

Helping Leaders Lead

An Interview with Alan H. Fleischmann, Founder, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Laurel Strategies

EDITORS' NOTE Alan Fleischmann is the Founder, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Laurel Strategies. Previously, he was a founding Principal and member of the managing board and operating committee of the global business strategy firm Albright Stonebridge Group (that combined the former Albright Group with Stonebridge International), co-founded by the late U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine K. Albright. He had earlier also



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served as a member of the leadership team of the strategic communications firm PSB Associates. Fleischmann was Chief of Staff to the Honorable Kathleen Kennedy Townsend and served in the State of Maryland Governor's Cabinet; a Staff Director of the U.S. Congress Committee on Foreign Affairs and its Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere; and a founding Vice President of the trade investment firm LATCORP. Fleischmann was also the co-founder of ImagineNations Group, a global network that promotes youth investment, youth-led enterprise, and entrepreneurship. Fleischmann was awarded the Goodwin Prize in Siena, Italy for ImagineNations' global work to promote entrepreneurship in the developing world. Fleischmann was a lead member of the Obama Presidential Transition Team from 2008-2009, was appointed by the Obama Administration to serve as a member of the Board of Advisors of the Export-Import Bank of the United States (ExIm Bank), a member of the International Trade Advisory Commission (ITAC), and as a member of the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars. Fleischmann serves on the boards of the Atlantic Council, the American Council on Germany (ACG), the Museum of the American Revolution, the Cal Ripken Foundation, the R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Emergency Medical Center, Morehouse College, the Washington National Opera of the John F. Kennedy Center, and JUST Capital. He is also a lifetime member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a member of the Leadership Council of the Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) Center, an advisory director serving on the Board of Trustees of Carnegie Hall, a founding member of the Clinton Global Initiative and formerly a

board member of the Phillips Collection, the Eisenhower Fellowship, and the Deepak Chopra Foundation. He previously served on the boards of the Jane Goodall Institute and was a founding board member of the Jane Goodall Legacy Foundation, where he served on Jane Goodall's Council of Hope.

FIRM BRIEF Laurel Strategies (laurelstrategies.com) works with inventors, entrepreneurs, foundations, and NGOs around the world.

Laurel partners with leaders to build relationships, communicate impactfully, seize opportunities, attract investment, navigate geopolitical dynamics, define and protect reputations, manage crises, and deliver results. Laurel helps design comprehensive strategies while executing across all levels of implementation, bringing together the disciplines of financial and corporate communications, government affairs, crisis management, investor relations, media relations, executive coaching, in-depth research, and business intelligence capabilities. Laurel Strategies provides clients with counsel and operational support to maximize opportunities and mitigate risks.

What was your vision for creating Laurel Strategies, and how do you define its mission?

We help leaders lead. That's what Laurel Strategies was created to do. When we started, and it is still true today, there were no other firms providing the full breadth of services we provide to CEOs and their C-suite. We designed Laurel Strategies to advise and empower leaders to navigate complexity with clarity and purpose, across every aspect of their business and all stakeholders globally. Our mission is to become indispensable to leaders by providing the tools, strategies, and insights leaders need to seize opportunities, face any challenge, and drive change. We operate globally, across industries, regions, and cultures to ensure our clients are positioned to lead in ways aligned with their values and their strategy for their business or organization.

What have been the keys to Laurel Strategies' industry leadership, and how do you describe the Laurel Strategies difference?

The key to our leadership lies in our ability to listen deeply and ask the right questions. Every engagement is bespoke, tailored to the unique DNA of the leaders and organizations we work with. What sets us apart is the combination of our expertise, our ecosystem of influencers and our approach. We are all-in. We bring a global perspective and a nuanced understanding of geopolitical risks, reputation management, stakeholder engagement, and crisis management. We're trusted advisors, helping leaders anticipate challenges, uncover opportunities, forge important relationships and make decisive, high-impact choices. Leaders also know that they can count on Laurel Strategies to be there, with hands raised, 24/7. We not only advise, we execute. We not only completely integrate within our clients' organizations, we also serve as third-party validators with our own independent reputations and ecosystems that are put into action for our clients.

How has the role of a strategic communications firm evolved?

Strategic communications firms have evolved from simply delivering messages to shaping outcomes. Today, you have to build deep, trusted relationships as leaders continue to face increasingly complex challenges, a fragmented media landscape, polarized points of view, and a broader set of stakeholders. It's not just about what you say, but what you stand for, your authenticity, and how you demonstrate it. What leaders say, when, who says it, in what sequence, and through which channels, matters to deliver the impact leaders are seeking to achieve. Firms like Laurel Strategies have become trusted partners, offering tested advice for communications and integrated strategies to allow leaders to anticipate what is around the corner and preempt what's next.

How do you see artificial intelligence impacting your work?

AI is transforming every facet of life. Professionally, it's providing tools to analyze data, anticipate trends, and tailor strategies with unprecedented precision. At Laurel Strategies, it will never be just about leveraging AI to enhance efficiency; it's about using it thoughtfully to enable better leadership – helping leaders connect more deeply, solve complex problems, and make decisions that resonate with their stakeholders.

