

# Leading Well in Law: Mindsets to Engage, Retain, & Inspire Your Team

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# Burnout, Workplace Evolution & The Birth of a 2<sup>nd</sup> Book

- Lots of growth & change; lean/understaffed teams
- Work format shifts
- Persistent state of uncertainty (economic; geopolitical)
- Gen AI and the role it will play in law (humans + technology)
- The law is a stressful profession

# Legal Profession Impact

Paula Davis & ALM Survey 2023-2024. N=887 Lawyers (N=797) & Legal Professionals (N=90)

STATEMENT	% WHO RESPONDED, "ONCE A WEEK, A FEW TIMES A WEEK, OR EVERY DAY"
I am overwhelmed by the amount of work I have	63.3%
I have a hard time concentrating at work	64.9%
I have become less interested in my work	63.4%
I have become more cynical about my work	68.0%
I feel emotionally drained on a regular basis from my work	68.7%

# This Trio Significantly Impacts Lawyer Mental Health

Krill et al. 2023



Stress

Loneliness

Over-  
commitment

## Sustainable Performance Requires A “Me and We” Approach

We need to understand that leadership behaviors, team dynamics, and individual experiences interconnect to create the conditions for sustainable human performance.



## Leaders Drive This Conversation

Jim Clifton & Jim Harter (2023).  
Culture Shock

—” —

Managers can account  
for *at least 70%* of the  
variance in team  
engagement

—” —

*Source: Jim Clifton & Jim Harter (2023). Culture Shock*

PAULA  
DAVIS

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# The Core 6 Drivers of Chronic Stress & Disengagement at Work

Maslach (1998); Baker & Demerouti (2017). *J. Occ. Health Psychol.*;  
Maslach & Leiter (2008; 2022)

1. Unmanageable workload
2. Lack of recognition
3. Unfairness
4. Lack of community
5. Values misalignment/lack of meaning
6. Low or no autonomy (flexibility & control)



# Drop in the Chat

What Core 6 factors drive stress on your team? For you?

# 5 Mindsets to Help Legal Leaders & Teams

Paula Davis. Lead Well: 5 Mindsets to Engage, Retain & Inspire Your Team (Feb. 4, 2025)

**MINDSET 1:** Prioritize “Sticky” Recognition & Mattering

**MINDSET 2:** Amplify ABC Needs

- \* Autonomy (flexibility)
- \* Belonging (community)
- \* Challenge (and growth)

