



## My Story: Eleni Pallas

I spent the first 20 years of my career working within large organizations such as Booz Allen, Deloitte, the World Bank and Orange (a European telecommunications company) in strategy and business development groups. I spent numerous years leading strategy partnership and acquisition teams across countries as diverse as Brazil, Russia, India, China and other countries throughout Europe and Asia. In doing so, I observed similar patterns of leadership and team issues across very different environments.

While I loved my work with partnerships, I felt burned out by the political infighting, never-ending cross-team miscommunication, misaligned priorities across fiefdoms and silos, disruptive mergers and acquisitions and extensive long-haul travel that was necessary at the time to support multiple initiatives. I was ready to find another workplace when I was in a car accident that changed my life's trajectory. The accident happened en route to a business meeting with a client in Novosibirsk, Siberia in February of all times; the middle of winter. That landed me in the hospital for 100 days, 15 or so in Novosibirsk and the rest in Paris where I lived at the time. That was followed by three months of convalescence at home, which gave me a lot of time to think. While in the past I'd ask myself, "Which next step is good for my career?," I started asking myself "What's the best way to use my life force and energy?" Being faced with a long convalescence, I felt more urgency to live life more fully instead of continue to burnout while trying to create order within an ever-increasingly chaotic work environment. When I was well enough to quit, I did so and took a few months off for rest and soul searching. As a result of that, it became clear that I love people-related challenges more than anything else and decided to focus my attention on finding ways to humanizing our workplaces. When I was fully well, I quit my job and moved to San Francisco for a fresh start.

Over time, I was coaching leaders and teams and teaching working professionals at UC Berkeley Extension. I had won numerous projects where I'd walk into fast-paced workplaces and find people steeped in tension, bully behavior, silent conflict or false harmony where everyone's guards were up. I've been called a double agent, spy and utopian by frustrated team members who didn't initially trust my intentions. As I coached and taught, interacting with so many people looking for better ways to lead and collaborate, it became clear that people were seeing each other as jobs or titles not humans. When their expectations unmet, they'd criticize, judge and blame that spirals them into further frustration, powerlessness and cynicism.

To facilitate ways to cultivate highly-functioning workplaces – especially when already steeped in dysfunctional work habits, I developed Human-Centric Leading. It acts as an antidote to recurring leadership and team culture problems because it uproots the basic assumption about what it means to be human: instead of seeing people as thinkers, doers or replaceable cogs in a wheel, we can think of people as whole beings with emotional needs and unlimited potential. Human-Centric Leading is a leadership model, mindset and set of tools that equips leaders and team players with was to cultivate workplace interactions and cultures where people can thrive instead of merely survive. That means people feel aligned with the team's mission, inspired by the team's rules of engagement and challenged to rise to their potential. Over years of testing, I condensed Human-Centric Leading to include the fewest number of tools that solve the biggest number of people-related problems. When used properly, it's a reliable model that generates useful insight and transformation at the individual and team levels simultaneously. To support learning, I published a series of five Human-Centric Leading Toolkits and continue to coach, teach/train, speak and write books with my first one that's upcoming named Reclaiming Our Humanity in the Workplace.