

Transcript:

The Secure Leader: How Attachment Styles Shape Leadership | Part One

Cause And Purpose Opening

Melody King 0:00

Everything rises and falls on leadership. The ability to lead well is fueled by living your cause and purpose. This podcast will equip you with the tools to do just that. Live and lead with cause and purpose. And now, author of the book, The Anatomy of Leadership, and our host, Chris Comeaux.

Chris Comeaux 0:21

Hello and welcome. I'm so excited today. Welcome to our podcast. Our guest today is Jamie Goff. She is the founder and president of the Empathetic Leader, an executive coaching and leadership development firm. Welcome, Jamie. It's so good to have you.

Jaime Goff 0:35

Thank you, Chris. I'm happy to be here.

Chris Comeaux 0:37

Yeah, let me read from your bio so our listeners can get to know you a little bit better. So, Dr. Jamie Goff is the founder of The Empathetic Leader, where she specializes in helping leaders unlock their full potential through executive coaching, insightful workshops, and thought-provoking keynotes. With her unique blend of expertise in psychology and leadership development, Jamie helps individuals and teams navigate their toughest challenges, build resilience, and achieve transformative growth. In addition to her coaching and speaking, Jamie has served in the past as a director of leadership development for an international healthcare system where she designed and led innovative programs that inspired leaders to thrive. Her career began in higher education as a professor of couple and family therapy and later as an academic dean. Jamie's thought leadership has been featured in academic journals, industry magazines, and she shares her insights regularly on her blog and her LinkedIn, where she engages in thriving community. And she's a seasoned speaker. She's delivered presentations at workshops at more than 30 professional conferences. Jamie holds a PhD in couple and family therapy from Michigan State University and a graduate certificate in executive coaching from SMU, Southern Methodist University. And she's an ICF certified coach. And also she holds a SHERM CP designation with over 25 years of experience as a psychotherapist, professor, executive coach, and hey, she's passionate about helping leaders craft an empowering

stories that help them become more secure. Jamie, what did I leave out that you would want our listeners to know about you?

Jaime Goff 2:07

Well, that was a lot. It's always odd to hear so much read about yourself. But maybe on the personal side, I am an animal lover. Um I love my pets, my dog, and my cat. Um, I also love my husband, and we enjoy, we've been married for I guess it'll be 25 years this year. Congratulations.

Chris Comeaux 2:28

That's awesome.

Jaime Goff 2:29

Thank you, thank you. We love traveling and enjoying the outdoors together.

Chris Comeaux 2:33

Very cool, Jamie. And you hail out of Texas, right? That's where home is.

Jaime Goff 2:37

Yes. Home, well, sort of. That's where I live.

Chris Comeaux 2:41

Okay, okay.

Jaime Goff 2:42

That's where I live and have made my career. Um, so yes, Texas, but home will always be West Virginia.

Chris Comeaux 2:48

Oh, wow. Well, that's cool. What part of West Virginia?

Jaime Goff 2:49

Country Roads, take me home.

Chris Comeaux 2:51

I've got the song going in my back in the back of my head right now. Well, that's cool. I didn't realize you had connections to West Virginia. We actually work with a hospice that actually serves in uh the West Virginia, in the Wheeling West Virginia area, which is so beautiful there.

Jaime Goff 3:03

Oh, yeah.

Chris Comeaux 3:04

All of West Virginia is beautiful.

Jaime Goff 3:06

Yes.

Chris Comeaux 3:07

So, Jamie, what's your superpower?

Jaime Goff 3:10

Yeah, I think that my superpower, uh, if I had one, it's I was thinking about this and it's context. Um, and what I mean by that is that I'm always when I'm interacting with people, I'm always thinking about what is the context that is informing how this person is showing up. Um, and so I think I'm a I'm a systems thinker, I'm a contextual thinker at heart, and I can quickly pick up on contextual cues about what might be driving behavior.

Skills Versus Mindset Shifts

Chris Comeaux 3:45

Oh, that is really good. And we've asked this question now for two years. I've never had someone answer it that way. That is a superpower. Um, and I did mention to you over the holiday, I did read your book, by the way. So this is Jamie's book, The Secure Leader. Thank you so much for getting me a copy of it. Great job. And obviously, we're gonna jump into the book, but I can actually see that superpower woven into actually how you approached what you did within the book. So let's jump in then. After spending years developing leaders across a large, very large, complex healthcare system, what did you come to realize about leadership that most traditional leadership development programs maybe miss?