**MINDSET 3:** Create Workload Sustainability

**MINDSET 4:** Build Systemic Stress Resilience

**MINDSET 5:** Promote Values Alignment & Meaning

Good teaming practices + good human practices





# MINDSET: Prioritize “Sticky” Recognition & Mattering

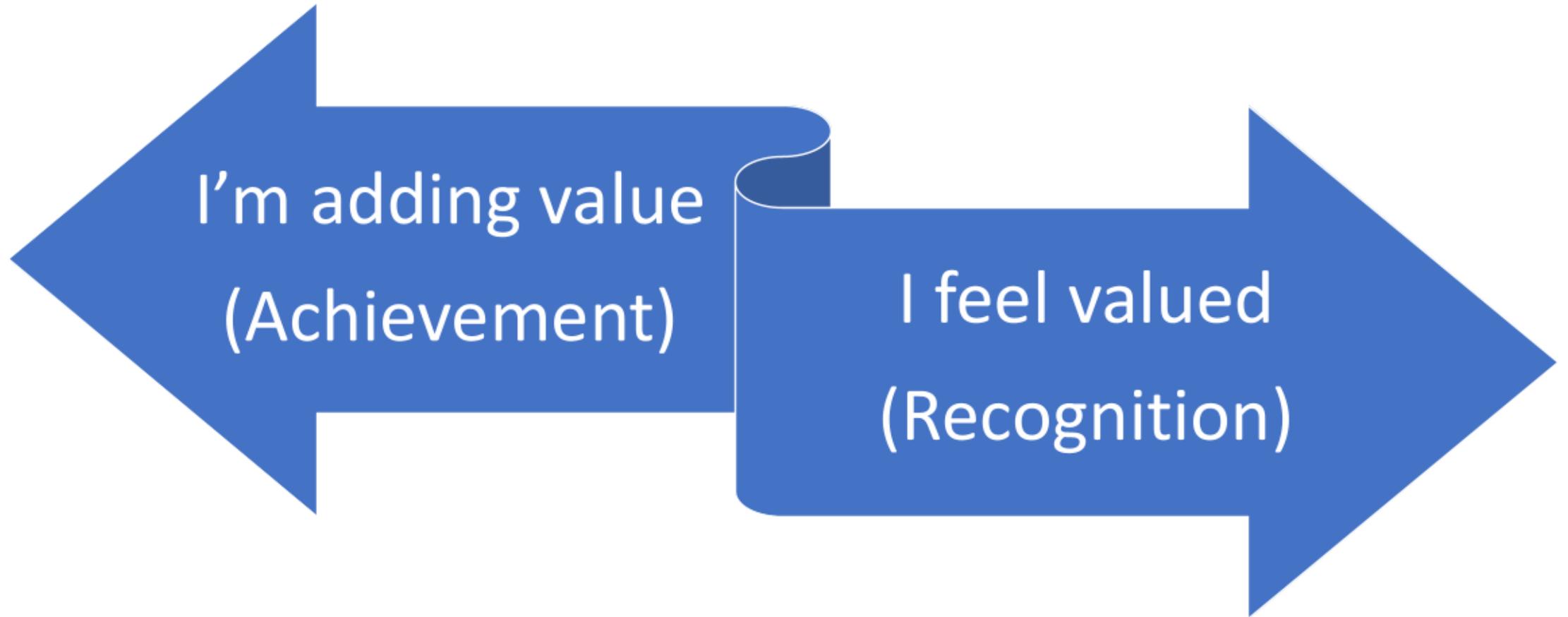
# What is “Sticky” Recognition?

A way to show a person or  
a team the evidence of  
their impact.



# Why It Sticks: It Activates Mattering

Dr. Gordon Flett; Dr. Isaac Prilleltensky – How People Matter; Gail Cornwall (Sept. 27, 2023) NYT Article; Drs. Marty Seligman & Gabriella Rosen Kellerman; Dr. Zachary Mercurio - The Power of Mattering (2025)



# “What Do You Feel Your Employer Values about You?”

Krill et al. (2022). 12 Behavioral Science, 177

GROUP 1: My skill as a lawyer & worth as a human being

GROUP 2: The number of hours I bill

GROUP 3: I don't know - I get very little feedback

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THEN LAWYERS WERE ASKED: “Are you considering leaving, or have you left the profession due to mental health, burnout, or stress?”

Group 1: 15.4% said yes

Group 2: 26.7% said yes

Group 3: 37.4% said yes



# Appreciation & Recognition Need a Boost in Law

Paula Davis & ALM Survey (2024)

STATEMENT	% WHO RESPONDED, "ONCE A WEEK, A FEW TIMES A WEEK, OR EVERY DAY"
I am recognized by colleagues for my work contributions	35.6%
I am recognized by my clients for my work contributions	27.0%
I feel like a cog in the wheel at work	51.4% (23.1% said every day)
I feel appreciated at work	38.9%
I know that what I do makes a significant contribution	39.3%
I have a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment about my work	43.4%
I feel motivated when I accomplish something at work	68.1%

## TNT: Thank You “Plus”

Carol Dweck (2006); Deloitte Workforce Well-Being Imperative (March 13, 2023)

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- Think of a person you want to thank, recognize, or affirm
- Add the specific behavior/strength you noticed that led to the good outcome (the “why” or the “because”)
- Tell them the impact to you, the team, or the firm



THANK  
YOU

# TNT: Tell Someone How You Rely on Them

Zach Mercurio The Power of Mattering (2025)

“If it wasn’t for you...”



# TNT: Ask This Question

Mercurio (2025)

When you feel like you matter to me, what am I doing?

You can rephrase:  
When you feel like you're a valued part of this team, what I am doing?  
What are we doing?

