

Leader-Cast March 2022

Leslie Shaffer Hereba, LMHC [Licensed Mental Health Counselor]

<https://www.herebamentalhealthcounseling.com/>

Clinic Director / Owner

Leslie is a self-employed small business owner doing BIG THINGS! She is the clinical director and owner of a group private practice in Syracuse, NY. She currently both manages the practice and works with individual clients. Leslie believes that a healthy work place is the key to success and encourages both healthy staff and therefore, healthy clients. She runs her practice through the Holistic Model of Wellness approach, which refers to the integration of physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of a person and thus to the integration of body, mind and spirit, which is assumed to be the base of wellness. She holds the belief that we are all a sum of all our experiences, thoughts, feelings, systems, and supports. Her practice is deeply rooted in person-centered therapy and other evidenced-based theories which ground in the basic thoughts that the client knows themselves best and the importance of creating an authentic relationship for healing to flourish.

Leslie is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) with extensive clinical experience ranging in various ages from children, teenagers and adults. She works to help clients build skills and strategies that they can utilize to manage current struggles and discomfort. She is a mother, a lover of warm weather and sunshine, dance classes, cooking gluten-free and exploring alternative methods of healing.

Questions

A. Who IS Leslie Shaffer Hereba?

- As it turns out, this is a question I often ask myself as my birthday approaches (which is in early April). And oddly I keep coming around to the thought of: I am both hot and cold. I am a strange blend of curious, creative, and open-minded mixed in with determination, persistence and risk-taking. I am warm, passionate and engaged, and equal parts cool, aloof and an observer. I am a person who is committed to the journey and not the destination. I have been interested in health and wellness in its various forms since I was very young, having always been drawn to medicine and topics that are attached to the idea of healing in all of its forms. The best thing about being a therapist professionally is that it encompasses all of these things! I am a healer by nature.

B. What are your current goals?

-I always have a LOT of ideas that I sit with before they become goals. Professionally my goal is to continue to grow my private practice and hire a few more licensed therapists, continue to grow an internship program and begin to branch our services into more therapeutic groups and workshops. I also have been thinking about starting a podcast, so this is a very amazing

opportunity! I feel like podcasts and workshops would allow me to impact a larger audience beyond the individual therapeutic relationship.

Personally my goal is always to listen to my body and its various demands which has taken me down a path of learning a lot about alternative healing and the physical body. Right now I am focused on intermittent fasting, strength training, yoga, reiki and maintaining my health and sanity during covid as a parent! I also very much would like to get back into the creative arts, such as painting, pottery and playing the piano. Basically, I will never be bored in retirement.

From Followers:

1. How are you able to lead while also taking care of your own mental well-being?

- In the field of mental health, self-care and personal therapeutic support is actually built into our training during graduate school. It's not that they teach us how to do it, as much as we are launched into this profession with the understanding that if we do not take care of our own mental health then we cannot be healthy providers. You can't pour from an empty cup! I like to model wellness to my staff and clients by sharing activities I've tried that are helpful, or working with my staff to recognize when they might need to slow down or seek support. At the core of the leadership role, I believe you need to practice what you preach and lead by example. If I am burned out or do not feel well I am transparent about it and hope that my staff feel comfortable to share in the same way.

2. What is a mistake you have made while leading or managing you WISH you could take back? What did you learn from it?

- Having a scarcity mindset. When I first started private practice on my own and then eventually transitioned into a group practice I think there was a lot of anxiety based in what we call a "scarcity mindset", which basically means you become hyper focused on the lack of something or this inherit feeling there will never be enough. That looked like: What if we don't have enough clients? What if I can't hire staff? What if I can't fill someone's caseload? What if these groups aren't successful? What if I don't get paid in time? I realize my greatest mistakes (which have come in the form of decision making) have occurred when I am operating from this space. I've really had to make the conscious choice to lean into the abundance mindset which is just the opposite: that ideas and opportunities are always available and there is no shortage of ways to accomplish them.

3. As a leader do you think that it is your responsibility to know if any of your employees have mental health issues? If so, do you think it is important to know signs of a break down or stressors that may trigger the employee?

- Again, this is fairly specific to the field of mental health as within the supervision structure within the field itself, not only are we reviewing cases and problem solving client needs with our staff, but we are freely talking about situations that might be triggering our own personal trauma or tender spots. These are things that therapists discuss with their supervisors as a protective measure for both the clinician and client. So yes, as a leader I am aware of many of my staff's triggers: maybe it's death, divorce, an absent parent, illness, being bullied in childhood and if that stuff gets activated we talk about it a bit. And if the trigger or stressor becomes too great we might refer a client to a different provider and I'd encourage my staff to seek their own individual counseling on the matter. There is a line of appropriate and safe sharing within the supervision relationship that I am always aware of.

