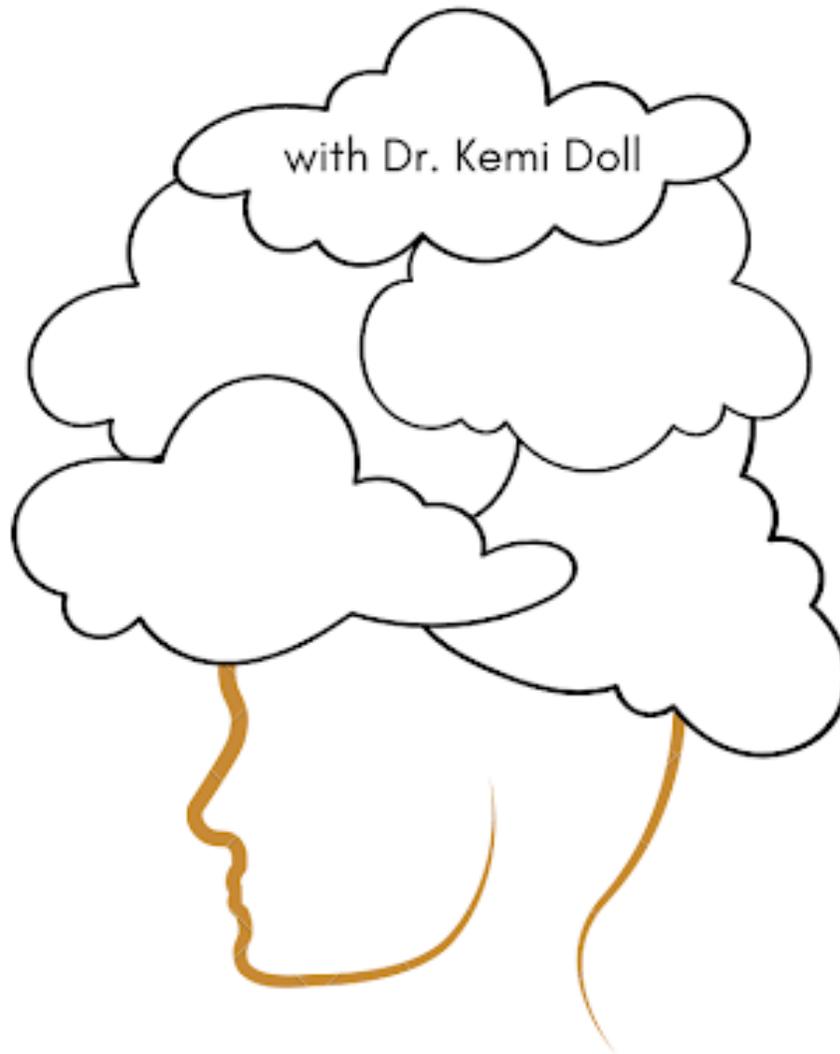


# #354 Curbsiders Women in Medicine:

Top 5 Challenges Faced by Women of Color in Academic Medicine

## **WOMEN IN MEDICINE: THE TOP 5 CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN OF COLOR IN ACADEMIC MEDICINE**



[The Curbsiders Podcast theme]

[Disclaimer]

**Matt:** Welcome back to the Curbsiders. This is the second or third time we've done this intro. I'm Dr. Matthew Watto, joined by two great cohosts who hosted this episode. The guest was Dr. Kemi Doll. And they were talking about the top 5 challenges faced by women of color in academic medicine. Yes, that's right, this is one of our Women in Medicine episodes, which means I must be joined by the great Dr. Leah Witt and Shreya Trivedi. And Leah, welcome back.

**Leah:** Thank you.

**Matt:** How are you doing? It's been a long time.

**Leah:** Yeah, it has been a long time, lots happening in our lives. Last time, I think we published an episode was about a year ago and Shreya and I were talking about new motherhood and I'm about to have my journey into second new motherhood. So, I'm having a second baby in the fall. But I'm great. And yeah, I'm glad to be here with Shreya and you.

**Matt:** Well, remind the audience what is it that we do on the Curbsiders. And then, Shreya can tell them a little bit specifically about what we'll be doing on this episode.

**Leah:** Yeah, sure, Matt. So, we are *the* Internal Medicine Podcast. We use expert interviews to bring your practice-changing knowledge and clinical pearls. In this interview, we're going to be focusing less on clinical pearls but definitely career-changing pearls.

**Shreya:** Mm-hmm. Yes.

**Leah:** Shreya, do you want to tell us about our guest?

**Matt:** Oh, Shreya, I was just going to interrupt you because [Shreya laughs] you're too humble to do this yourself. I think you need to plug the fact, Shreya, famous podcaster from the Core IM Podcast, who's kind enough to donate her time to Curbsiders: Women in Medicine series. So, thank you, welcome back. And now, tell us about the guest.

**Shreya:** Matt, you are so kind, I'm so grateful for you and your peer mentorship. Dr. Kemi Doll, who's someone we adore, actually, you'll probably hear us gushing over her throughout the episode. She is a physician, a surgeon, researcher, advocate, coach. We were talking about triple threats earlier. She's like quadruple-- I don't know, is it quintuple? Someone can correct me what is it if you're five big deal.

**Matt:** Let's go with it. Yeah.

**Shreya:** [laughs] She's the founder and CEO of KD Coach, LLC, an exclusive coaching company for women in color in academic medicine. She's coached over 100 women who have transformed their careers and secured tens of millions of dollars in grant funding and institutional support. You can also hear her on Your Unapologetic Career podcast, which we will reference a ton on the episode.

So today, she teaches us about her career as a coach. And then, from her experience coaching women of color in academic medicine, what the five challenges she sees that they face, and how we can overcome some of these. So, without further ado, let's get into it.

**Leah:** Hi, Kemi. Thanks so much for coming on the show. We want to start with some rapid-fire questions to get to know you better. This is how we start all of our episodes. So, if you could please give us a one-liner to describe yourself.

**Kemi:** Yes. Okay. So, I'm a nearly 40-year-old gynecologic oncologist, health equity researcher, career coach, spouse, and mom of two little kids who is deeply committed to personal growth and development.

**Leah:** We'd love to hear too about some advice or feedback that you got during your career or your training that really shaped you. And that'll lead us into our questions about how did you become a coach.

**Kemi:** Okay.

**Leah:** So, what's some of the advice or feedback?

**Kemi:** So, this was not advice I followed [chuckles] but it really shaped me because it taught me how bad advice can be, like how well-meaning people can tell you just the most ridiculous things. I was once told that it had basically been disrespectful for me to ask to be paid for what would have otherwise been like free clinical labor. And yeah, and I remember like the person was very well, meaning. I think they were looking out for me, and they genuinely believed that I had done something very disrespectful and basically not being willing to work for free. And so, it was just really meaningful to me, because it was a really helpful distillation of what happens to, I think, a lot of us all of the time, which is that we conflate people's interest in us, and we conflate their desire to help us with their capability in doing so. And those are two totally different things.

**Leah:** Absolutely, I feel like for sure, I'll probably be referring back to a lot of your podcast episodes because we listen all the time. But I feel like you had a podcast episode about this talking about mentors who don't have a stake in the game and things like that, thinking about where people are coming from with their advice. That's what's making me think about. All right, well, Shreya. should we move to Picks of the Week?

**Shreya:** Yes, yes, yes. Leah, do you want to start with your Pick of the Week?

**Leah:** Yes. So, I am nearly 30 weeks pregnant.

**Kemi:** Oh, yay.

**Leah:** [laughs] Thank you. I have been on a personal journey. Everybody I talk to, I've been telling them about pelvic floor PT because I found this amazing program online called, wait for it-- It's called The Vagina Whisperer.

