

## A Closer Look: Laura Schwartz

*This is a sidebar to a feature about former White House planner, Laura Schwartz. Read the full article [here](#).*



Laura Schwartz, the former White House Director of Events, was 19 when she arrived at the White House in January 1993. The college student volunteered as an intern answering phones in the press office before climbing her way up the ranks of the Clinton Administration as the Midwest press secretary, director of television and, ultimately, the director of events, where she produced the president's events on the world stage. In her first book, "Eat, Drink & Succeed: Climb Your Way to the Top Using the Networking Power of Social Events," she mixes practical advice about research, appearance, timing, follow up and conversation with personal anecdotes from her life and White House years. Today, she is a professional speaker and the founder of White House Strategies, bringing her message to boardrooms, classrooms and ballrooms. She has been a television commentator for Fox News Channel, CNN, CBS' "The Early Show," BBC, Larry King Live and Sir David Frost's "Frost Over the World."

**How did you keep up with the demands of a busy planning schedule—travel, long hours, jet lag and endless time spent on your feet?**

Rubber-soled shoes! The first lady's press secretary gave me that advice to survive the marble floors in the White House. I found some great pumps that had rubber soles. Cole Haan has a line using Nike Air Technology. I always wear heels, because I am vertically challenged.

**Health tips?**

I'd love to say I ate well when I was at the White House, but I grabbed whatever was available. I was always focused. I didn't have time to get sick. Now, I always travel with a plastic bag filled with emergency vitamin C and every cold medicine. It's my little care kit; you have to do what you have to do.

**What do you do to relax?**

I walk and it helps me think. I lived like a tourist in Washington, walking everywhere. It helped so much with stress.

**What's your guiltiest pleasure or escape while at an event (including your own)?**

I don't think I really have any (when it's my own event). In Chicago (where I live), I always hop into Ghirardelli to get a sample piece of chocolate. I love chocolate cake mix, just mixed with water. I really need some guilty pleasures; I'm going to work on that.

**How do you gear up for the next event? Where do you find your inspiration?**

From my sister. She is really positive and has great energy. We're very similar, because of our parents. I run things by her. To say something out loud with someone else in the room, you realize how ridiculous or how remarkable it is. She's vice president of communication for Macy's North. Watching her and her events, I've learned a lot.

**Do you volunteer your time?**

Yes. I am on the board of the American Heart Association of the Midwest. I manage and lead their press conferences at the state capital. I serve as master of ceremonies on their heart walks. I advocate for heart healthy education. I also volunteer for United Way of Chicago and the YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago. I am involved with Step Up Women's Network, an organization of women mentors for young professionals and those embarking on second careers. And I am on the host committees for a lot of events, including the Ronald McDonald House.

**What's the quality you like most about yourself?**

I'm engaging. I'm genuinely interested and I love learning about where people came from and how they got where they are.

**Who's had the biggest influence on you?**

Again, my big sister—she's five years older—both personally and professionally. We were just named by Today's Chicago Women magazine as two of the most important women in the city. She really led the way.

**Other mentors?**

Outside of my parents and sister, Mike McCurry, press secretary during the Clinton administration; Evelyn Lieberman [Lieberman served as White House Deputy Chief of Staff—the first woman to hold that position—and the first U.S. Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in the Clinton administration], and President Clinton.

**Must have when I travel...**

The favorite shoes always go. Always two pairs—you always need a backup. I bring my favorite clothes: If you look good, you feel good. I took that from Billy Crystal, who ac-

tually said, “It’s better to look good than to feel good.” I always bring this little fan to run next to my bed at night. It gives me some sense of consistency—every bedroom has the same sound.

### **Favorite technology tool...**

My iPhone for so many reasons! I use the Keynote app to present from, though I always have a hard copy backup in case my iPhone crashes. And I have 3×5 cards with every number I could possibly need, especially for the specific event I am going to.

### **Best resources...**

Attending events as a guest, from free events to things you read about in the paper. The front and back of an event can really differ. I like to talk with other event folks to see what their challenges are...what they are doing differently. We need competition...that fire in the belly...but learning from others is what’s really important. I also read everything for ideas. I like to look at hotel room magazines; you see culturally how things are done differently in a city.

### **Favorite book...**

History books.

### **Favorite movie...**

“National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation.” I love it. Everyone can see part of their family in that movie.

| Advice |

### **Getting ahead**

I thought I’d go into communications or public relations, and go to Chicago to intern. I was out at a bar in college (talk about eat, drink and succeed...) and met someone who had just returned from American University’s semester program. I applied and headed to Washington in 1993. I chose to do a track on museum studies and art. I met with gallery owners and curators, and saw how they put together exhibits with photos, video and text to tell the story. Little did I know then that I would use what I learned in the White House.

That experience led to my internship with the White House press office. I was warned not to expect glamour; I would be getting coffee and making copies. I listened to what was being said in meetings. I listened to who was getting the most calls and meetings,

and I would ask if they needed help. I got to help them and stand in the background at events. I took notes and watched the mechanics of events.

I always volunteered. I kept one of everything I copied for myself so I knew how things worked. I had samples when someone asked who knew how to write a press release. I copied one and got a press release out. I would get the president's phone book and learn everyone's name and position, so when they called I knew who it was, how important they were.

There are two kinds of education: academic and experience. I never did finish my college degree, however, I was learning things each step of the way. I had great mentors who encouraged me. They often see things in your life that you don't always see yourself. It's been an incredible journey and I am still learning every day.

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