Jaime Goff 4:25

You know, I think what really stood out to me is that most leadership development programs really focus on technical skill. They focus on helping leaders build technical leadership skills. And what I mean by that is, you know, they try to teach leaders conversation models for how to give feedback or how to deal with conflict, um, how to manage their time effectively, how to delegate. And those are all fabulous tools, and they're tools that leaders need, and they need to know how to use those in order to lead

effectively. But what most programs miss is the adaptive challenges that leaders face. And those adaptive challenges really come from kind of who they are and the stories that they're telling themselves. And that's about mindset. And most leadership development programs really don't spend a lot of time on the mindset that's necessary, the mindset shifts that are necessary for people to really step into leadership effectively.

Chris Comeaux 5:35

That's a great answer. And we're gonna unpack that a little bit more. Was there a moment in your journey where your leadership journey where you realized that becoming a better leader wasn't really about maybe ingesting more knowledge, learning more, but about understanding ourselves more deeply?

Jaime Goff 5:52

You know, I think, you know, given my background, you know, in my prior kind of role and world as a psychotherapist, um I think I always had this sense that most things that we do, whether it's leadership or whatever it might be, it really is highly influenced by who we are, the context we grew up in, the systems we find ourselves in. And I think for me, when I first stepped into leadership, there were a couple of things that happened where I was beginning to notice that um what I was doing as a leader, the actions I were taking, were being highly influenced by some of the beliefs I had and the stories I was telling myself. And, you know, there we may kind of get to some of those specific examples with other questions, but um, you know, those were really eye-opening for me because I started to see in my own leadership story how this was happening. And then as I learned that about myself, I was able to see it in other leaders as well.

Coaching Leaders At Scale

Chris Comeaux 6:54

That's pretty cool. Um, well, this is where I think you and I had talked about this the first time we met, but the fact that you worked at Christas, I worked at Studergroup for a couple years. And so I when you got to Chris, first off, the level that you were functioning was incredible. You had a team of like 50 people. So, what did that skill teach you about developing leaders across the complex system? And here's maybe my additive question about goes back to the student group. I mean, love what I learned at Studio Group, and it is a lot of techniques, you know, um, basically uh rounding for outcomes, keywords at key times, all those really good techniques. Were you kind of like the anathema going and going, wait a minute, we got to get to kind of the core of who these leaders are. So maybe take both those questions.

Jaime Goff 7:41

You know, I think, yo, yes, the the team that I was on at Christmas, we the talent development culture team there, we did have, we have they have about 50 people on the team. Now, not all those people reported to me directly. Yeah, I was I was one of the leaders on on that uh larger team. But in terms of the scale piece of it, I think, and this is what I just really highly admire about Christis and their like overall senior leadership is the commitment. Yeah, that's a huge commitment that they have to really being a learning organization and helping their leaders grow. Um, and with having a team that large, we were able, we of course delivered all of the technical skills and those tools, right? And we used a lot of the the student tools at at Christmas. Um, we used those tools, we taught those tools. But I think what differentiated that, and this goes to the scale, is that having a team that large is that we had team members, consultants who were also trained in coaching, not necessarily certified coaching, but they were trained in coaching, who were able to connect one-on-one with every single leader in our organization when they were a new leader to help them address the challenges and the struggles they were having and applying the tools that we were teaching them. And I think that was such a unique model and one that, you know, I really, you know, highly endorse because that enabled the space for those consultant coaches to find out on that adaptive level what were some of the challenges getting in the way when someone learned a great tool for delegating, but they couldn't apply it for the life of them. They had someone they could go to to help them really think through and work through what were the mindset challenges getting in their way.

Chris Comeaux 9:33

That's incredible. So we're um so that whole team of people sounds like there was a team of coaches. Um, was it more um voluntary that okay, you need to get coaching? How did that kind of work where you were doing your team was doing some of that executive coaching?