**Shreya:** [laughs] amazing.

**Leah:** By a doctor of physical therapy, Sara Reardon, I again started following her on Instagram just like Kemi. And it's three times a week, 10 minutes, it's changed my whole life. Shreya and I were both pregnant during the pandemic for the first time. This is a totally different and better experience, I think, because of pelvic floor PT. Wow. It's amazing. And then, my second Pick of the Week, I'm going to take to is Kemi's old podcast. Shreya and I text back and forth about this all the time.

[laughter].

But I went back to your one of your first episodes, The CEO, Scientist, and Worker Bee, because that is just like a core principle to ask. And I let myself, like many people, be hijacked by the incoming email and have to remind myself like, "This is not the time for this. We do not do this now."

**Shreya:** That's awesome. Yeah, put on that CEO. I was literally just listening to that episode an hour ago so, so near and dear. It's really interesting, kind of in that worker bee mindset. I think my pick of the week is actually just this idea recently that in the last month or so, I just took time to take work vacation where I'm like, "Let me clean up my life. I'm not going to have any meetings." One of my mentors, Kelly Graham, actually told me about this. And something small that I discovered was email templates. I probably send people the same email every single year or monthly, or even like how many people ask me for my address or some information, my bio. And then, I discovered on Gmail, you have this small tab of email templates, game changer. And now, I don't know how much time it's really saving me, but I feel like a bit like a better CEO and a worker bee because of that.

**Kemi:** I love that. I bet it's definitely saving you time. Because I feel like it helps us not-- anytime we have templates, it helps us not get into the imagination of all the things we need to do to, to adjust the email or slight change it for this or that audience, which is all this just imaginative worry that we have about how we're perceived. So, I get it. I recently just transitioned into having an always-up autoreply, which I never thought I would do. And but it just got to the point where even sending the template emails was just getting completely out of hand. [Shreya laughs] And It was the same response every time, which is basically various versions of "No." [laughs]

**Leah:** Yeah, I get that.

**Kemi:** But it's all the same thing. And yeah, I don't know, ask me again in a couple of months, but it's been up for six weeks. And the palpable difference, I underestimated how much it would affect me as that electronic boundary and it hasn't in any way changed the people that I need to reply to or want to reply to sooner. So, yes, I definitely applaud every step in that direction.

**Shreya:** Yeah, also you just gave me an idea of different 'no' email templates.

[laughter]

**Kemi:** Shreya, yes. Oh, my gosh, multiple 'no' templates. After you do the address, and now you start, "No, I can't give the talk." "No, I can't do this co-writing project," like four or five of those. Man-- [crosstalk]

**Leah:** "Here are my recommendations of other people."

**Shreya:** Yes [laughs].

**Kemi:** Oh, beautiful.

**Leah:** What is your Pick of the Week?

**Kemi:** Okay, so I also have two. My first Pick of the Week is I'm a proud member of the Beyhive. So, it has to be the new album by Beyonce, Renaissance [crosstalk]

**Leah:** Oh, yes.

**Kemi:** Which is an absolute masterpiece and has wormed its way into my heart and mind. And then, my other Pick of the Week is a show that I just kind of mainlined which is the new Star Trek show, which is *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*. And it just hits the inner nerd. I love it. It's really accessible for people who've never watched any Star Trek. I'm not like a big fan, but I like the world in general. Yeah, it's just a great episode, great actors. And as long as you can get over the streaming platform, which is absolutely terrible, Paramount+, the actual show is great.

**Shreya:** I love it. My husband's obsessed.

**Kemi:** Oh.

**Shreya:** I actually want to take that up on --

**Kemi:** There you go.

**Shreya:** I'm such a superficial-- We will dress up our son as Yoda and Chewbacca. That's my superficial knowledge.

**Kemi:** Yeah, that is also Star Wars [crosstalk]

**Leah:** [crosstalk] for Shreya.

**Shreya:** Oh, am I mixing up Star Wars and Star Trek?

**Kemi:** Yeah.

**Shreya:** Oh, see, see? This is unacceptable. Unacceptable.

**Kemi:** I take no offense to that. But I'm sure somebody somewhere just shed a tear.

[laughter]

**Kemi:** I just enjoy both worlds. So, it's all good for me [laughs].

**Leah:** Oh, heartbreak, heartbreak. Okay, on to the main event on that note. So typically, for episodes, we start off with a case. But in your coaching role, you are hearing so many cases of real people going through their very real journey in academic medicine. And so, we thought to structure this episode around some of the common cases you get to hear and particularly around some of the challenges.

But before we kind of get deep into the good stuff, we just love to hear a little bit more about where you started in this journey. What got you so passionate about Women of Color and coaching them? And what difference you see that you're like, "I need to help this population out"?

**Kemi:** Yeah, I think it was kind of two things happened. There were two simultaneous things happening at the same time. One was that I started my new faculty position, and I was giving a lot of talks on my research. You start and I was like, "Go present to these people. Go present to these people." Well, that kind of happened like on steroids for me. I think I gave maybe seven or eight talks my very first year on faculty about my research. And what I realized, which seems maybe funny now, but I didn't actually know this so clearly then, is that I was a really good public speaker. I was like, "Oh, I'm good at this". So, I thought maybe I could do some public speaking on the side. That would be a nice little some extra pocket change and I could do that.

So, I started thinking about developing a signature talk. I did what everybody did. I went on Google. I listened to podcasts about public speaking. And they're like, "You should have a signature talk." And when I figured out what that would be, I'm like, "Well, I think I'll talk about career tips." People come to me a lot, and they ask me for help making decisions. And I think I'm pretty, I don't know, strategic and I thought I could do a talk like that. And in the process of trying to write that talk, I realized I have a lot to share, I was like, "Oh, I have a lot to say. This is not going to ever fit into like any kind of talk." So, that was happening.

And then, while that was happening as I was on faculty, it was just happening more and more of people being sent to me almost for help. "Can you help get this person together? They just started." And it was kind of a combination of those two things happening that I thought, "I'm just going to see if I can be helpful in a more structured way as opposed to these one-off conversations. Maybe I'll start a newsletter. Maybe I'll just offer people some coaching services and see what happens." And then, it just took off from there.

**Leah:** We're so grateful you did. I was just going to ask how you learned to coach. Is this an innate skill that you just developed? You mentioned looking at Google--

**Kemi:** Yeah.

**Leah:** --YouTube videos, or did you have a coach and then you learned how to become a coach? How did that happen?

**Kemi:** Yeah, it was the inverse. When I first started, I was like "Oh, I'm going to get an executive coach," because I don't know. I'm like a super high achiever like all of us, right? I'm chasing the gold stars and all that. I'm like, "Oh, I'm going to set myself up for success." So, I looked for and hired an executive coach, and it was a really poor experience. And I realized, "You do not know this world that I'm in. These things are not applicable, this is not helpful." And so, I'd had that experience and then I was simultaneously helping other people and figuring out a lot of stuff on my own, and I think it was that combination that that led me to say, "Well, let me just see how I can help, if I can help do this." And I can't remember how I came around to the work coach, because it took me a while to even go there. I was like, "Oh, I think I can do peer mentorship." I think that's what I was calling it. I'm like, "I just got here. What do I know?"