MINDSET:  
Amplify  
ABC  
Needs



# What Are ABC Needs?

Deci & Ryan (2000). *American Psychologist* 68-78

**Autonomy (choice/flexibility):** Wanting to act with a sense of choice & volition; choosing to do something because it aligns with your values and goals

**Belonging (connection):** Feeling connected to others; like you are part of groups that are important and significant to you; feeling cared for by others; a sense of community

**Challenge (growth):** You feel like you're getting better at goals that matter to you; you feel effective in your work role; you want to master new skills



# ABC Needs, Motivation & the Legal Profession

(Sheldon & Krieger (2015) 83 G. Wash. Law Rev. 554; Krieger (2018) *Best Lawyer You Can Be*)

## HIGHLY CORRELATED



Autonomy  
.66



Belonging  
.65



Challenge  
.63

## NOT SO MUCH

- Income .19
- Class Rank .12
- School Rank .05
- Law Journal .00
- Made Partner .00
- Billable Hours -.10
- Alcohol Use -.12



# Autonomy Builders

THE NEED TO CHOOSE YOUR  
OWN ADVENTURE

# TNT: Give People Context

Frank Martela et al. 2021

Give a rationale, explanation, the strategic thinking, and/or back story for assignments, projects, and change

\*\* Show your (mental) work

\*\* This is a practice that also fosters meaningful work



# TNT: Clarity When Delegating

Charlie Gilkey. 2023 Team Habits

What types of decisions do “others” have sole control to make?

(Level 1 Decisions)

What types of decisions can “others” make but must keep you in the loop?

(Level 2 Decisions)

What types of decisions are “others” not allowed to make?

(Level 3 Decisions)



Build Belonging/Community

# Challenges in Law

Dr. Larry Richard (2002); Achor, Rosen Kellerman, Reece & Robichaux (2018); Dr. Kelly Monahan (2024). Essential

- Siloed work
- Long working hours
- Increasing productivity (billable hours) expectations
- Competitive environment
- Higher rates of loneliness than in other professions studied
- TBD – AI's impact on relationships.

**\*\* RESULT:** Limits meaningful time with colleagues & time for personal relationships



# And Lawyers & Legal Professionals Feel It

Paula Davis & ALM Survey Study 2023/2024. N=887

I have so much work to do it takes away from family and friends	72.8% - once a week, a few times a week, or every day
I have so much work to do that it takes away from hobbies and personal interests	76.7% - once a week, a few times a week, or every day

# A Note about AI & Its Impact on Connection

Burlacu & Monahan (July 2025). Upwork Research Institute

AI's productivity payoff comes at a cost:

- The most productive AI users are also 88% more likely to be burned out, disengaged, and twice as likely to quit
- 90% of workers see AI as a co-worker and 67% trust AI more than colleagues, and 64% say they have a better relationship with AI than with their human teammates; and 54% say AI is more empathetic
- 85% of those most productive AI users report that they are more polite to AI than the people around them; 79% say AI is more polite to them

\*\* We need to design work not only for new tech and workflows, but also for the broader interpersonal work experience (e.g., holiday parties, lunch and learns, retreats, eating meals together, volunteering, zoom coffees, happy hours)



TNT: Revive a  
Dormant  
Connection  
Aknin & Sandstrom  
(2024)



# But, We Stop Ourselves before We Start – Why?

*Id.*

- They might not be interested in hearing from me
- It would be awkward – too much time has passed
- I don't want to bother the person

What helps move us into action?

Start by sending messages to current friends and contacts. This one activity increased the number of people who reached out to an old friend by 2/3!



# TNT: Build Strong Relationships & Community by Capitalizing on Small Wins (Active Constructive Responding)

Dr. Shelly Gable et al. 2004; Dr. Karen Reivich; Ilies et al. 2023; Illes, Bono & Bakker (2024).



<b><u>Active Constructive Responding</u></b>  <b>JOY MULTIPLIER</b>	<b><u>Active Destructive</u></b>  <b>JOY THIEF</b>
<b><u>Passive Constructive</u></b>  <b>FAUX LISTENING</b>	<b><u>Passive Destructive</u></b>  <b>RESPONSE SHIFTER</b>

# Reflection

## Menu of Concepts/ TNTs

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Thank You “Plus”

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Tell Someone You Rely on Them