Jaime Goff 9:49

Yeah. So the way it worked was that when when new leaders were in our leader orientation program, new leader orientation program, Chris has called it leader foundations. So they met with their assigned consultant once a month during that program. And that was a six-month program. Um, now we couldn't, we it was required, but what we also did, right? Like what you measure, that's what's important. And so on our side, for our team members, those consultants and coaches, they had metrics associated with how frequently were they meeting with their leaders, how um successfully were those leaders finishing that program. So what it kind of created this motivation in our team to stay on top of it, to be reaching out, to really try to engage those lead those

new leaders so that they could equip them to be successful as they moved into those new roles.

Chris Comeaux 10:51

Yeah, I've never heard of this in the actual healthcare system realm. This is pretty incredible. I've got a friend who's created the coaching practice at one of the top eight accounting firms, and it started with just him, but this is an international firm. And now he was like, man, we're up to four people. Um, man, for a healthcare system, talk about incredibly innovative. Well, Christas was international. Like I knew Texas, Louisiana, but they also have some international footprint.

Speaker 1 11:17

Uh Christas does have an international footprint. Now, I will say, like, talent development and the HR functions are separate.

Chris Comeaux 11:25

Okay.

Jaime Goff 11:25

So um we there are some things where you know the US and Latin American um organizations would collaborate on some of our leadership development programs, but much of that was separate as well. So that's incredible.

A Micromanaging Wake-Up Call

Chris Comeaux 11:40

Yeah, but yeah, what a great life opportunity. But again, now how you've built all this and going out into the world and providing your gifts to way beyond just Christas. So, Jimmy, let's get back to your story. Uh, after obviously incredible experience that you had at Christmas, and I love how now you're taking all your wonderful experience to the broader world. But back to your story, you shared in the book, and you kind of alluded to it earlier, that you start to discover your own avoidant attachment style, which we're going to unpack in a couple moments of what does that mean for our listeners? But that was a turning point for you. Can you kind of share that story a little bit more and unpack it?

Attachment Theory In Leadership

Jaime Goff 12:15

So, you know, through my training, um, as I, you know, did my PhD in couple and family therapy and was a practicing therapist, of course, that type of work when you're going through training does require a lot of self-reflection. And so, and and many times, and I had, you know, I had to, you're required to get your own psychotherapy. So I had known, you know, right, um, that I had more of an avoidant lean in terms of my attachment style. But then when I stepped, and and I could see the ways in which that was playing out, like in my relationship, my relationship with my, you know, with my spouse, with my family members, um, in my personal life. And then when I stepped into leadership, um, you know, I the thing that really was like an aha moment for me, I had an ex like an executive assistant for the first time in my life. And I, given that I do lean more toward the avoidance style um of attachment, I am a very, I can be a very controlling person. I don't like to let other people have control over anything in my life because I often doubt whether or not they can do it well as good as I can. And so I was in this situation where I had an executive assistant. And let me tell you, so micromanaging of her work. I did not let her see my calendar, help me like with all of the, you know, manage my calendar. I was really controlling when it came to like events that the our department, academic department would be sponsoring. Really didn't let her give her any empower her to make any decisions. And during one of our one-on-one meetings, finally, um, at after some time, she said to me, Jamie, you have got to let me do my job. And that just really hit me. Um like, oh, this is my avoidant attachment style. And it's showing up in this context too, in my leadership and the way I'm running this department. And I'm sure it wasn't only her that was probably experiencing some of that, but she had the courage to say it to me. Uh, which, you know, I'm forever grateful for because I think in that moment, what a gift. And I realized what I was doing, and it helped me begin to to change that and to work on changing that within myself.

Chris Comeaux 14:46

Well, let's back up then, because we're alluding to some very specific lexicon around attachment theory that is so critical to the work you're doing and critical to your book. I I have I've heard of attachment theory, but I never had actually heard. So there are three aspects, and you could define them, right? There's a secure leader, and then there's two versions of insecure. There's insecure avoidant, insecure anxious. So, can you maybe how does that show up in leadership behaviors as a way for our listeners to understand what what are these kind of three themes, if you will? I don't want to call them labels, because I think people kind of revolt against labels, but they're they're themes and and ways of people making sense of themselves and how they're showing up.