So, it was kind of like that. It was very innate, Leah. And then, it wasn't until maybe two years-ish into having formal clients and coaching people all year and all that that I did, I went and did formal coach training, and that was mostly confirmatory. It was one of those things where I was learning terms of what I was doing. I was like, "Oh, that's the thing I'm doing when I'm doing X or Y." And that was definitely some stuff I picked up on that I really appreciated. I was like, "Oh, that's super helpful." And so, there were a few techniques, but I felt mostly confirmatory. So, I feel like I'm a little bit of both.

**Leah:** Yeah, a lot of innate skill that radiates when we hear you talk. Well, we would love to start to hear about where your passion for helping women of color faculty and academic medicine came from, in particular, because that's your focus.

**Kemi:** Oh, yeah. Well, that's who I am. So, I think that when you're navigating through a world of whiteness, which we all are all the time, even as a woman of color, even as a black woman, if I stand up and say, "I want to be a coach," I have to deliberately center myself in people like me. Otherwise, the overlying culture of whiteness would just take over. So, I think part of saying it was just making it really clear, "This is a perspective I'm coming from on purpose."

The other thing is that I did have experiences as a black woman of having to filter and adjust and adapt advice that was completely not going to be helpful for me. And it goes in both ways, and it was very environmentally driven. But I would try to tell you that I'm speaking as a black woman, I think any black woman who has gone through third-year medical school and rotations, and have had the experience of people saying, "Oh, on this rotation, you should do this," or "Be nice to this person," or, "This is how you get in with this person," or all those tips and then gone in and try to do those things and have the exact inverse experience knows what I'm talking about, where all of that is contextual. And you think like, "Oh, it's just because I talked about rock music in the OR," but you don't understand that it didn't have anything to do with rock music. And if I come in and I try to establish some connection over music, it actually is the exact opposite thing that happens.

And I think that we all have had that experience and so much of medicine is so subjective. So much of it is like being in a fishbowl and constantly being judged, that when I decided, "Okay, I want to help people in this way. I want to help people navigate their career. I want to help the people who are set up to be successful the least," and that's black women in academic medicine, that's women of color. And I do think that that's really important for me to always keep that lens very active, because I want them to have one space where they don't feel like they have to essentially translate the advice.

**Shreya:** We'd love to hear some challenges. You have coached-- Well, you should tell us how many people you've coached. But your program is super popular.

**Kemi:** Yes, we were at over 100 now, which--

**Shreya:** Wow.

**Kemi:** --just blows my mind. Yes.

**Leah:** Wow. So, you have coached many, many women of color. And we would love to hear some common themes that have come up, challenges that women have faced. We'll look into solutions later, but what are the common themes so far?

**Kemi:** Okay, let's talk about this. So, I have to start with saying the number 1 through 5 and through 50 and through 500 challenges is structural, cultural, interpersonally mediated racism and sexism. I think I just want to make it really clear that I recognize that a lot of what I'm about to talk about, the challenges I'm about to talk about arise in a system that starts out by telling you that you are not good enough by virtue of who you are and what you look like in your background. I never want to talk without that context. But also, my perspective coming in as a coach, and even for myself was, "Okay, how do I strengthen myself in such a system? How do I strengthen myself in that system so that I can get what I want out of it, because I get to be here too?" That might be true, but I don't want that overarching racism and sexism to mean that my nerd self can't take advantage of this field that I love called academic medicine.

Having said that, I would say the first thing-- I'll try to distill this into five. So, the first thing is believing, like really believing that your institution is what defines your value. So basically, believing that your level of desirability, what you can do, what you bring to the table is basically dependent on the institution that you're sitting within. And that is such a problem because basically, it means that the institution's perspective is always more important than your own. And it means that you will, both consciously and unconsciously, give the credit and a lot of times the power to the institution of your work instead of to yourself. And so, I think it's like a huge challenge because it basically changes how you're moving through your days and all the decisions you're making. So, that's one. Do you want me to just keep going or do you want me to pause in between?

**Shreya:** I think you can keep going.

**Leah:** Yeah, keep going, unless you just want me to consistently be like, "Oh my gosh, yes."

[laughter].

**Leah:** Will I hold myself back? I will interject, I'm still-- [crosstalk]

**Kemi:** Yeah, interject. [crosstalk] talk at you. Okay, so I think that's the first one. Institution defining your value, not understanding that actually your job is to cultivate, that your job is to cultivate what your individual value is to these institutions.

I think the second one is making decisions based on obligatory gratitude, which is a term that I coined for this way in which we will feel that the way that we express gratitude for having the faculty position that we have, for having the job that we have is that we express that through sacrifice. So, we express that through doing things that we don't want to do in order to make it clear to everybody that we're really grateful to have the position that we have. And that is a real problem because you're never not going to be grateful. You're not going to wake up one day and be like, "Oh, I have no gratitude that I got this sometimes very highly coveted position." Some of us know that there are only a few academic positions in our super small fields every year. There's a lot of different experiences but on some level, I think people choose academics very consciously. Like you're choosing often to make less money. You're choosing often a whole host of things that are not as convenient. I'm not saying private practice is perfect. Obviously, I'm not in it.

So, I think we come with this feeling of gratitude to be here. And then, the institution is like, "You're definitely grateful to be here. You are so lucky we gave you this form/offer letter we haven't changed in

15 years and what it says." And so, we have that, but then the problem is when you're moving, and you're accepting this idea that like, "Well, because you're grateful to be here, you have to do this thing you don't want to do and that thing you don't want to do, and you have to give up that," the problem is you're never going to not be grateful. So, that means every day, you have this unending job of sacrificing yourself on the altar of gratitude.

And so why is this a challenge? Because when I coach clients, and when they come and they talk about this decision they have made or that decision they made or why they feel stuck, we get to the bottom of it. And the bottom is basically like, "Well, I don't want them to think I'm not grateful." And I'm like, "We got to stop this." We got to have a different way to express gratitude than sacrificing what you care about in your career and what you want for your life. So that's number two.

**Shreya:** I think both the first one and the second one, they just create so much noise.

**Kemi:** Yes.

**Shreya:** You don't have headspace to think about your potential when you're constantly thinking, "My value is the institution. What is he going to think of me? I'm going to this meeting. God, what did that mean? Do they think I'm ungrateful enough. Do they think I'm working hard enough?" All that crap. And then, one day, you wake up and you're like, "Am I even reaching half my potential like--"

**Kemi:** Right.

**Shreya:** Yeah.

**Kemi:** Right. What I am actually--? I try not to ask this question too often, because it can be a little bit pointed. But it can be a helpful question when you're in the right moment, which is, "What are you actually spending your day doing? What are you actually doing? And does that line up with why you came here?"

**Shreya:** True, what a good point.

**Leah:** Sometimes, you just feel lost. You're like, "I don't even know how to answer that now. I'm so deep in the weeds."

**Kemi:** You're too deep, right? I invite anybody listening to take-- a week as a long time, you might not make it through a week, to be honest [Shreya laughs]. Three days, I want you to take three days and actually document what you actually spent your time doing EVERY hour on the hour at least. You're actually supposed to do this every 15 minute when you do this but it's too intense. But if every hour, what did I just do? What did I spend my time doing? And then, just look at those three days and ask yourself, "Is this the career that I wanted? Is this why I came here, to spend 45 minutes trying to think about how to say no to an email?"

**Leah:** Shreya and I were just listening to your shadow task podcast. [Shreya laughs]. This is really hitting home because we were texting back and forth examples of shadow tasks, personal and professional. They both hijack your time.

**Shreya:** And then, you're like, "Well, it's just these three days. It's just this and then I'm going to get some better."

[laughter]

**Shreya:** "And next week is going to be like my time to be creative and be transformative. This week, I just got to get through this" [chuckles].

