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EXECUTIVE PROFILE

LAURA THUROW



Laura Thurow...“I really enjoy coaching people and helping them build their skill set.”

SCOTT PAULUS

Embracing Baird’s culture, client-first focus

BY SARI LESK
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Laura Thurow believes your answer to a new opportunity should always be “yes.”

The 40-year-old says her willingness to try new things has been a key contributing factor to her professional success. Thurow has worked full time at financial services firm Robert W. Baird & Co. Inc. (Baird) since 2000. She got her start as an

equity research analyst and was recently named Baird’s new director of wealth solutions and operations.

Although she joined the Milwaukee-based firm full time in 2000, Thurow’s journey with Baird began in 1999 when she was a student at Trinity College in Connecticut seeking experience in financial services.

“I don’t think I fully understood the magnitude and quality of Baird’s reputation at that age,” she said. “I’ve really come to understand the

strength and importance of Baird’s culture and client-first focus as I’ve had more life experience and work experience.”

Thurow’s new job puts her in charge of the employees, platforms and services that support the firm’s financial advisers. In moving into her new position, Thurow succeeds Russell Schwei, Baird’s chief operations officer, who plans to retire at the end of 2019, the firm says. He will serve as a vice chairman for the

remainder of his tenure.

As Baird transitions responsibilities, Thurow said she and Schweibach have discussed the importance of doing what's right for Baird's clients and associates.

"That's a part of my personal belief system, as well, but really one of the key, core culture components of that group that I'll want to continue," she said.

Thurow said one of her goals as director of both wealth solutions and operations is to look for opportunities to improve partnerships between the two areas. One enhancement Thurow said she wants to make is thinking more about how Baird can serve its clients through digital tools.

"As more and more people do everything on their phone, (we're) able to really think about how to leverage technology, to either enable a client experience or enable the operational work of Baird, to then save the humans for all of those things robots and computers can't do," she said. "(We're) taking the technology to enable a better client experience."

Thurow joined Baird's Executive Committee as part of her new position, making her the committee's youngest member. The board, which serves as the employee-owned firm's governing body, includes 21 members. Thurow is one of three former interns serving on the committee, as well as one of three women.

Mike Schroeder, Baird's president of private wealth management, supervises Thurow and described himself as her No. 1 fan at Baird. He said he recommended her for the promotion for multiple reasons, including her knowledge, experience and leadership skills.

"She has this natural ability to empower others and draw the best

► IN THE DETAILS

Title: Director of wealth solutions and operations

Company: Baird

Education: Master's degree in business administration from the University of Chicago; bachelor's degree in economics from Trinity College in Connecticut; (also attained designation as a chartered financial analyst)

Family: Married, two daughters

Resides: Thiensville

Age: 40

Board or memberships: Recently retired from the board of The Gathering of Southeast Wisconsin

Best decision ever made? "The best decision I've made in my personal life

is to marry my husband, because he's amazing. This sounds cliché, but my best decision professionally was to come to Baird."

Toughest decision ever made? "I actually turned down a different opportunity because it wasn't the right fit for me within Baird. Something like this is more the right fit for me."

Best lesson ever learned? "Control what you can control, let go of what you can't."

Hobbies: Curling

Greatest place traveled: A month-long backpacking trip around Europe with her husband

out of people and leverage people's strengths," he said. "She's a wonderful coach of a team."

Schroeder also complimented Thurow's willingness to participate in Baird's initiatives. When the firm started a business diversity council in 2005, he said, Thurow volunteered to serve as a co-chair.

"That was a key moment in her career that allowed her to get a much broader perspective of Baird and all the businesses we have," he said.

Like Thurow, Schroeder serves on Baird's Executive Committee. He said he looks forward to the diversity of thought Thurow will bring to the group.

Thurow noted that diverse backgrounds, thought processes and experiences were also important to her. She said she believes strongly in the power of teamwork, both personally and professionally, and described the people who comprise the unit she has led as "terrific."

"(It's) super humbling," she said. "They're incredible. ... I actually believe strongly that I wouldn't have gotten this opportunity without having such a tremendous team."

In addition to her team, Thurow also credited her success and professional growth to the mentors who have guided her along the way. She said she is committed to paying that mentorship forward, which is why she participates in counseling her own co-workers.

Thurow partakes in a female mentoring system called Breakthrough Masters, in which Baird pairs women leaders with experienced executives for a year of mentoring. She has also played the role of the mentee through Baird's Millennial Masters program.

The six-month experience pairs millennial associates with their more senior colleagues to share perspectives about the firm.

She said she uses the opportunities to help her co-workers think about their careers, determine their highest and best use and see where they can have an impact.

"(I) really enjoy developing future leaders at Baird," she said. "Candidly, that surprised me, how much I enjoy it. I'm finance, investments, numbers, numbers, numbers. And I really enjoy coaching people and helping them build their skill set."