for me. It was as going from black & white to colourful television. Same in my personal life. My relationship with my wife became much more relaxed. My daughter started to reflect my positive attitude. I opened myself and started to talk to other parents who are now good friends. I even started with a personal trainer. A ridiculous idea for me before, now I do understand why people talk about it as an investment in yourself, my first investment in myself which has been a fantastic decision as this incredible person supported me, trained me to get better physically, and to feel better internally. Even if I told you many times, thank you again. Definitely, the trial started to be a success.

In the meantime, my employer started in the middle of the year to focus on the wellbeing of the staff. Various training, workshops, meetings were organised not to teach you how to do your job better, but more how to be a better person. What a great coincidence. In the process of amending my attitude, I've got training on how to develop it even more. Perfect timing. Law of attraction again? Maybe not. Maybe? It was an amazing opportunity for me to open myself, my mind, to push me outside of my comfort zone more and more. But be ready for what you could discover on the other side as you might not like it due to being out of your comfort zone, not something that you have the habit to do, to see,

to hear or even to think. The idea of values emerged. Everyone has values. We can have some in common, but we own ours. Then I realised that the values of the company evolved with time and were not mine anymore. The more my eyes opened to my situation, the more I knew actions had to be taken. I am laughing remembering what happened then. A change had to be made, here was the fact. My new manager, a new one due to the change of portfolio earlier on, decided that I had to change. Ok, I am fine with the idea, but how was the question. I needed help. And there happened what must happen when you do not know your team very well, frustration due to a lack of communication. I am not saying who was wrong or right as we all have our credit here. There is no use for that. The most important was what was right. My attitude was getting really better at this time, but my manager wanted to change me to something I was definitely not in the purpose to fit into the new values of the company, the same values which were giving me a matter. Unfortunately, in my position, no evolution was possible in my department. I suggested maybe a transfer to the human resources or training department as I loved training fellow colleagues and the wellbeing of the co-workers was important to me now, David against Goliath. It could have been fun. How ridiculous I was [once again]. Instead of a new position, they offered me to leave. Sure not with empty pockets, but I must admit that after a third of my life spent with the company at this time, I was hoping that they would be more supportive. How credulous I was, and probably still am.

But do not stop reading yet. You didn't reach the end of this story. And believe me, it's just starting and will finish amazingly well. Stay a bit longer.

To condense, 2018 started with a great realization of myself, amendment of my attitude, indirect help from my employer with various training and developments, work on how I could be better for the company and got the door with some cash. Yes, I was not expected this.

What is behind the curtain?

On the 31st of December 2018, I was out of the company. On the 1st of January 2019, ready for the new year, I woke up full of energy, ready to conquer the world. I took a great deep breath and ... nothing. No idea, blank page. I did some small summer jobs in my youth, spent thirteen years working for a conglomerate, ten in revenue management, have the head full of expert knowledge, discovered my values, but no idea about what I could do. Even worse, no idea of what I would like to do. My time in my comfort zone had my brain on auto-pilot for so long that days were just passing one after the other. I had been in London for more than ten years. Arrived single in a fake room, now I have a wife, a daughter, a dog and a house. What happened? A finger snap and ten years flew away. The difference was that my eyes were now opened. As a friend of mine, one of the school parents [laugh],

told me one evening: “You took the red pill, Laurent. Welcome to the real world” in reference to the movie Matrix when Morpheus offers Neo to choose between a blue and a red pill. The blue one leaves you in the Matrix which is the world you currently know, your comfort zone, when the red pill wakes you up in the real world, disconnecting you from the Matrix, a world full of discovery, excitement and unknown.