**Kemi:** Yes, that's one of my challenges, actually. But I'll go in order. Okay, so my next one is, we actually touched on this very briefly earlier. So, it's conflating a mentor, or I would say a leader's interest and enthusiasm in you with their capability of helping you get to where you're trying to go in your career. And oh, man, this is a big one. Again, I come with empathy because we're really trained to do this, we're trained to kind of give up all of our own internal knowledge. Like go to this medical school so you can get into the right residency. Like this residency will rubber stamp you as an effective XYZ clinician. We're really trained that way. So, I get it. So, it's very strange to then come into faculty and be told, "Oh, this person is interested in your career. They want to support you, etc.," and then, having this very odd experience, where you're not getting what you need, and I think it helped-- I see clients get very hopeless. They're like, "Oh, my God, my world is over. This person actually can't help me." And I usually tell them, "I'm really glad that you figured that out now. Because now is your time to step up and be the CEO of your career. Now is the time for you to develop all these skills that have been atrophied by our training. They've been atrophied. So, it's okay that this is weird for you to think about making your own decisions." I mean, we get our jobs through a match [Shreya laughs].

Talk about abdicating decisions in your life. "Fingers crossed, I get to live in the city I want to live in," as full-grown adults, this is what we do. And we were whole families and all that. So, I come with a lot of empathy because I know it's a very scary proposition. But I think the earlier we can recognize and decouple that idea, the better because I find faculty all the time who have gone down years of paths, like years and years doing things that don't fulfill them, they don't want to do they're not, they might not even be very good at frankly, or sometimes they are really great at it. That's actually harder. But all because, "Well, my mentor or leader told me, this is the way I needed to do it."

I think that when you when you step back, and you maybe just ask the question, "Are they helping you create the career that you want, or are they helping you create the career that they see for you or that they want for you?" And being able to disentangle that is so important. Because again, otherwise, it's really hard for you to have clarity around your decision. So, I think that's a huge challenge, is learning how to disentangle those two things. Somebody can be so excited for you, they can support you so much. And you can use that, that can be so helpful for you. And you can also separate that out from having to follow their advice. Those are two different things.

**Shreya:** When we get to solutions, I cannot wait to ask you how you help people figure out what they want. Because I feel like I went through years like, "I don't know, I just want to get into the best XYZ. I want to do a good job and get a good evaluation." Yeah, that part where we just move from A to B to C in this regimented way removes something, from my brain at least, of independent decision making. So, that's really tough.

**Kemi:** Yeah. Okay, number four. You kind of mentioned this, there's like a general, and I'll do a specific. I would say in general is the "when, then." "When this paper is over, then things will calm down." "When I get funded, then I'll be respected." When it's all of that, once I get through this section, or once I'm through my boards, once I finish my boards, then X will get easier. So, in general, the "when, then" is not good. And again, it's been bred in us because it was true for a long time. When you're done with intern year, things do generally improve. When you finish this part of your training, things like that, that was true for a while and then it stops being true. Because once you become faculty, you're now in an infinite path. There's no metric. We keep looking for, "Okay, it's been three years. What's next?" It's like there's no next, this is where you are.

**Shreya:** That's so hard.

**Kemi:** But we're still in this when, then. We're still in that mindset still thinking it'll just magically get better because some external thing will happen. Even promotion. I'm having a lot more of those conversations now. People are like, "Okay, I'm promoted. Everything is still terrible." I'm like, "Okay, great. Are you ready? Are you ready to do [crosstalk]" [Shreya laughs] We've broken down the why of the "when, then".

Okay, that was my general, but I will say that specifically and again, always speaking from my perspective, as a black woman, I know it probably applies to everybody but deeply believing that there is some metric that will define you being taken seriously. So, it's like, "Well, once I get this grant, then they will have to take me seriously." Or, "Once I'm in this leadership position, they will take me seriously." Oh, my gosh, it's so damaging, because it's never true. It's never true and what it'll make us do especially as high achievers that have been working against the grain to get where we are, is that it will make a sacrifice these critical things in our quality of life that matter to us, both in our career and outside of our career, because we think it's temporary. And we will convince ourselves it's temporary, and it's not temporary. Because no matter what, just the body that you live in, the voice that you have, the perspective that you have, it doesn't matter what accolade that you get, it doesn't matter what you accumulate, there will always be at least one person that will not take you seriously. There will always be at least one person that will assume that you don't belong. There's always a person out there, often many, but always at least one.

And so, I see that as such a career-- almost like a long-term challenge I want to help people work out of because when we believe that, one will keep just chasing larger and larger things from and we're fueled by the wrong thing, being fueled by this idea that once we get there, we'll feel secure, and we'll really be safe and protected. And it keeps us so vulnerable, because it takes the smallest dude with the tiniest voice, the most insignificant creature to just destroy the whole thing. And I don't want any of us walking through our careers with that kind of fragility. Except that's what is supported. That's kind of like the culture, is that kind of fragility, because it runs-- academics runs on that fragility. Instead, I want people to be fueled by something so much stronger that is internal and totally independent of what Johnny over there thinks. So, that's number four.

**Shreya:** That's hard also when you're in an environment of such scarcity, fragility, and everyone around you is also thinking that too. And then, you have all these mentors who are like, "That's how I got through it." And you're like, "Oh, shucks. I don't want to be--:

**Kemi:** Yes, like you. [laughs]

**Shreya:** "--Miserable like you are right now."

[laughter]

**Shreya:** It's so hard to unlearn. But it's all so interconnected, but the "when then" is so real.

**Leah:** Yeah. I'm thinking about all the hijacked nights and weekends. "I just got to finish this task tonight. And then, it'll be better." And then, you're like, wait, I'm doing the same thing night after night. Why is this not better?"

**Kemi:** Yeah exactly. And if I didn't say it already, I think it's maybe really important to say that there are a few things that I can say, "Oh, I understood this better because I have been coaching clients for a while and I understand this is a problem." But like 98% of what I talk about is because I have deeply felt and been in this place, in this space and I see and I think we grow into new levels of this. I never want to seem like apart from these challenges. I feel like I'm right in the middle of them. And then just like relearning them over and over as I move through my career, too.

Okay, the last one is-- okay, I think the last challenge is insidious, because it presents itself as a solution. I've said this before, but it's trying to avoid burnout by settling for less. So, I think that we kind of get told you get in, you've got a lot of energy, you're like, "Okay, I want to do all these things I'm super excited," You know that there's that cynical--

**Shreya:** People love you because you're hungry.

**Kemi:** Yeah, they love you because you're hungry, and you'll do anything. And then simultaneously, there's those cynical people who are like, "Oh, you can't do all this. Can't really have all this." You're going to learn at some point that you're just going to have to hunker down or not do this or cut that out, and you're just going to have to settle for a career that is less than the one you wanted, because that's the only way you're not going to burn out. If you really go after what you really wanted, it's impossible.

And so, people see that as a solution. And I deeply, deeply disagree with this, because I think that what I see is actually the opposite. I think that we see people who say, "Well, I didn't want to burn out, so I did X,Y,Z." And I think all it is burnout in slow motion. It's like, "I got rid of the thing I care about or I decided not to do X or I gave up on this or I resigned from this thing, even though I really loved it, because I didn't have time." And then, it's like 3, 4, 10 years later, bitter, angry, frustrated and burned out. I think that when you're not actually plugged into the work that you care about most, you're going to burn out. It doesn't even matter anymore how much you work, like you could get down to 20 hours a week, 15 hours a week, if what you're doing you hate, you'll burn out. Because there's no positive reinforcement. I don't really think there's enough that we can do outside of work to appropriately account for work being dissatisfying among people who put so much, who sacrifice so much to get to the positions we're in. So, it's like the equation is never going to work out. So, that's my last one.

