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Laura Xiao, Operations Director
Workstem HR Management System
Thunderbird School of Global Management, MBA '10

Every Hinrich scholar is an explorer of the world and can bring people closer together through their work in international trade and lifelong learning.

Be an inquisitive explorer

“Success for me is when you have achieved outcome through hard work and have gained valuable experience while striving for that outcome,” said Laura Xiao, Hinrich Foundation Global Trade Leader and, as of 2017, Head of eCommerce at Global Sources, a leading Hong Kong trade facilitator. She is also the inaugural President of the Hinrich Foundation Alumni Leadership Committee.

For Laura, success is not measured only by financial achievement: “My measurement of success will always be in terms of career achievement, trust bestowed on me by the organization I work for and the freedom it gives me to try new initiatives.” Laura the explorer thrives on seeking out new possibilities at work and never shies away from the seemingly impossible.

Hinrich Global Trade Leader pathway to success in trade



Laura joined the Hinrich Global Trade Leader Development Program in 2008 and was awarded a scholarship to study at the Thunderbird School of Global Management in the US where she earned her Master of Business Administration in Global Marketing and Finance in 2010.

“It was MBA on a different level. Besides the excitement of meeting new people, for once I was amidst students who had already been to many more countries than I had travelled to,” reminisced Laura. “It was in every sense a truly international environment and opened my mind to new possibilities. For the first time, I had an acute realization that my work experience should add value to my education.”

A firm believer in things international

Laura’s interest in things international started from a young age, as evidenced by her pursuit of an undergraduate degree in Commercial Spanish in 2004

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from the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE) in Beijing. In addition to her native Mandarin and Cantonese, she is fluent in English and conversant in Spanish.

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Today, she feels she is a true third culture kid who has embraced the world as her home. “I have been to 17 countries and, because of this exposure, I can better understand different cultures and get along with most people,” revealed Laura.



Laura and other members of Global Sources' management team poses for a photo after a celebration dinner with Merle and Miriam Hinrich

Laura is grateful for the support and encouragement she received as part of growing up within her loving family. “My parents always encouraged me into taking responsibility and making my own decisions which has helped shape my value system.”

Her mother, who is a practicing doctor faithfully committed to her calling, has always inspired Laura into taking up a career that will leave a positive impact on the lives of others. “I think my mother’s sense of accomplishment comes from being in a profession that she could use to help others, and I knew that I wanted to do the same!”

Career path of continuous learning & adding value

Laura’s forte is management, but she has the soul of an adventurer. She comes across as a leader who is on a voyage to explore new worlds and discovers new possibilities all along the way.

The skillset she has developed is comprised of interpersonal, analytical, troubleshooting, decision-making and intercultural communication abilities. Plus, her easy adaptability to any role that she undertakes has helped her make a variety of diverse work environments her own.

In 2010, with her new MBA degree from Thunderbird in hand, Laura became the Executive Assistant to the CEO of Global Sources. This gave her an excellent overview of international trade at a senior level. “Because of this position, I had access to all functions, processes and systems and the opportunity to compile as much trade industry knowledge and understanding of significant business initiatives – right from concept through to implementation!”

Laura wore several hats in this critical position supporting the CEO: She helped in market research, analysis and preparing business plans for core revenue generating projects, plus lead and facilitated several new corporate initiatives. She was adept at bridging communication gaps amongst business units to ensure effective communication and execution.

Besides liaising with the advertising sales teams to identify revenue growth areas, she attended business networking events to identify potential corporate partnership opportunities. Her strategic position also involved managing relations with government entities and associations to ensure flawless collaboration.



Laura and the members of the Gifts & Home and Hardware teams give a thumbs up to an outstanding sales achievement

In 2014, Laura was given profit and loss responsibility when the company made her Assistant General Manager for Global Sources' new initiative, the FashionSZShow – an international China fashion brand trade exhibition.

It was in this role that she honed her problem-solving skills and achieved 300% revenue growth from overseas brands and double the number of international exhibitors. She leveraged on the expertise gained in her previous role to develop and manage strategic relationships with 20 consulates and trade commissions, and collaboration with overseas fashion industry associations. Laura and her team also developed a partnership with KBiz (Korea Federation of Small Business) and the Korean Fashion Association, which brought in significant recurring revenue over a three-year period. This heightened exposure showcased the fashion trade show as a truly international venture in the global market.

As Head of eCommerce, she has taken yet another challenge and developed a new business. She and her team were responsible for creating, designing and validating processes and models for building a profitable e-commerce business.

Besides managing all aspects of the business, including service roadmap planning, content strategy and development, promotional campaigns and other online marketing strategies, Laura and her team were responsible for design, test and implementation of an effective process and methodology of predicting demand, curating products, verifying vendors and validating market demand that ensure a one-click, easy and trustworthy purchasing experience.