Where should I start? First of all, relaxing my mind was a necessity after the past months’ events. I’ve decided to take the first two weeks of January off, which are not the best as the weather is generally not the greatest here in London, but at least it was my decision and I was focusing on it. You would ask: “Off of what?” as I was out of job. Off of torturing my mind to find answers to questions I was not even able to ask as I didn’t know what I wanted. I needed clarity. The second half of last year, a close friend of mine, not a school’s parents [laugh], linked me to one of his acquaintance. Adding to be very approachable, kind, helpful and a great listener, this extraordinary man is an impressive entrepreneur, coach, writer, husband and dad. In 2009, they decided with his wife to leave the UK for a two-years sailing world tour in August 2014 with their two (in fact three) young children, not even teenagers yet. He wrote a great book associating everything they had to learn, to prepare, to financially secure for this changing-life trip [ask me, I will be pleased to give you the book’s title]. With this contact, I discovered that I needed support to find my way. I needed someone able to guide me in the new direction I was taking. I needed a coach. After a few interviews, I decided to hire one who was maybe not the most experimented in term of years of practice, but she was the one I had the best contact with. She guided me to discover my main passion and desire, to give clarity to my mind and how to function a business linked to my values, my new passion, my new life. At the same time, I’d decided to extend my knowledge of the human being, and face my fear of new people, by going to various network and speech events. I reached back to my old school Stamm and used the meeting events that my coach was organising to meet new people, to extend my circle, my comfort zone. During this period, I was getting better with myself, still no job, but more peaceful. Through one of my coach’s event which was planned for women only, very interesting after you overcome the malaise I must say, I met two film-maker sisters. Lovely and very professional persons, they contacted me to join a free event they were recording a couple of weeks later. Unfortunately, I already had another networking event for my old school planned for the same date. That is what happens when you open yourself to new opportunities. The law of attraction works 24/7. How can I be in two places at the same time? The networking event will be interesting, no unplanned surprise and I will join persons I haven’t seen for fifteen years. On the other side, I have no knowledge of the other event’s speaker, of the venue, of the number of people there, of the subject...totally unknown. Here is when you have to focus on your “Why”. Why are you doing what you are currently doing? Why was I hesitating? My hesitation was due to my echo, my subconscious, the little voice in my head, call it as you wish, they are all only one entity, the safe you who is afraid to leave its comfort zone. But here I

was. Out of my comfort zone looking for new discoveries, new knowledge, danger, excitement. Managing well my way between the two events, I would be able to attend both starting with the unknown one. Let's keep the reunion to finish the evening. Once again I was definitely not prepared to face what will happen. Another switch to my new life.

Si Vis Pacem Para Bellum

End of February, I arrived at this unknown event far too early by an hour and a half. I saw my film-maker friends in the venue, met them, noticed the speaker reviewing his speech and decided to quickly introduce myself. Our first talk was extremely brief, something like "Good evening, I'm Laurent and very happy to meet you". His answer: "Hi my friend, very pleased too. Can you just leave the room as my team is setting up for the event? Thanks." Nothing more. So I went outside and waited. When the event started, there were about 200 people at the venue. The speaker, another unbelievable person that I am so pleased to have had the chance to meet, started by requesting each us to write the reason we were here tonight. Our why for this event. Then, when we all finished writing it, we had to tell it to our neighbour, but not someone we came with. And then the speaker asked who would like to share its reason with the audience. I could feel my body sinking into my chair. One person talked. Two. Three. Four. I started to think about the situation. I was in a venue with no one knowing me but my two film-maker friends, all here to support each other, no judging. There was an opportunity for me to face my fear of talking in front of an audience. I raised my hand. To be totally honest, I did it in two waves [laugh]. And the speaker noticed me. He turned his head, look at me and: "Hey my friend. Laurent, right? Do I pronounce it right?". I was deeply impressed that he remembered my name after our ten seconds introduction two hours ago. I told my reason with shaking legs and everyone supported me with applause. It literally warmed my heart. For something I was not really fascinated with, this event started in an interesting way. Then the speaker told his story which was followed by another exercise. During this new activity, he pushed us to go into ourselves to meet our mini-me, the child in each of us, and to listen to what he had to say. Once again, I must be totally honest with you, this exercise opened doors from my youth I was happy to keep closed, but it was too late. My mini-me talked to me. The old deep feelings hidden and covered by many layers reappeared and I could not lie to myself, I had to face them. After two hours the event finished with a room full of emotion and interrogation. I went to see the speaker and ask him for assistance in my new emotional situation. How can I manage, handle, my old demons and difficult relationship? He just offered me to join his next three days-event at the beginning of May. The location and surrounding should help me. To be continued...