**Leah:** Should we go through some solutions? What do you think, point by point? How should we do this? We want to hear some ideas. We want to get a few coaching pearls.

**Kemi:** Sure, I think just like the challenges probably sound connected, I think the solutions are too, right. I think, ultimately in some ways, I just see that each of these challenges are just different lenses of looking at the same kind of an internal problem. And I kind of identify as a paradox. I think I am a disrupter, who is also deeply and high achieving gold star chaser. People are like, "What is your perspective," I'm like, "This is my perspective." I think that whole system is messed up, and we will burn the whole thing down. And also, I would really like to get this and get promoted and do this and that. So, I get both and a lot of what I'm saying is like maybe helping people who feel the same way, who say, "Achievement matters to me." There's nothing wrong with getting a lot of satisfaction out of working hard towards something and then seeing that hard work come to fruition and say, "I did that."

Actually, as humans, I think we all understand that. If somebody's like, "Oh, I worked really hard and I built this house with my hands. And I'm really proud of this," we will all be like, "That's great." But somehow there's this weird thing where if you say the same thing, if you're like, "Well, I worked really hard. I don't know, maybe I got this grant," or, "I worked really hard, and I published these 10 papers," people are kind of like, "Oh, what's wrong with you? Are you just chasing something empty?" I'm like, "Wait a minute, what is that about?" You get to feel a sense of accomplishment and it's okay to want that.

But the problem is, of course, that we're super unbalanced. And in academic medicine especially, the content of what you created can start to mean a lot less than the thing itself. And I think that's where we get into trouble. Then, it becomes, "Oh, I just have to publish 10 papers a year, because everybody publishes 10 papers a year. And now I'm doing work I don't even care about just to hit this metric." Anyway, I feel like I'm digressing.

So, going point by point, your institution does not define your value. I think that. I will say I think that, but I would say more is that I believe, and I live by the fact that I think that your value as a faculty member is based on your ability to execute on your purpose of becoming that faculty member to begin with. And this is where I think that we have an incredible advantage from being people who are actually outside of the norm that the system was built for. Because in some way, shape, or form-- again, I'm speaking as a black woman, I know I'm definitely speaking for women of color, in some way, shape, or form, you went against the grain to get here. And it's likely that there was something driving that against the grain. There's some piece of the people you wanted to help or the idea that you had, or whatever that was part of that fuel. And that place is where so much of your creativity comes from. That's the place where you get to say, "Oh, well, I'm here because I would like to change X or Y or Z." And that is where we discover what our purpose is.

The academics, that's the place of it, that's the setting of it. Being a faculty member, that's the setting of it. But the fuel that got you here, that reason why people looked around, and they were like, "You want to do that specialty? You want to go into that? That's only like 2% black women in that field." And you're like, "Yeah." Whatever that reason is, that's really what your purpose is. And so, what I'm interested in is saying, "Okay, now that you're here, your job is to say, okay, how can I now execute on that purpose while I'm here." And your ability to do that is directly related to what your true value is and it really, really isn't about the institution. Because if you can learn how to separate that out and say, "Now, what's around me institutionally to do that," you can do that anywhere. And if you're aware of what you're doing, then you can also speak about how you do that anywhere. So, now, "Yes, I did it this way at this

institution," you probably would have done it a different way at another institution. But who's the constant? You. You were the constant, not the place.

So, I think that perspective shift, it has a ripple effect to everything else, because it shifts what's in the center. Instead of the institution being in the center and you're holding on to this rope, you're holding on to the rope of the institution being like, "Don't leave me behind," you're in the center, and you're looking around you going, "Ah, what do I have around me to build what I want to build? And now you go "Hmm, I don't know, I feel like these bricks are kind of sad." [laughter] "Maybe [crosstalk], maybe they got better bricks over there." So, I think that it's a shift in perspective for the first one.

For the second one, this is basically very related. Once you realize that and you're like, "Okay, I'm actually here to use what the institution has available in order to execute on my purpose, in order to do the work that makes me come alive," then you start to realize, "Okay, so if I'm very grateful for being given this opportunity," if I'm looking around, and I'm the only woman of color in this department, if I'm looking around-- or I'm the first. It's 2022, so we're still having firsts. I'm the first black woman to show up here. If you're looking around and realizing that then you start realizing, "Well, I'm really grateful for that opportunity. And isn't it now so obvious that the way that I can best express my gratitude is through my performance? Now, can't you see that the best way I can express my gratitude is to make good on this purpose and this reason I came here. And that means that when you asked me to do something that is going to be in conflict that's going to take away from the energy and the time and the space that I have to make this work happen, I have to say no for both of us, because it's not helpful for both of us."

And I think what institutions actually ultimately want-- I think they're set up against what they want, to be honest. But I think that what they ultimately want is to be able to look at faculty members and say, "Look at this amazing work Shreya did. Look at this amazing work Leah did. Look what we have here. These people are so amazing. Look at the work that they created." And so, "I think of it as I'm doing this on behalf of both of us, and you might not understand it right now. But I promise you, I'm doing this on behalf of both of us. These boundaries exist so that I can bring value to this institution."

**Shreya:** Yeah, I think it's so refreshing to hear you talk about reaching that fullest potential, especially because I was talking about before, there's so much noise that accumulates. And I think it sounds like the first step is to really tap into that purpose, which I think can sometimes get lost in the equation, when the everyday stereotype threat comes in, the everyday tasks and accumulated cognitive loads come in. Do you have any tricks or-- not tricks, I guess, like purposeful exercises to tap back into that purpose? Because it's so easy to be in the worker bee mode and just keep pushing.

**Kemi:** Yeah, there's a whole process that when people come into coach with us, there's a whole process, we go through over four to five weeks of doing this. So, I will say it's a little bit more involved. But I would say that I think actually, most of us, if we get quiet and we ask yourself some questions like, "Why am I here? What am I really doing here?", when you actually close your eyes and you're like, "What would I like to build here? What would I like to create here?", when we re engage with ourselves as faculty members here to create new things-- Because otherwise you are in private practice. Maybe people are upset with that but if you're not creating anything. You're not creating a new way to teach people. You're not bringing your unique perspective on that. You're not creating new ideas. You're not doing anything. In my world, you're cutting and sewing. That's what you're doing every day. Then, I'm not sure what you're doing. I'm not sure if I would call it academics.

Anyway, don't @ me, please don't come and yell at me. I am just saying that I think at least what we are sold into is that this is a place of creativity, and this is a place where we're generating new things. And I think that all of us, when we get quiet, can get to a place to understand, like, "Okay, this is actually what I want to do," the reason why it's hard to own that is because it can simultaneously come with a thought that is impossible. That thing that I just identified, there's no world in which it is compatible with what I'm doing today. And what I would say to that is that's the culture speaking. That's the culture telling you, "Be quiet, be grateful da, da, da, da, da." As opposed to saying, "Okay, if that's the ultimate destination, what is the one step that I take tomorrow that gets me closer to that place?" Just one thing.

You start that process, and one of the things that we do and get that grant is we audit what you're doing against that purpose. So, this is the purpose. Let's just audit everything that you do. And what are the things that align with this purpose that gets you closer, and what are the things that have absolutely nothing to do with it? Because that's the first filter, Shreya. Instead of looking at it as-- a lot of us filter our activities by, "Who would be happy if I do this or not?" Our filter is how much does my chair care about this or not? Our filter is all these filters but not actually, how does this align with your work that brings me joy or not.

