



You are the key

Stress Detective Series for Leaders

Hi everyone, this is Dr. Kristie Pretti-Frontczak and this is the second from a four part series that I've been calling the stress detective series for leaders. This is all about how we can be the most effective leader possible, especially during times that are so challenging or when uncertainty seems the thing that is the most certain. And so, we want to really pull from and leverage things that we already know. We're going to build from attachment science, the work around these 4 S's from [Dr. Dan Siegel](#) and [Dr. Tina Payne Bryson](#) that we're safe, seen, soothed and secure and we're also going to build upon the work of [Dr. Stuart Shanker](#) from The MEHRIT Center, in terms of this notion of the role that stressors play on the responses or reactions that we put out into the world. And so, this second part of the series is all about being seen.

When I think about defining what it means to be seen and the strategies that we can use to help others feel seen, I really thought about a phrase that I had read in the foreword to a book of my friend, [Dr. Tererai Trent](#). So in her book, [The Awakened Woman](#), Tererai speaks to many different things around our dreams and really, there's a lot of things about leadership embedded in there, especially personal leadership. There's a foreword to the book that [Oprah Winfrey](#) wrote and in that forward, she talks about how some people, some Zulu people have a greeting, a tradition, a very ancient tradition where they use this word, and I'm going to say it the best I can, and that word means quite literally, "I see you, you are important to me and I value you."

And so, when I thought about "What does it mean to be seen?" I immediately thought of Oprah's opening forward to Tererai's book, where she talks about how the Zulu people use this as a greeting to one another. And this greeting again says, "I see you, you are important to me and I value you." So, I think that really sets the stage for how do we unlock and how do we lead in a way that helps others feel seen? So, let's take it first and unpack other ways to think about, "what does it mean to feel seen?" And then, let's talk about a few strategies about how we can ensure that as a leader. So, there are a few things that people would often say, ah, you see me? So, if others see how I feel, or my point of view, that helps me feel seen. If others hear what matters to me, maybe even just right now, not like it used to matter to me.

I don't know how many of you. Maybe, you still feel like your parents see you like you were when you were 16. And you're like, "I'm not 16 anymore." I have different ideas and I have different feelings. And so, you really want to know that people hear what matters to you right here in this moment and what's important to you right now. I would even say that to be seen means that other people hear my shark music. So, what makes me feel overwhelmed or makes me shut down when other people can hear that. Then, they can start to reduce that or recognize that I may need some support. So, when people can notice my unmet needs, maybe even anticipate them, or at least in the moment recognize that I have a need that's going unmet. They can

understand my perspective. They can understand who I am as a whole person, not just who I am at work, not just who I am at home, not just who I am with one of the hats that I wear in my life, but they see me as a whole person.

I think this then evolves into really that my ideas, my thoughts, my feelings, matter to other people and I think if you break it really down, it would say that I matter, my life matters. And so, the more that we can see one another, the more that we can lead in a way that helps them stay in that green zone of optimal learning. It's that way that we have these secure attachments, that they are able to thrive. And so, this has many layers from classism to ableism, to racism, to sexism and just our own implicit biases that come up and keep us from really, as that Zulu greeting says, "I see you, you are important to me and I value you."

So, as a leader, what can we do? What are some concrete, practical things that we could do every day in our verbalizations, our nonverbal behaviors and communications, and even in our written word. So, a couple of things that we can do is really remain curious and this is where we're really going to channel the work of Stuart Shaker, and we're going to say, "Huh, when I see a particular behavior, I see it, but I'm not going to judge it." Instead, I'm going to ask why and why now? It's that infamous thing that [Laura Fish](#) talks about of seeing the child behind the behavior, and as she and I have talked about, seeing the adult behind the behavior. We want to stay in our prefrontal cortex. We want to stay in our curious mind and ask, "Why and why now?"

We also want to really listen deeply. We want to listen for understanding. Remember others feel seen when we see their point of view, when we can see their perspective, when we can hear what really is mattering to them right now. That also means that we have to avoid rushing to find solutions or to fix things. That might mean turning our own shark music down so that we can allow for processing of not just the verbalization but processing of the emotion. We need to give people that time to feel what they're going to feel and if anything, offer an opportunity to use a coping strategy.

So, we're going to channel what we've learned in our work with children, from [Alyssa Blask Campbell](#) of Seed & Sew and we're really going to slow down and make sure that people have an opportunity to process a big emotion and use some coping strategy, and that coping strategy isn't to avoid the emotion or to rush the emotion but to process the emotion. And so, I'm going to be really attuned to what others are thinking, feeling, experiencing. And as my friend, [Jennifer Lopez](#) would invite us, to even be attuned to what they're dreaming about. What are they hopeful about? What do they see as an ideal future for themselves and their work and who they're in service of and-

I'm channeling all kinds of my friends today, but [Petra Kolber](#) would talk about how to break our perfectionism and to be in a place where we're reflecting and not ruminating and reacting. And so, if I work with the facts and I'm in the moment and I'm able to notice without judgment what others need, that is what a great leader does. That is what a leader does that isn't stuck in their own perfectionism, but really

is working with the facts, being in the moment, and really noticing those needs. Because remember, someone really feels seen when somebody can notice that they have an unmet need. I'm also the calm that others seek even if they don't really know that they're looking for a lifeline.

If I can be encouraging, affirming, validating, those will all create that calm. And so I really need to, once again, be empathetic. I have to notice that you have a need and I have enough compassion and enough in my own tank to do something about that. Again, not to try to fix it or to alleviate it, but to hold that space for someone and to really think about how can I be attuned with what you're thinking, feeling, experiencing and dreaming about, but this means that as a leader, I need to be really aware of my own biases.

Remember, if every life matters, if I'm going to do things that show others that they matter, I have to be aware of my own biases and my last friend that we're going to channel is [Iijima Jordan](#). We're going to say, I have to be accountable for my impact, not just my intentions. And so, as a strong leader, I'm not only non-racist, I'm anti-racist. And what this allows us to do, now, is a more passive approach. If I'm anti-racist, is a call to action. And so, if I am wanting others to know that their ideas and their thoughts and their feelings matter to me and that they matter and that their life matters, because again, with that Zulu greeting, "I see you, you're important to me and I value you."