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Powerful Mattering Question

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Give People Context

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Clarity When Delegating

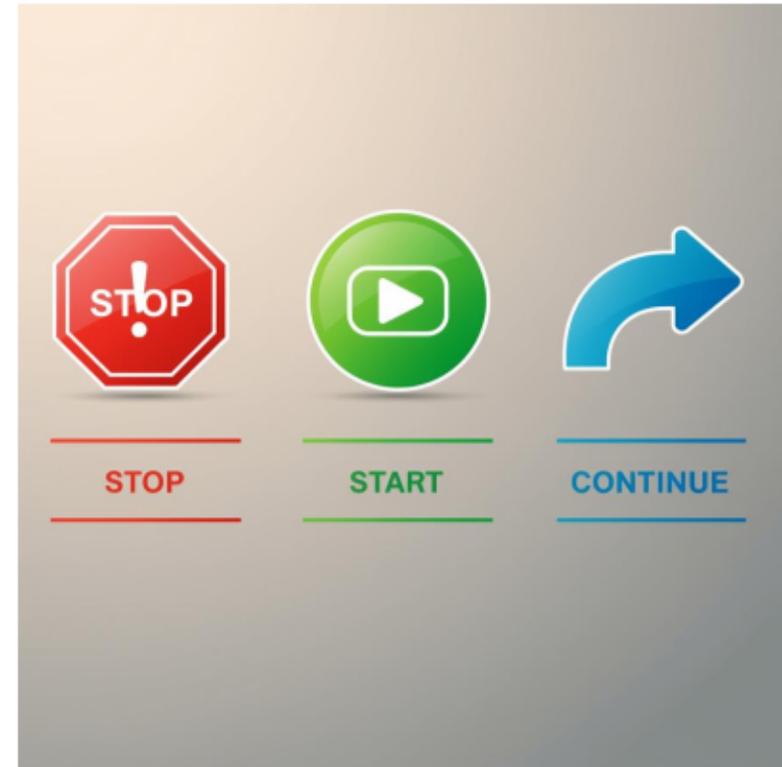
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Revive a Dormant Connection

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ACR

## What Do You Want to Stop, Start, or Continue?



# Let's Stay Connected

**Lead Well on Amazon**



**My LinkedIn**



# Final Thought

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“Perhaps organizational life can offer some shelter from the chaos and uncertainty by being a safe haven where people can connect, be known, and achieve something meaningful together.”

Dr. Amy Edmondson



# Connect with Paula



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LINKEDIN - Paula Davis

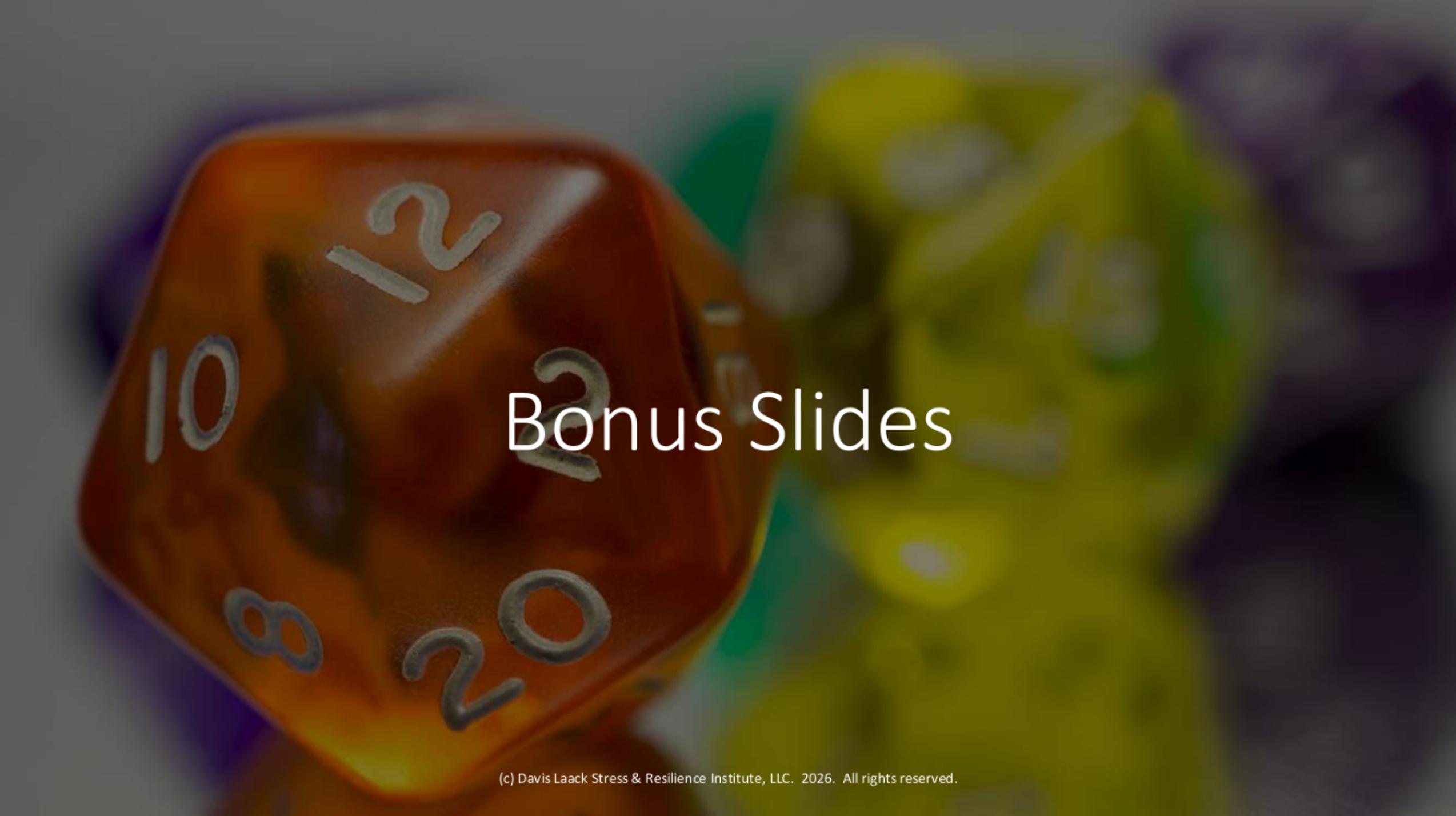
A stack of four sticky notes is centered on a large, light blue circular background. The top sticky note is yellow and has the words "THANK YOU" written on it in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Below it, the edges of three other sticky notes are visible: a pink one, an orange one, and another pink one. The notes are slightly offset, creating a sense of depth.