**Shreya:** And unfortunate, I think by the time people get to that stage of being like, "Wait, what is-- What are my values? Is it aligning?" I think sometimes you're just so burnt out, you're just like, "I just want to breathe."

**Kemi:** Free.

**Leah:** Yeah.

**Shreya:** Yeah.

**Shreya:** And that's a sad place to be.

**Kemi:** I know it is.

**Shreya:** And I think that's where I find a lot of my--

**Kemi:** Colleagues.

**Shreya:** --Friends. Yeah.

**Leah:** Yeah.

**Kemi:** We're basically in triage mode by that point. We're just like, "I don't even care what it is. Just cut it all away. I just need space. I need to recover myself." I think that those times are important though, because it is hard to be creative from complete exhaustion. And sometimes, the beginning is taking two weeks off and being, "I'm literally not giving anything to anybody. I may or may not be back. [laughs] [Shreya laughs] I got to take some time to be able to listen to myself."

But I guess, Shreya and Leah, I have to say that what I have seen over and over again actually, is once the desire is there, once the desire that's like, "I'm not doing it this way. I'm doing it a different way," and there's a little bit of structure of just creating the space and some exploratory questions, nobody's

confused. Nobody comes up like, "I just don't know." It's just too scary to face. So, it's like, "Okay, well, let's support you while you face it but you know what you really want to do." Anyway, I feel like I can keep going, so I'll pause.

**Leah:** No, that's great. What was it? Number three was?

**Kemi:** Number three was conflating the mentors. So, instead-- this one might be a little bit more very practical. So, instead of going into leader into meetings with your mentors or leaders thinking, again, "I think we do a really good job when we don't think that people support or care about us. We won't listen to them. Fine." You know what I mean? We're pretty good about that. I will say, I didn't start out being that way. I still cared about those people even though I could tell that they didn't want me because I was still wanting to prove myself. But eventually, I think we get to a place where we're like, "Okay, we can ignore," but it's really hard when you're dealing with somebody that you feel like does have your best interests at heart, and you're dealing with somebody who does support you, or has supported you in some way.

So instead of basically saying, "Well, in order for me to demonstrate my appreciation, and my respect for this person's interest, I have to follow their advice and do what they say," instead you approach those meetings as informational interviews. So, you're coming in-- so that means one, you're clear about what information you want. Very clear, not pseudo clear. You know exactly the topic you're talking about, you know why you're talking about it, and you know, "This is what I know, and these are my variables I'm unsure of that I am interested in their perspective on." And then, you take in the information as information, and then you make decisions yourself that you can learn from. Then, you decide, "Okay, I am going to go after this opportunity, or I am not." Also, when you're in the meeting before we get to after the meeting, it changes your curiosity, because instead of just waiting to hear, "Do they think I should do it or not?," you're so much more interested in the why.

Maybe one mentor is like, "You should definitely go after this program." Then, you're like "Oh, wow. you felt very sure. Tell me why?" Now you're like, "Oh, what do you see there? What am I missing?" It's all curiosity based. And then, you get a fuller picture of their perspective, because maybe their answer is really valuable for you. Maybe they're like, "Okay, on the surface, it doesn't look good for you, but these are the reasons why I think this is helpful. I notice A, I notice B, I notice C." And you're like, "Wow, it's really great." But maybe their answer is, "Well, I don't know, like this person is really important in that program. And I saw that their mentees, da, da, da, da, da. So maybe if you get it." Then, you start to hear the reasons. And what you can do with the reasons is you can then compare that to your values, you can then ask yourself, Shreya, "Oh, okay. Is that how I want to chase my success? Because I need to be in the room?" And then after that, "Does that feel good as the way that I want to have to do it, or that might be a viable path. But that's not my path." It's not even that you're wrong. It's just that like, "I don't want to get successful that way, that sounds exhausting. [Shreya chuckles] I want to do it right, and I do it in a different way." So, that's how you can start to disentangle those things.

And also, it means that in the meeting, once again, you can express a lot of gratitude. "Well, thank you, I really understand your perspective now. That's so helpful. I'm going to think about this some more. I'm going to figure it out." And then, because you've been curious if you then decide not to take the advice, you're not just saying, "Oh, I decided not to take your advice." You're saying, "Well, I understood that

you were thinking A, B, C and D but I realize that actually is not going to work for me. I just don't operate that way."

**Shreya:** That 'no' template is going to be so much better.

**Kemi:** Yeah, that's probably something [Shreya laughs]. And then, I think the last thing is always to think about how does your perspective on the person who really wants to support you, but not might not have great advice, how does it then merge? Because I kind of think of it as just, "Oh, you want me to go--" I'm making all these hand motions for people listening, and I do this all the time on podcasts, I'm sorry. But I kind of think of it as, if your two hands are going like parallel, you're like, "Oh, we want to go to the same destination, don't worry. I'm just going to do it a different way." But you can still mention and bring forth and remind both of you that you're both working towards the same thing for you.

And at the worst, you're wrong. At the worst, you're like, "Well, I'm going to try this, I could be wrong, but I will learn from it." And you can only learn from it when you made the decision, because you understood what you were thinking about. your variables and all that. So even if you're wrong, it's still valuable, because you're like, "Oh, okay, I was wrong about this." As opposed to, "Well, they told me to do it, and it didn't work out." So, what did you learn? Nothing. You're just angry, but you don't have anything to do with it.

I think the other thing about mentors is sometimes people can support you, but they want you to go somewhere else. And that's where the curiosity also helps, like, "Oh, well, what is this going to get me? Well, what is that going to get me? Okay, well, I don't want to do that." I had a mentor who was like, "Oh, you got to do this, then you got to do this, and you got to do this. Because eventually, you're going to have this position." And I was like, "Oh, I don't want that." [laughs] "You're going to be a department chair," or whatever. I was like, "Oh, no, we need to have another conversation. I have no desire. [laughs] Thank you so much for believing in me. This is not my path." And just that clarity changed the nature of the conversation, and that went back to number one. Because I knew that I don't need to be department chair to fulfill my purpose of what I'm doing here. And so, I'm not chasing that gold star just to chase it.

**Leah:** That's so true. This is opening my eyes because what realizing is-- this is obvious. If you go into a conversation with somebody like this, and you don't know who you are, what you want, what your values are, then you're literally with the wind, you're with the wind. And I think that's what happened to me. I'm like, "Sure. You think that's good for me? I'll do that. That sounds great."

**Shreya:** Yeah, "Maybe you see something in me I don't see myself."

**Leah:** Yeah. Okay.

**Shreya:** It's the trainee mindset.

**Kemi:** And we've been in it a really long time and it's served us. It's not like we're all maladapted. I think we're all appropriately adapted for the training and everything that we had to go through. I will see as somebody who trained in surgery, that's exactly how it was. You come in, and they're like, "Oh, you're good at this, and you're like, "I am, yay." [laughs] [Shreya laughs] So, we still kind of want that magical experience of like, "Oh, you see this in me," or, "You have the blueprint." And we have to grow up. It's a

delayed kind of catchup because of the kind of environments we've been trained in. But we still have to do the catch up to realize that actually, nobody knows what you really want for your career but you. And not only that, nobody is living your career, but you. Let's just think about that for a second. You're the person who actually is doing this thing. So, you are the one who has to be able to come in and say, "Okay, this is what I really want. This is where I'm really trying to go. How can you help me do this?"

**Leah:** Mm-hmm. Yep, lots of work.

**Shreya:** That agency is so hard. I feel like there's just so much to unlearn from that trainee mindset, to get to a place of having that courage, to go into meetings with that curiosity. You could go into anything, "You're just going to give me some datapoints, but ultimately, it's going to be me."