Turning things around – rise of the phoenix

“As far as life-changing moments go, I have two! The first when I graduated with my MBA from Thunderbird and second when my team and I successfully revived sales for a Hong Kong trade show.”

“On one hand, I felt I was being asked to steer a foundering ship. On the other hand, it felt good that the organization had enough faith in my abilities to entrust me with this challenge.”

In 2015, Laura was asked if she wanted to take up the challenge of reinvigorating sales for a trade show. It was a tough mandate as sales had been declining amid growing competition. She jumped at the opportunity. “On one hand, I felt I was being asked to steer a foundering ship. On the other hand, it felt good that the organization had enough faith in my abilities to entrust me with this challenge.”

Laura and her team were determined to turn the business around, comparable to the rise of the mythological phoenix from its ashes. The team completely revamped the exhibition business with new positioning that focused on quality, creativity and design. They identified quality suppliers and showed them how to present their products more effectively.

Slowly and steadily, the team turned the exhibition around, with significant revenue growth and 22 percent more exhibitors within two years.

“The critical success factor was the ability to turn team confidence and customer satisfaction from negative to extremely positive. That was the real winning moment in this endeavor,” Laura shared.



Laura and other Hinrich Global Trade Leaders celebrate the launch of the Hinrich Foundation Alumni Association (HFAA)

“Besides the new positioning and the strong revenue growth, we standardized several operational procedures that increased efficiency of internal communication among the project team and a national salesforce of 300. We reduced the amount of communication time by at least 50 percent, which meant quality time spent on actual work and execution.”

Teamwork: From idea to effective execution

Laura emphasized that she has been blessed with great teams who have the ability to take initiatives forward and execute them to perfection: “A great team is made of people with a healthy mix of different ideas and skillsets that complement each other,” said Laura.



Laura and other Hinrich Global Trade Leaders learn and have fun during a career workshop

“Sometimes eagerness to contribute can actually lead to poor execution; therefore each teammate needs to have the patience to understand and follow it up with right process and action.”

“Sometimes eagerness to contribute can actually lead to poor execution; therefore each teammate needs to have the patience to understand and follow it up with right process and action,” she added. She feels equally lucky to have worked with supervisors who have backed her 100 percent in her decisions and given her their absolute trust.

In addition to her teams, Laura shared her thankfulness with three people in her life and career.

“First and foremost is Mr. Hinrich, who sponsored my scholarship and gifted me a program that has helped me acquire a set of skills beyond my imagination.

“Next is the former CEO of Global Sources, Spencer Au, whom I worked with for three years. Spencer was sometimes a mentor, sometimes a friend, but most of all a storehouse of trade industry knowledge. He was a patient coach and willing to teach anything I needed to learn.

“Last but not the least, my grateful thanks to my current supervisor, Cameron Walker, who trusts me implicitly and gives me ample freedom to bring our business ideas to life.”

Laura notes with firm resolve: “I have to live up to my reputation of showing steady revenue growth for Global Sources year after year. Irrespective of projects and positions, I would like to keep contributing and see my organization expand more and more and impact millions of lives across the globe through sustainable trade.”

Patience and perseverance – advise for future Hinrich Global Trade Leaders
As the President of the Alumni Leadership Committee of the Hinrich Foundation Alumni Association, Laura is in a special position to share guidance with the next generation of Hinrich Global Trade Leaders. She feels that it is important for



Laura get together with fellow Global Trade Leaders and Mr. Hinrich at a dinner

those new to the program or recently graduated to be proactive, patient and view their early years learning in their careers as a precious investment in their future.

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“Patience is the key. In school we are always in a rush to learn quickly and assume responsibility too soon,” Laura said.

“As a result, as soon as we leave school our expectations from the workplace are too high.

“The trick is to keep your mind open and absorb as much as you can – and that learning is actually a lifelong endeavor. And be patient with yourself and with people around you once you start in your career, for it takes time for an idea to grow and take life. A great idea usually goes hand in hand with effective execution. So just to reiterate: Be proactive, patient and give yourself – and your company – time!”

Read more stories of inspiration from our Hinrich Global Trade Leaders [here](#).



“Success, for me is maximizing one’s potential in a meaningful way”

Naratevy Kek

Communications
Coordinator , Oxfam,
Cambodia

Hinrich Foundation alumna
Hong Kong Baptist University
MA in International Journalism
Studies '12



“Growing up I did a lot of sports - wrestling, football, basketball. That helped me build my character and ability to work in a team and understand that everyone has a role.”

Ben Wong

Eureka Nova Accelerator
Assistant General
Manager

Hinrich Foundation alumnus
Chinese University of
Hong Kong, MBA '15



“Success for me is happiness and seeking knowledge everyday. It’s important for me to go bed each night knowing that I have learned something new!”

Lauren Kyger,

Associate Editor,
TradeVistas, United
States

Hinrich Foundation alumnus
Tsinghua University, MA in
Global Business Journalism '16



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