Secure And Avoidant Patterns

Jaime Goff 15:26

Right. Yeah, absolutely. So, attachment um theory, just to just very briefly on that point first to set the foundation, it's really the what attachment theory says is that our fundamental need as human beings is connection with other people. And we need safety and security in our relationships with others. And over through our experiences, our relationship experiences in our lives, beginning with you know, from the time we come into the world as infants, we begin developing beliefs, right, based on those experiences and about number one, whether or not we ourselves are worthy, right? Am I worthy of love, respect, dignity? And the second fundamental question we're asking ourselves is are other people trustworthy? Am I worthy? Are other people trustworthy? Whether we realize it or not, the way that we're kind of subconsciously answering those questions really inform how we show up in all of our relationships, including leadership. And so the three kind of styles that you mentioned, and you're right, no one fits perfectly in a box. And then the book I actually talk about it does, these exist on a continuum to some extent. But there are kind of three styles. The first you mentioned is secure. And a secure leader is someone who would answer both of those questions about am I worthy? Are other people trustworthy? Generally would answer both of those in the affirmative. So they have developed that sense of self where they they don't feel threatened, right, by other people. They don't feel threatened by competence and others because they're secure in who they are and the value that they bring to the table. And it's not, that's not diminished by what anybody else might bring to the table. And so when it comes to leadership, these are the leaders you might, you know, think of them as those transformational leaders if you're thinking about other leadership theories. These are the leaders who really empower other people, invest in their growth and development, um, want to coach others to be their best. They're open to feedback. They can hear that feedback from anywhere in the organization, whether it's from, you know, below, above, or from a peer. Um, they're able to, they still have blind spots, but when someone points a blind spot spot out to them, they take it seriously and they're able to consider it without that defensiveness. Um, they create those environments of psychological safety too, because they're usually the first ones who are going to say, I made a mistake, I messed up, or I don't really know what to do in this situation. Um, and because they also tend to trust others, they're willing to empower their team and delegate to them and, you know, kind of let people, other people figure out the best way to do it for them, and they're not micromanaging that process. So those are your secure leaders. The two insecure types, avoidant and anxious. Um, I'll talk about avoidant first since I mentioned that that was kind of my style. Those who are voidant, they tend to really distrust the competence of other people. And a lot of that is because through their own experiences, they've discovered, and a lot of this does come from childhood that I have to take care of myself, right? I can't count on anybody else. I've got to take care of everything myself, and I'm responsible solely for myself, my own success. Um, and I want to make sure that

everything goes just the way I want it to be. And so that kind of creates this micromanaging control, but also a bit of arrogance sometimes, um, where like I'm the only one that can do this well. So they kind of, you might say that's like an inflated sense of confidence, but that's often performative in many ways because they do have doubts as well about their worth. And so these are the leaders, like I was describing myself, right? Who are very micromanaging. They can't, they have a really hard time letting go, empowering other people, delegating tasks to other people because they want to maintain that control. And if someone else is really competent, that can feel really threatening to them because they also want to be seen as the person who's providing the most value, um, the person who is the best at everything they do, right? So that's kind of the avoidance, and they also tend to um diminish emotions, right? So they don't like to show any vulnerability at all because they're gonna diminish especially vulnerable emotions. So the insecure, anxious um attachment style looks a little bit different in that the primary need for people with that attachment style is a need to for approval and a need to be liked by other people. And so many times their experiences, their relationships experiences in the past have been inconsistent, where sometimes, you know, it seems like people do like them, sometimes not. And they're trying to figure out um the best way that they can get what they need from others. And so when it comes to leadership, they're often those who have a hard time leading teams in a way that helps those teams grow and develop because they want to be liked first and foremost. So that makes it really difficult for that person to give good, honest feedback, especially if it needs to be constructive feedback that might cause someone to be upset because they don't like making other people upset. Um, and they also um do really seek that approval even from their leaders. So, what can often happen is that they have a hard time sharing um their successes with others. So rather than sharing a success with their team, they might claim it for themselves, which that can also um create some challenges between a leader and their team. So, those just in a you know, really quick nutshell, uh, those are the three attachment styles and specifically how they show up in leadership.