**Kemi:** Yes. You know what though, Shreya? Can I just say something? You're right. It is hard, it is hard to unlearn. It triggers fight or flight. Most people are like-- Your little Apple Watch will register it as a workout because your heart is beating like 120 beats per minute. "Are you working out?" "I'm not working out. I'm not freaking out." It is very hard, and I want to acknowledge that as humans, we need to belong. And we have all-- again, most of us have spent over 10 years, 15, 20 years working our way into belonging. And so, it feels completely insane to do something that feels like, "Okay, now I'm taking myself out of belonging. What the hell? Why would-- Everything is telling me not to do this." But I just want to say that it is equally hard to live a career you don't want. It is equally hard to look back and say "Wow, I worked for 15 years to get here, and I do not like my job." It's equally hard to say, "Oh, the only way I'm going to like my job is to actually give up on the dream that I actually wanted to do." It's equally hard to live in obligatory gratitude. It's equally hard to make decisions always based on other people's urgency. I think it's hard to come home to your kids and be like, "Oh, I wasn't there because I was doing this job I hate". That's also really hard.

So, I just choose the hard that leads to liberation. I'm like, "Okay, this is also hard, I also don't like this,"-- I tell my clients all the time, "I don't like this. I don't like having to think about things this way and being strategic. But I am clear that I love it here, I'm clear that I love writing papers. I don't know what's wrong with me. I like the research. I do like these things. I like giving talks. All of this. So, I've got to figure out a way that I can have this place be somewhere where I can thrive. And that I can come home and be like, "Wow, I really loved what I did today." I was so happy at what we accomplished. And when things are hard at work, they are hard that's meaningful. Like, it's hard on behalf of the work, like, "Oh, that was really challenging. This problem happened. And I'm really angry about it." But it's a problem on behalf of real work. It's not a problem, because I don't know the division director's ego is upset because of who made the [crosstalk]. I don't want to waste my time on those challenges. That's the only thing I want to balance out. Because it is hard, but I think both are hard. I think both ways are hard.

**Shreya:** One is hard and familiar. And so, it's easy, it's a little bit easier to continuously go through that. If, then-- or what was it? When-- Which clause phrase are we going with?

**Kemi:** Yes, and everybody connects on that too. Because they also have a built-in community, everybody's like, "Yes, I agree. It's all terrible here. Yes, this is really terrible here. We all just have to do it. There's nothing we can do about this," etc., etc. But I just think that we could be so much better. I don't refuse to believe that's the top, is we're all kind of in this system, complaining about this system, and not doing what we came to do. And like you said, not actually living out our full purpose on behalf

of the patients and the communities and all those things. I just don't believe that's the case. And I think part of what I want to do is seed courage in everybody to say, "We can all kind of wake up and belong to each other in this way differently." That would be powerful, because then you're not alone.

**Shreya:** Yeah, you start off your podcast with the idea of you want to transform people's relationship with work. I think too often-- Not too often but when you get into the place where you're like, "I don't belong here," it can very much be like, "Okay, well, I have to leave." And I think that's what we see so often with women of color, just leaving academic medicine. But the idea of transforming your relationship with this place that I know was not made for me and has cultural habits that are sometimes going to hurt my health, hurt my family, hurt my mental health, it's really powerful.

**Kemi:** I'm like the first person to cheer on when somebody, like a black woman on Twitter, was like, "I left," I'm like, "Yes," because I want us to be free. If you got to the point where you're like, "There's nothing here for me left. I have to go," then definitely go. And also, for people who want to be here for whom leaving is settling, I don't want you to leave as a way to settle because, "Well, I just can't have what I have here, so I'll have something less." I want you to leave for something more. If you're like, "Oh, no, this is even better over here," or, "Maybe this was never for me," that's fine. But I agree with you that if we don't adopt these differences in perspectives, and honestly these courageous steps that we can do in community, then that's what happens. Then, it's burnout in slow motion. Eventually, you're just going to leave and all of us miss out.

And I think the other thing again, just coming back to perspective is, it was never going to work for me as a strategy ever to be like, "Oh, this thing wasn't built for me, so I can't make it here." Where would I be? If that was my strategy, I would have never come back from failing out of school, I would have never-- there's a part of me that where I'm really speaking to black women and really speaking to women of color, that can't be the litmus test because none of this stuff was made for us. [laughs] I was like, "So, where are you going? The corporate world wasn't made for you either [Shreya laughs] Nonprofit? None of these worlds were made for you." So, once I settled a little bit deeper into that, then I'm like, "Okay, so which one of these worlds that were not made for me is most resonant with just the intrinsic things that I love. Which of these worlds that weren't made for me is the place where despite that, I can still have a lot of fun or I can have challenges that are interesting to me," all of that. And for me that's academic medicine and I think for a lot of us it is and that's where I want to say it's okay that you found yourself here. Also, I want you to be well. Also, I want us. Because if we're well, we will remake this place too, but we can't remake it until we're well.

**Shreya:** So true. I think that leads into their last challenge too, with the dichotomy of settling versus burnout.

**Kemi:** Oh, yes, okay.

**Shreya:** And choosing settling.

**Kemi:** Okay, I will just say briefly the "when, then". So, the one of--

**Shreya:** Oh, dang, I skipped one.

**Kemi:** Yeah, we did. So, I would say overall [chuckles] what's true is that what we want the result, and then we want to be able to change. So, we want the result of not having too much on my plate, and then I'll stop overworking nights and weekends. And it's like it's never going to happen that way. It's always going to happen that you're going to stop doing the thing, and you're going to be uncomfortable, and you're going to disappoint people and you're going to piss people off and you're going to be terrified yourself. And then, your reality will catch up and you will have the thing that you were looking for.

So, I think that like when it comes to this idea, "Well once I get this metric, then I'll be taken seriously. Once it gets funded, I'll be taken seriously," etc., it's like you have to take yourself seriously first. So, you have to recognize, again, in this paradox world that you could be going after this gold star, this thing, and yet simultaneously, the likelihood of success of getting there is going to be based on the fact of you being able to realize that you already deserve it, you already have it, you've already earned it. And so, you are just doing the work to catch up. That is it. And that changes how you enter into conversation with people. Because it means that when you're clear about that, and you're like, "No, I deserve to be here. I take myself seriously. I'm not waiting for you to take me seriously. I take my work seriously right now," then the way that you talk about yourself, and your work will change. And all of a sudden now, conversations will be valuable, because people will either enter into that conversation with you. And they'll be like "Oh, yes, you take this seriously, I take it seriously. What's next? How can I help you? How do we get there?" Or they'll enter into conversations with you, and they will make it very clear as you are taking yourself very seriously, you're not doing that weird thing that we do, like "Well, I'm really trying to do this, but who knows? Well, maybe I don't know. [Shreya laughs] I worked 20 years to get here--"

**Shreya:** Sounds really familiar.

**Kemi:** "Who knows?" [Shreya laughs] It like we're going to stop pretending. We're going to take ourselves seriously. And then, sometimes you will have conversations where people will completely dismiss you and you've gotten very valuable information. Because you now understand, because you came clearly that, "This matters to me, this is what I want to do this is how I'm thinking about it, these are my problems, this is what's next for me," and somebody is meeting that with basically, "Well, you don't really matter right now, because you haven't gotten this or that," you know where you stand with that person. And then, you get no matter who that person is, no matter what other people say about that, it doesn't matter. Now you get to say, "Am I taking advice from this person? Is this somebody that I want to be around? Do I feel better around this person or not?" So, that's where I say that, take yourself seriously, first, take your work seriously. I really want people to stop to give into the culture of this pretense that the work that you care about the most doesn't matter or is frivolous or is the bonus. Y'all know what I mean? How we are socialized to talk about our work like, "Oh, I'm just doing this little thing over here." No.