And then here I was, end of February, facing emotions I wanted to keep silent. Waiting for this workshop, I could not stay inactive emotionally or even physically. So I kept working with my trainer, reading books talking about mindset, entrepreneurial business, viewing motivational and coaching videos, continued meeting my personal coach and working on my new coaching passion, attending other events where I even met other coaches with whom I sympathised. At the same time, I had a lunch planned with my first Director of Revenue Management, a friend of mine and Mentor now. Last time we met was six months ago. I told him what happened and shared my feeling. The lunch was in Hammersmith, the same area I used to work in. Very uncomfortable I have to admit. He was pleased with my evolution, sorry and sympathetic in regards to the location and how my employment finished. He is the kind of person who eases you just by being here. Always positive and smiling even after a difficult personal moment, in public at least, he will constantly have the right word at the right time. His support was and still is very precious to me. His experience, mentoring and attitude were just a few examples of what I needed and still need. A mentor is here to give you advice according to his own experience. He is not here to tell you what to do, just what he has done and what has been the result in a more elaborated method that a friend would, as feelings are not involved in the process. It took me a long time to understand the usefulness of a mentor, approximately as long as to find one I could trust as this element is crucial for me, one of my values.

March and April flew faster than I thought [but nothing compared to May, you will see]. Busy with meetings, networking, workshops, more pleasant time with my family and holidays planned a year before, my end in mind, my main goal was still to become an official coach. End of April, I went to another two-days' workshop presented by an academy properly accredited by the leading global organisations dedicated to coaching. How did I get in touch with this academy? I could say that the great algorithms used on the internet did their job, but I will stick to the law of attraction as the flow of events seems right. I have decided to sign with this academy to obtain another diploma in coaching to support my knowledge with proper accreditation. The week following this workshop, an ex-colleague of mine posted a job offer in revenue management. With the idea that an interview is always good to take and to learn something, I applied. The only two reasons I would go back in that direction, after everything you know, would be, one, to work for a five-star hotel and be certainly hotel based, or two, to manage multiple hotels working remotely. For more understanding, the second option means location free and able to manage my time as I need. The job position was for a five-star hotel in central London. My first option. After two hours and a half, the hotel director offered me the position. Great in a way as, without any income for a few months, my finances were not flourishing [laugh]. This happened the day before my so-looking-for three-days' events in May started. Here I was...finally.

The Awaken

The proof that nothing happens with no reason appears from the beginning of these three days. The workshop was organised in Hammersmith, the same area I used to work in not so long ago. Bing! But wait. It was in one of the hotels of my previous employer. Double Bing!! And the cherry on the cake, over the twenty-five conference rooms available in this hotel, the event happened in the same one where we had our last revenue team meeting beginning of 2018. Triple Bing!!! Would it seriously just be a coincidence or does the universe got my back? The only certainty was that I felt uncomfortable with the location in the location in the location. Very unpleasant. We were thirty persons from all horizons joining the organizer/speaker and two to four helpers/other coaches. Each day had its own objective. The main one for me was to work on the old feelings from my childhood which re-emerged a couple of months ago, but I used the opportunity offered here to improve my fear to talk in front of an audience, my self-esteem and self-confidence, elements linked together and for which I was very weak but getting much better at now. They are both a constant work, and only with small victories to consolidate the base, the mindset will stay. The first day worked mainly on the structure of the mental, on the fact that we were here together to help and support each other altogether. Over this day, I discovered and understood why my mom was and is still reacting as she does, and why my dad showed and still shows his love to me as he does. I really simplified the situation here, but believe me, the way to arrive there has been intense in emotion. I have to admit that it has been a true release even if this kind of work on yourself is a challenge every single time you talk or see people you are close to. By the end of a day full of emotions, hugs, love, laughs, tears from joy or deliverance, we had one homework to do in the evening: to call at least one person we didn't talk to for a very long time or a person we wanted to fix a situation with and let go. As you can imagine, I had to make two phone calls. My heart was full, my legs soft with even difficulty to support me and my back started to sweat. I called my dad first. He was on an island at this time. Unfortunately, the line was really bad which didn't make the call easy and him very pleased. I tried my best to talk to him, but very quickly the line cut with no more network available to reach him. Not the best start. I called my mom then, talked to her [the line was fine], opened myself, apologised and she thanked me. It was lovely. I could feel the weight leaving me and my heart warming. As soon I finished with my mom, my dad called me back, our talk was shorter, but he told me, in the way he knows and that I do understand now, that he loves me. After that, I slept unbelievably well, free from tensions I had since my childhood even if, as I told you above, it is a continuous work.