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On a personal level, AI is changing how I navigate life, from managing time more effectively to gaining deeper insights into the world around us. It’s helping me focus on what truly matters: relationships, purpose, and the human connection that no machine can replicate.

The key challenge – and opportunity – is to ensure that AI is used ethically, responsibly, and with empathy. For me, AI isn’t about replacing humanity or the need for sound judgment; it’s about amplifying our ability to lead, connect, and create meaningful, lasting change. It’s an amazing tool, but the heart of leadership remains uniquely human. Ultimately, AI’s power lies not in what it can do for us, but in how we choose to use it – to inspire progress, elevate human potential, and shape a better future. Humans lead. AI does not.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership?

Effective leadership begins with asking the right questions. Great leaders don’t just provide answers – they foster understanding, build trust, and create a shared sense of purpose. They recognize and seize moments for leadership. The best leaders navigate uncertainty by staying grounded in their values while embracing new ideas and perspectives. Their clarity of vision and communication, as well as their empathy and agility, are what makes the difference in leadership. And of course, authenticity is the cornerstone of effective leadership.

How important has it been to build the Laurel Strategies team, and what do you look for when attracting talent to the firm?

Our success is directly tied to the strength of our team. The work we do is only possible because of the deep bench of brilliant, diverse, and deeply curious individuals who make up our team and the trusted advisors we surround ourselves with. When attracting talent, I look for a combination of intellectual rigor, highest level emotional intelligence, and passion. We rely on team members at Laurel who are not only experts in their fields, but also collaborative and creative. Our global team reflects the international nature of our work, bringing fresh perspectives to complex challenges. This diversity of thought and expertise enables us to deliver truly tailored, effective solutions for our clients.

You are widely regarded as someone who knows many of consequence and importance, both in the United States and abroad. How did you build this global network of leaders and influencers?

Our ecosystem of influencers and leaders is 30 years in the making. It began with genuine curiosity and a desire to connect with and learn from people who inspire me. I genuinely enjoy meeting people and learning about their lives. I’ve always valued relationships built on authenticity and mutual respect while engaging with individuals from all walks of life. Over time, I’ve built this constellation of relationships by listening, learning, and finding ways to add value to others. People sense when your interest is genuine, and that has helped me forge deep and meaningful connections across industries, cultures, and geographies. People also want to be part of the ecosystem if it consistently brings personal and professional value. Trust plays a big role here. Doing what you say is paramount in building that trust.

You’re known for the salon dinners you host at your home and around the globe, and for the fascinating people you bring together. What is your definition of success for these events?

For us, success at these dinners lies in creating “uncommon tables” – a gathering of individuals from diverse disciplines, industries, and lived experiences. These events are about more than conversation; they’re about fostering meaningful connections and uncovering shared perspectives that might otherwise have remained untapped. When guests leave feeling inspired, having learned something new, or discovered synergies with someone they hadn’t considered, I know we’ve succeeded. Building these bridges reflects our broader mission at Laurel Strategies to challenge those we work with to think and navigate the world in new ways.

You host a weekly radio show on SiriusXM called *Leadership Matters*. How does the show fit within the Laurel Strategies orbit?

Leadership Matters is my hobby that has become so relevant and impactful in ways I only imagined when we started the show several years ago. I enjoy hosting it, and I’m thrilled that it’s become so successful and has such a wide and diverse following. Our listeners are devoted,

and our guests are extraordinary. On a weekly basis the program offers an insider’s view of what it takes to be a great leader today, featuring personal stories of challenge and triumph from world-class leaders and thought leaders. Some guests are household names and some should be and will be. Each guest has a story that inspires, and each guest has a set of life priorities and principles that give one pause and a genuine confidence that there are good people doing great things.

This show aligns seamlessly with the mission of Laurel Strategies, as it extends our commitment to leadership excellence, providing a platform to share insights and experiences that resonate. The show reinforces our dedication to building effective leadership and authentic statesmanship, offering perspectives that are fascinating and qualities that we see are in great demand. The roster of guests we attract each week humbles me. I’m so grateful that the show is so impactful. Each of us are looking for examples of strong leadership and *Leadership Matters* is a unique platform for listeners of all walks of life to learn about them.

As Laurel Strategies celebrated its ten-year anniversary in April 2024, were you able to reflect on what the firm has accomplished?

Reaching this milestone is both humbling and gratifying. Over the past decade, we’ve had the privilege of working with extraordinary leaders across the globe, helping them navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and make meaningful impact. What I’m most proud of is the trust we’ve earned; leaders turn to us when the stakes are highest. Whether it’s safeguarding a reputation, crafting a transformative philanthropic gift, navigating new markets, negotiating business deals and mergers, or facilitating connections that lead to significant investments, we’ve built a reputation for being the firm leaders rely on for results. Our success has been rooted in listening deeply, asking the right questions, and remaining fiercely loyal to our clients’ missions.

These ten years have been about forging strong relationships and delivering exceptional value. As we reflect on what we’ve accomplished, I’m even more excited about the opportunities ahead and continuing to make a difference alongside our remarkable clients. ●