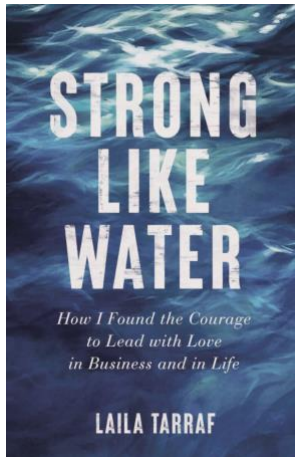

Strong Like Water

by Laila Tarraf



About the Book

Laila Tarraf was the chief people officer for Peet's Coffee and Tea, the iconic Berkeley coffee roaster, but she had a secret: She was failing in the most important relationships in her life. Yes, she was a strong and effective business leader, the successful daughter of immigrants, and the mother of a toddler, but she was disconnected from her own feelings -and had little patience for those of others.

All that changed, however, when three of the people most important to her - her husband, father, and mother - died in quick succession. Laila had spent her life leading from the head, convinced that any display of vulnerability would make her soft. But as this trifecta of losses led her to reconnect to her feelings, one painful step at a time, something remarkable happened. She became a better leader, a better mother, and a better person. Leading from the heart became the true source of her power.

This is a book about healing, about waking up, about learning who you are - who you really, truly are at the core - and reclaiming and embracing all the pieces of yourself you long ago abandoned in the name of survival. For women longing for balance, this is a path to opening our hearts and infusing our leadership and relationships with love, compassion, and authenticity.

"Water is fluid, soft, and yielding. But water will wear away rock, which is rigid and cannot yield. As a rule, whatever is fluid, soft, and yielding will overcome whatever is rigid and hard. This is another paradox: What is soft is strong." (Lao Tzu)

Discussion Guide Questions

1. Last year was hard for everyone ... How have you experienced adversity in your life and how have you **overcome or adapted** to it? What do you think has made you more **resilient**?
2. "**The antidote to stress is wholehearted living**," according to the Austrian Benedictine monk Brother David Steindl-Rast. What does wholehearted living mean to you?
3. The author's life was shaped by the dynamics of her parent's marriage. In what ways did your family of origin affect the person you are today? How are your **core beliefs and values** shaped by the people who raised you? How did the dynamics of their relationship(s) impact your **relationships with others**, particularly loved ones?
4. If you are a parent, has your **relationship with your child** changed you? Changed the way you are with others?
5. Over 21 million Americans have at least one addiction, but only 10% receive any kind of treatment. **Has addiction impacted your life**, or the life of a loved one?
6. There are many different ways that people deal with **grieving a loved one**. If you have experienced the loss of a loved one, how did you **learn to accept their death**? What advice or counsel would you give to a friend who was going through that experience?
7. Many of us have believed and held out hope, as the author did, that, "When this happens, then I will (finally) get what I need or want or deserve." When this does not come to pass, it can be very painful. What are you **holding out hope** for?
8. The author describes a conversation with her therapist who tells her that, "**you cannot have safety and life at the same time**. Life is connecting with your emotions and allowing yourself to feel pain." Do you agree with this statement? How has this been true (or not) in your life?
9. The author shares a revelation she has that, "Maybe there's not a linear spectrum where you are either strong and capable or weak and vulnerable. Maybe, it's more like a DNA strand where **the strong and the vulnerable strands weave together**, making a strand stronger than one or the other alone." Which of those strands tends to be the dominant one for you, or are you able to weave them together?
10. The author created a nightly ritual, the Daddy Box, that she used to help her daughter process her grief at losing her father. What **rituals** have helped you in times of distress?

11. What **valuable lessons** have you learned from the people you've worked for/with? Which lessons have you carried with you throughout your life?
12. How do you balance the desire to have a meaningful, exciting **career** with having a **personal life** -- falling in love, getting married, having kids, etc.
13. Do you keep your personal life and your professional life completely separate, or are they more intertwined? How does this choice **impact your well-being**? Your success?
14. "**Where you stand depends on where you sit**," was the advice given to the author by one of the leaders she worked for. What does this expression mean to you? What do you stand for?
15. The author states that what is needed for people to do great work is '**to be supported and to be held accountable in equal measure**.' Do you feel supported and held accountable in equal measure in your workplace? Why or why not?
16. What do you think makes a **good leader**? (Competencies, leadership qualities, etc.)
17. There are **different expressions of power** — it can be **hard** and **directive** or it can be more **caring** and **collaborative**. All of us have both in our toolkit. With cultural norms shifting under us, words like **authenticity**, **vulnerability** and **empathy** have entered leadership and business vernacular in the past 10 years. Given this:
 - How have you seen **leadership change over the years**?
 - Do you feel you **have more range** in how you can lead today?
 - What does this mean for us broadly as **leaders**?
 - Do you see yourself as a **compassionate leader**?
18. The title of the book, ***Strong Like Water***, came from the Lao Tzu quote: "Water is fluid, soft, and yielding. But water will wear away rock, which is rigid and cannot yield. As a rule, whatever is fluid, soft, and yielding will overcome whatever is rigid and hard. This is another paradox: What is soft is strong." **In what ways are you soft and strong?**

To invite Laila Tarraf to join your book club discussion, contact her at her website <http://www.lailatarraf.com>