The second day focused more on our mini-me, on the child in each of us, to let go internally the loads we were carrying. We did various talks, chanting [amazing! Even my daughter loves it by the way], shares, and exercises. One was a breathing exercise. Very pragmatic people would tell you that we were just in hyperventilation. I must confess that physically speaking, yes, we were in hyperventilation [laugh], but it gave an opening to clear our mind, our thoughts and even to clean them with the feelings attached. As mentioned earlier, the emotion due to the location was very unpleasant even if the osmosis and mood in the room were very lovely and supportive. After a certain period of time of doing this exercise, the child in me appeared and, instead of having a sad, and tense face, he was happy, illuminated. He joined me in the bedroom where we spiritually met a few months ago, and he thanked me. The work on myself done over the last months and last days paid off. I had been able to let go of this part of me. To feel released. Just after, my parents appeared and this time, I did thank them. But wait, another person came to me, my latest boss. In my mind here, he was the representation of my previous job, of my previous employer, of the previous company I worked so many years for. I looked at him [pause], smiled [pause], thanked him [pause] and let him go. When we finished the exercise, yes, I was grateful for being released from childhood's loads, but even from my wrong feelings about my previous employer and everything attached to it as the location. In fact, what happened to me end of last year gave me the opportunity to discover myself, to refocus my attention on what is important for me, on my values, to see my limiting beliefs and I am sure that life will make me faced some others [laugh]. So now, the only important thing to say is: Thank you to all of you who crossed my life and made me the person I am now. After two days that I used to improve my self-confidence by sharing to the audience, I was feeling better about doing this activity, and even my self-esteem improved a lot. It was a very delightful feeling.

Like the second days, the third one was filled with chanting, deep shares and exercises. But this time we had to work on consolidation. We had to learn how to keep what we've done during this workshop for as long as possible, if possible forever. So we did one last exercise for that, the one which will push us all to the edge of our fear. To be honest, when the speaker announced this, I thought to myself: "Yeah, come on, try me. After the last two days and a half, I can face anything". I was so wrong again. By teams of two persons, the challenge was to bend a ten millimetres steel rebar with our throats. Seriously it was pure madness. I was thinking that I was going to die there. How will my wife know that I am dead as nobody here in the room has her contact detail? And we did it. We all did it. We all manage to bend the steel rebar with our throats. The atmosphere was just unbelievable, full of power, joy, support, love, release, relive. It was amazing. The purpose was to keep in mind that the best way to deal with fear is to face it. And seriously, the way used during the workshop to teach it to us will stay forever [sigh of relief].

After three life-changing days, we had to go back to our real life. But as we learnt more about ourselves, as I learnt more about myself, my life changed with me. I have cleaned in my own garden, hungry for more, ready for new challenges, for new changes. And they will come.

Two days later I had lunch with my friend and mentor, my first RM Director. I told him what happened just over the last ten days with the academy I signed with, the position at the five-stars hotel, the three-days' workshop with the locations impact and everything I had been able to do, to amend, to learn, to let go. He was amazingly pleased and happy to hear how good I was feeling then, how incredible my journey had been since the end of last year. After lunch, I even went to my previous office where I spent two hours pleasantly chatting with ex-colleagues. I was released and ready to (re)live.