The Anxious Leader Example

Chris Comeaux 21:48

So let me mirror it to you and then you edit me as much as you need to. So that's so that so that secure leader, um, and I was I did. And it does have that kind of thing, right? That like I took the test in your book. And I'm like, I wonder how I'm gonna come out. Um, luckily, I came out as more of a secure leader, but yet I did see some things that I think are opportunities for improvement on the avoidant and the anxious side. And I love that you framed it as a scale. So to mirror it back to you, that secure leader may be a good indication of someone who's very willing to receive feedback, a little bit more self-aware,

probably comes across as a little bit more emotionally intelligent. The insecure avoidant um is that one that maybe comes across as a little bit more micromanagement controlling, um, maybe takes a little bit more credit where maybe they should be giving others credit. Um, does that would you edit that at all? Um and then the insecure anxious um is coming across sometimes as almost maybe non-engaging. It's maybe a little bit more apparent that they're not confident, maybe have some challenges in that emotional intelligence side. Does that maybe that would be one to um okay, I see you're shaking your head. You gave some examples, but maybe extrapolate that one a little bit more. Like, how is that showing up in leadership? What are some leadership behaviors that might be a little bit more example of that uh of the uh anxious?

Jaime Goff 23:18

Of the anxious. So, and and sometimes I think it's best to use examples, right? Because that really gives a picture. And in the book, I I talk about this, and I use examples from pop culture because most people have some frame of reference or they can like look up a YouTube video, right, and watch it. The quintessential example of an insecure anxious leader from pop culture is Michael Scott from The Office. So if you haven't, if you know, listeners out there haven't watched The Office, you know, do a quick YouTube video search and you you'll find a you know a lot of clips. And the reason that he's the the perfect example is that he wants nothing more than to be everybody's friend, right? And he wants to be the fun guy that everybody likes, and he wants to get a lot of praise from people, and that's what he's seeking more than anything else is that approval and that appraise. And it often comes across in kind of a needy way, right? Like there's a neediness about that. And at first, you know, if you have a boss like that, you might like to think, oh, you know, this is cool. Like my boss just wants to have fun and be goofy, but eventually that doesn't work well, right? Because that can really undermine progress and growth and paying attention to goals and the things that matter, the metrics, right, in the organization. And because that person wants to be fun, you're probably never gonna get like real constructive feedback that's that will help you grow as one of their team members, right? Um, because they're more focused on getting that approval and being liked by everyone themselves.

Chris Comeaux 25:04

Any feedback then is totally antithetical to that paradigm then it's like don't even go there because it becomes obvious over time.

Jaime Goff 25:11

Yes, yeah, exactly.

Chris Comeaux 25:13

I love that you wrote the book, Jamie, because you know, I've I've got over 30 years now and executive leadership experience. This is somewhat obvious, but there's never been a resource. But here's my question: how do you avoid the label thing? Like, how do people like you know, if you you walked into a presentation and said, there's three themes of you people when you fall? Like, that's not gonna work, right? So, how do you avoid that kind of allergic reaction to this amazing material?

Moving From Labels To A Scale

Jaime Goff 25:43

Yeah, yeah. So what I say, and you know, I often have people, I send people to my website to, you know, you can do the scale, and I tell people, like, what you're you'll notice is you're gonna get a score for all three areas for secure, anxious, and avoidant. And that is because, and and I do talk about it more in the book, those these styles do exist on a scale. There are not, there's they're not like firm cutoff points, right? Um, and even for those of us, like you said, like you were like, Oh, good, yeah, thank goodness. I I scored and the my highest score was secure. And that's the same for me now. But even those of us who are generally secure, when we are under a lot of stress or we're overwhelmed, chances are we're going to slide toward the avoidant or the anxious side of that continuum. And for me, I slide toward the avoidant side, much more likely to do that. So almost everybody has, you know, moves a little bit on that scale. And so I do talk about that when I'm, you know, doing workshops and presentations. Like nobody fits 100% into any one of these categories. And the examples I use, like the Michael Scott, that's a really extreme example, um, because it just helps to illustrate it a little bit more.

Part Two Teaser And Close

Chris Comeaux 27:04

Yeah, so I'm so glad you said that in the way you just said it, which is why like it's you're not reading the book to go, did I pass the test? And I'm secure, so I could like put down the rest of the book. No, I kept reading throughout the book, and I'm like, no, I actually see some of those insecure avoidance tendencies, and you nailed it during times of stress, um, and also some of those insecure, actually anxious elements during times of stress. So the whole book is very revelatory and illuminating to turn the mirror on oneself, but then also kind of forge a path.

Jeff Haffner 27:35

Don't miss part two of this episode coming this Friday.