**THANK  
YOU**

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# Bonus Slides

# Business Case: People & Performance

24 Chapter 1

**Table 1.1. Comparing People + Performance Approaches**

<b>People + Performance-Focused (P+P-Focused):</b> These companies outperformed on both financial results and human capital development. They represented 9% of the companies studied.	<b>People-Focused:</b> These companies outperformed on the human capital dimension. They represented 15% of the companies studied.
<b>Performance-Focused:</b> These companies outperformed on the financial results dimension. They represented 21% of the companies studied.	<b>Typical Performers:</b> These companies showed no distinct patterns and did not stand out in either dimension. They represented 55% of the companies studied.

# People & Performance Focused Companies

McKinsey Global Institute (2023)

- Were 4.3 times more likely than the average company to maintain top-tier financial performance for 9 out of 10 years from 2010-2019
- From 2019-2021, they grew their revenues 2x faster than Performance Focused companies (8% vs 4%)
- Had a lower attrition rate (8.5%) compared to the PF companies (13.4%)
- Had returns on invested capital equal to the Performance Focused companies (both 28%)
- Greater economic profit (\$1.5B) compared to PF companies (\$0.4B)





# Mattering Activates...

Dr. Gordon Flett; Dr. Isaac Prilleltensky – How People Matter; Gail Cornwall (Sept. 27, 2023) NYT Article; Drs. Marty Seligman & Gabriella Rosen Kellerman; Dr. Zachary Mercurio (2025); Hazlip et al. (2020); Paradisi, Matera, & Nerini (2024)

When employees feel like they matter to their organization, they are/have:

1. More satisfied with their jobs (and life)
2. Increased intrinsic drive (the ABCs coming up)
3. More psychological safety
4. Higher resilience
5. Less likely to quit
6. Lower rates of burnout, anxiety, & depression
7. Greater belief in their ability to achieve their goals (increased self-efficacy)



## Well-Being & Performance Consequences

Gagne & Vansteenkiste (2013); Van den Broeck et al. (2016); Rouse et al. (2020); Deci & Ryan (2014); Goh, Pfeffer, & Zenios (2016)

- ABC Needs are essential nutrients for growth, performance, & well-being at work
- When ABC Needs are met: better job performance, decreased risk of burnout, stronger organizational commitment, & lower turnover
- When ABC Needs are not met: likelihood of depression increases, higher exhaustion, & higher turnover intention