The Universe got your back

The following two-weeks were filled by children's birthday parties and, on the other side, by various networking events and workshops, but really less intense than those three days. It could seem very quiet, but another unexpected thing happened. One day when I was cleaning my email, I noticed an old one from my previous boss, the one I let go during the three-days' workshop [laugh]. I've truly forgotten about this email which was the contact detail of a person managing a team working from all over the world revenue managing hotels all over the world. You remember, the second reason I could go back to this business. I wrote her a short email telling who I was and my story without seriously expecting any return. Once again, I was so wrong [re-laugh]. She contacted me straight away. We had an hour chat and she offered me a position. Law of attraction again? Great opportunity but I had two offers that I really liked now. Even with all my will and nights with no sleep, I would not be able to manage both of them. A decision had to be made. I've listed the pros and cons, tried and tried and tried to get a revelation, tortured myself, but the answer finally came with the help of my wife. She knew the situation I was in and the difficult decision I had to make. During a discussion outside in the garden, she asked me a question, only one question. I looked at her and asked if she wanted me to coach myself. Her little smile meant everything. Ok then. And I started talking in regard to the challenge I was facing. I went deeper and deeper in the analysis to finally reach a point where the illumination, the revelation came to me with no grey area. The decision was made. I had to call the unbelievably nice and professional director of the five-stars hotel and tell him that I will not be able to join his team. This position was an amazing opportunity, a very interesting experience and a great line in my curriculum vitae by itself. Unfortunately, with the other offer on the table, the equation

changed. Going back to my main life goal, to my end in mind which was and is coaching, time management and flexibility are some example of vital elements to take in consideration.

Your why is always important to know. It gives you a line of conduct, a line of behaviour which is good to keep in mind. Following this strategy, the law of attraction will bring you what you are looking for. And the Universe will always have your back. But do not lie to yourself, be totally honest. Always express what you want, what you are looking for, what you need. The Universe does not make the difference between negative and positive. It will bring you what you ask for in absolute value. So, never formulate wishes in a negative way or what you do not want will come to you. Always be positive. So you must know clearly what you truly desire, need, want and action this way.

To bear in mind before you leave

Do you remember the first sentence of this book? When I told you that I will come back to one of the last Led Zeppelin's album they produced the year I was born. Here we are. Six covers of the same scene have been done for this album which was a first in the '70s. I am not even sure if any other artist has done that since. What are they? Visualize a pub. You have one guy dressed in a white suit burning a paper with a lighter seating in the middle of the bar counter, and six other persons randomly placed in the same pub. The six covers are the point of view from each of these six participants. Great idea. What is important here is to keep in mind that you have one point of view. A situation can have different aspect depending on how you will handle it. I am not saying that if you fall in the stairs and break your leg you must consider yourself lucky, however, maybe something worse could have happened if you had not fell on the stair. We never know. What I mean is that you can consider your have-to-rest time to do something you postponed again and again. It is maybe the right time. These six covers are now with me and I see, even watch them very very often. They keep my mind aware of the various possibilities available, as a vantage point of view of possibilities. They all depend on one thing: your desire to action linked to your mindset(s). The law of attraction will do the rest. But never forget that if you lie to yourself, here too, the law of attraction will do the rest. It is inevitable.

Thank you for your time. I truly hope you enjoyed the reading and wish to meet you very soon.

Take good care and always remember that you are in control of your thoughts; your thoughts will define your world, and the only limit of your world is your thoughts. Go after the things you want and the Universe will have your back. Always.

Acknowledgements

To my wife who is supporting me even when I am a bit too direct, I love you for the next seven billion years.

To my daughter who gives me a rational and simple point of view which is, often, the best one, I love you right up to the moon and back.

To my parents who gave me everything they could and even more, I love you. To my young brother who is much more mature and wisdom than me, I am proud to be your brother.

To my friends who are part of my life and without whom I would not be who I am now,

To all of you that I mentioned in this book, and you who crossed my life,

THANK YOU. I LOVE YOU ALL.