Outside of the world of mental health, talking about triggers and mental health issues isn't as common and still often times remains taboo. I do think as good leaders creating a space for wellbeing and the ability to talk about it without shame is the sign of a strong leader and healthy workplace. How can we separate ourselves from our other parts or the world? This goes back to the Holistic Model of Wellness. I also think its important to note the differences related between talking about mental health, treating mental health and being proactive about mental health in the workplace.

4. What has been your greatest accomplishment with counseling a client so far?

- I don't think I can name the greatest accomplishment so far as it is equally rewarding to see all of my clients shift and grow. For example when I get to witness a client is doing things they once were too afraid too, or setting boundaries in a way they never have, or using language that they've learned to process and communicate their experiences – those are victories! But if I had to focus on some of the biggest successes, I think it's the clients who began counseling in a very dark space: with no hope, no skillset, lack of insight into themselves and even a bit of stubbornness and then overtime I get to see them shift, change and bloom like flowers. What's that saying? No mud, no lotus.

5. What efforts have you made, or been involved with, to foster diversity competence and understanding?

- Within my practice we have fostered team meetings, educational opportunities and conversations in awareness of the fact that at the present time we are a group of seven white women – and this doesn't necessarily reflect the diversity of the population we serve. It is our job as clinicians to be educated and aware of the diversity and experiences of others so that we can meet our clients in the experience that they are having, whether we are a part of that or not. So in terms of efforts, we foster transparent conversations about our where we are competent in terms of diversity and where we might still have blind spots and can continue to learn or become educated.

NSL Questions

6. What are you reading right now? What is on the night stand? On the Kindle?

- There's an ongoing joke in my practice that I have "secretive ADHD" because I am always doing a lot of various things all-at-the-same-time and my reading list is no exception! I literally read a chapter here and another there. So these are all happening simultaneously! In my car on Audible I am listening to; *The Body Keeps The Score* by Bessel van der Kolk, MD and *Burn Out: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* by Amelia and Emily Nagoski. At the same time I have *The Atlas of The Heart* by Brene Brown and *On Grief & Grieving* by Elisabeth Kubler Ross MD and David Kessler. Basically, I love to learn and this field is a never ending study!

7. What would you say is the BIGGEST Misconception people have about you? How do you work through it?

-I'd like to say there is not a big misconception of me as I do believe I enter into the professional and personal world very authentically. But, if there is a misconception I think it's surrounding the ideas we discussed in *Who IS Leslie?* Not everyone has experienced both sides of me. They may assume I'm a consummate professional and then be taken off guard when I am playful, or randomly say something cheeky and they notice that I have some tattoo's. So I guess the misconception would come from their perception of me being too serious (which I both am and am not).

8. Tell us about a time you failed as a leader.

- I've had various roles in management previous to owning my own practice. I can't say that I view any of these experiences as failures, but more of: "If I only knew what I know now, I could've done better". I think a lot of my professional life I've been thrown into a role quickly without any training and had to learn it from scratch, there is a lot of failure there for sure.

Years ago my family's business found their office manager stealing – I offered my services to help out and suddenly in a week I was the Office Manager for a big commercial roofing company doing things like bookkeeping and payroll which I had never done before! The same is true for private practice. I was exposed to black mold at my previous employer and got so sick I couldn't ever walk back into the building. One day I had a job, the next I didn't. And at the time I had two clients in private practice, so I had to figure it all out and fast with insurances, marketing, etc. I think these were both pretty traumatic events, which is maybe is why at times I struggle with the scarcity mindset and really have work on coming from an abundant framework.

9. Last Question: What thoughts or ideas do you want to leave Lessons in Leadership Leader-Cast watchers with?

-These questions really have me circling back around to a lot of simple sayings!

- Practice what you preach (do the work you are asking others to do through leading by example).
- You can't pour from an empty cup (check in with yourself and those you manage, reduce shame surrounding struggle and be willing to problem solve, that goes a long way!).
- Always be a student (there is so much we can learn from each other and our clients, regardless of role or management structures).
- Authenticity and transparency builds trust in a team environment and trust allows the ecosystem to thrive.
- Laugh, be playful, think outside the box! Those that you lead will mirror your honesty in finding comfort with "just being yourself."