**Shreya:** [laughs] You're changing it.

**Kemi:** Yes, you're here to change. And I think the best thing about that is that you find your people. Exactly what you're looking for you find because the people who are in it like that will respond to that. "Oh, okay. You're really serious. Let's figure this out. How can we help each other?" So, maybe it's a peer who just really appreciates meeting another peer that's not just chasing gold stars, but cares about their work, and now you've got community. Or maybe it's not a peer, but it's somebody who's been

waiting for somebody serious to show up. And who's like, "Oh, I will give you my time and attention because we're not going to have to wade through all of this BS of "Oh, maybe it doesn't matter. I don't really know. You sound focused. Let me help you." This is the Informed Believers podcast. You actually find those people that you're looking for, but again, it didn't come because they found you and made you serious. It came because you took yourself seriously first.

Okay, the last one is avoiding burnout by settling for less. I don't know, I feel like it's everything I just said, right. And I think, Shreya, you kind of touched on it when you were talking about how it's hard. I think it's about choosing your hard. And I don't know, I can never say, "Oh, if you do what I say and follow these things, everything will work out." But what I will say is that if I have to leave academics or if you have to leave academics or anybody's like, "You know what? This didn't work out for me," you want to be clear about that. You want to be like, "Oh yeah. I gave this my best. I showed up with what I wanted to do. I like made proposals that made it sound good. I gave this my best. And it turned out that academics wasn't ready for my best. So, I'm going somewhere else." But you don't want it to be, "I kind of entered into this world, followed all their rules. I knew that this place was not built for me. And I went along and I realized, wow, this really sucks. And then, I left." You haven't learned anything about yourself. So, I say avoid burnout by being deeply and totally committed to the process. The process of growth, the process of self-discovery, because no matter where you end up, you will win. It's impossible to waste your time when you are connected to your purpose and you're like, "I'm going to do everything I can to make this career work for me," it's impossible, you cannot waste your time.

And I actually think it is the cure to burnout. Because when we are really-- I mean, the research says-- you guys talk to burnout people. The research says when you're working hard towards something that you believe in, and you feel activated and you feel like you're bringing your best self, even when it doesn't work out, you have this incredible positive return of seeing your efforts and having there be value and meaning in it. I think that is the opposite of burnout. Not, I don't know, all the things that they do, ice cream parties and all the other weird things that they do to help us not burn out.

**Leah:** Yoga.

**Shreya:** Petting dogs and things.

**Kemi:** Petting-- Oh, God, don't get me started on the petting dogs.

[laughter]

**Kemi:** I don't know if they're still doing this. There were like these automatic events that got put on our calendars. First of all--

**Leah:** No.

**Kemi:** That's a trigger for me.

**Shreya:** Oh, no.

**Leah:** That's a little intrusive there.

**Kemi:** Like, do not put a meeting on my calendar without my permission [laughs] It's already a trigger. So, somebody had some-- I don't know, I was like, "Who has this access?" [Shreya laughs] So, it just appeared on your calendar, and it was called, "Got burnout?"

[laughter].

**Kemi:** I was like--

**Shreya:** Oh, my gosh.

**Kemi:** -- and they were always at like 7 AM or like 6 PM. You're like, "Oh my gosh." Anyway, no, that doesn't work either.

**Shreya:** We can create such a funny episode of just the things we've all seen with regard to "Oh, yeah. That's popping."

**Leah:** Oh, that would be a hilarious episode, yes.

**Kemi:** Start in accounting, all the way--

**Shreya:** It's coming from people who I think are trying to be well intentioned with limited resources. But it would be just funny to laugh at our culture.

Kemi, this has been incredible. I almost feel like this is a therapy session for me [Kemi laughs] It's like every time I listen to you, I tap into that courageous Shreya that I really, really hope I'm trying to-- I hope I'm living my fullest potential and tapping into that purpose and you remind me every day to take that time out for that CEO in me and really make sure I'm that worker bee part of me. Somebody who's listening is like, "What are these two--"

**Leah:** I know. I feel like we have to refer to the appropriate podcast episode [laughs].

**Shreya:** Yeah.

**Kemi:** Episode, I don't know, 2 or 3, something like that.

**Shreya:** 2, yeah, exactly. We're so, so grateful for you, for your time, your wisdom. Any take-home messages? Any big picture things or anything else that you want to mention on the episode?

**Kemi:** Everything I say, all of this is coming from my absolutely deep and unshakable belief that you are already enough, that your institution is immeasurably lucky to have you. They barely know what they've got. And I am so clear about this after working with so many clients, to see them be able to blossom out in all the more that they had to offer and give this space, the institution and their work when they get out of these mindsets. I just want everybody to know that any thought, any belief, anything that is in you that wonders, "What am I even contributing? Maybe I don't belong here? Maybe--," I just want you to deeply know that all of that is bullshit. It is by design, it was by design, by experiences put into you for specific reasons to keep things the way they are, to keep the status quo. And I just want you to know that the most truest thing, truly the most truest thing is that you are not only enough, you are more than enough, you have always been more than enough. And every moment where you feel that, when it

might happen by accident, and you're like, "Wow," and you have that connection back again, to like what you're capable of. That's your NorthStar. Follow that. That's what I want to say.

**Shreya:** Ah, thank you so much Kemi. Our last question is, what do you want to plug? Because you are on so many outlets and I am following you on all of them because I cannot be your coaching client but it's Twitter, it's Instagram, it's podcast, it's newsletter. What would you like to plug?

**Kemi:** Okay, first of all, I'm on all the socials with my government name, Kemi Doll, except for LinkedIn. I'm like there but I don't see any of those messages, so please don't message me there. I guess I will plug that if you are a woman of color in academic medicine or public health. I have a career coaching program called Get That Grant. It touches on all of the things that we talked about here. I recognize that this is just a little sprinkling and one of the things I've learned is that it's very hard to transform alone. And so, we have an amazing community where you can transform with other people. And otherwise, if you don't fit that bill, I love communicating and connecting with the larger community on all those social platforms. So, thank you.

**Leah:** This has been another episode of the Curbsiders bringing you a little knowledge food for your brain hole.

**Matt and Shreya:** Yummy.

**Leah:** Yummy, Shreya? [Shreya laughs].

**Shreya:** [laughs] I think I was daydreaming.

**Leah:** I waited.

**Shreya:** Oops, [laughs] my bad.

**Leah:** All right. Get your show notes at *thecurbsiders.com* and sign up for our mailing list to get our weekly show notes in your inbox. Plus, twice each month you'll get our amazing Curbsiders Digest, recapping the latest practice changing articles guidelines and news in internal medicine.

**Shreya:** We are committed to high-value, practice-changing knowledge and to do that, we need your feedback. So, please subscribe, rate, and review the show at Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or email us at *thecurbsiders@gmail.com*.

**Matt:** And a special thanks to Dr. Leah Witt and Shreya Trivedi for hosting this episode and for finding such great guests for the Women in Medicine series. The Curbsiders is produced and edited by the team at PodPaste. Elizabeth Proto runs our social media and Stuart Brigham composed our theme music. With all that, until next time, I've been Dr. Matthew Frank Watto.

**Shreya:** And I've been Dr. Shreya Trivedi.

**Leah:** And this has been Dr. Leah Witt. Thank you and good night.

[music]

[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]