

What Matters Most?

Feeling Like you Matter

July/August 2026 NLCDD Leadership Brief



In a world where 30% of workers say they feel invisible, the antidote is leading in ways that people feel seen, valued, and appreciated

The work we do matters. We constantly have the opportunity to better the system of support so people with disabilities can live with dignity, choice, and full human rights. We, and others who do this work, matter too. In fact, research shows that people who feel they matter experience more [self-compassion, relationship satisfaction, and greater belief in their capacity to achieve their goals](#). Feeling like we don't matter is associated with burnout and increased self-criticism.

Mattering is the belief that we are a significant part of the world around us. It is an innate human need, defined by a combination of how valued we feel and how much value we feel we add.

At work, people want to feel like they contribute and are valued for the work they do and the person they are. They also want to know and [be recognized](#) for their contributions. If mattering is so important, how do we create a culture where our colleagues feel it? Start with supporting people to feel significant.

The Big Takeaway



Building a culture of mattering takes commitment and requires us to [notice, affirm, and meet the needs of](#) those who work within our teams and organizations.

Notice the people around you and act on what you see. Employees need to feel like their teams and their leaders see who they are, what they uniquely bring to the work, and act on that information.

Affirm each person's contributions to the work. People need to feel that others recognize what they bring to their role and how their skills, strengths, and experiences positively impact the work they do.

Demonstrate how needed each person is to the work and the mission of the organization. Feeling needed is a key human driver. Our teams and organizations are places where we can build practices that highlight how indispensable employees are.



National Leadership Consortium
on Developmental Disabilities

Zoom In: Applying the Skills as an IDD Sector Leader

Notice the people around you & act on what you see



We spend about a third of our time at work and with our colleagues and teams. Usually we get to know them – things they like, what their family or home life is like, do they drink coffee or tea. Noticing is more than knowing someone. It is about recognizing the unique qualities of each person on our team and paying attention to the things that make them human. Can you tell when your employees are struggling? Have you celebrated achievements with them for things outside of work? Noticing allows people to bring their full selves to work. It creates a safe space.

In a world where [30% of workers say they feel invisible](#), research shows how critical it is to support people to feel seen, valued, and appreciated. People who feel invisible are less engaged and less productive. Gallup created the [Q12 survey](#) to measure indicators of engagement. It is no surprise that many of those 12 factors line up with being noticed. Three that stick out are: "My supervisor, or someone at work, cares about me as a person", "there is someone at work who encourages my development", and "I have a best friend at work".

Support engagement by showing people you know & value them for who they are

Show people you care about them as a person. Take note when important events happen in people's lives and check in on them. Did someone just finish their degree? Celebrate them! Did someone just have a death in their family? Check in on how they are doing and offer support. If your memory is not great, write things down. Make notes of people's birthdays or upcoming important dates. Just because you need help to remember does not discount the effort and impact.

Consider how you can support personal development as well as professional growth. It is important to support people to grow in their roles and responsibilities on our teams, but it is equally important to [support people's growth and development](#) related to their goals outside of the immediate work/role. It is energizing for employees and can help support the feeling of being noticed.

Build a team culture where people can create meaningful relationships. Aim for a [culture of psychological safety](#)—one where people feel safe to share ideas, concerns, challenges, successes without fear of ridicule, punishment, or backlash. People do not need to have their best friend be a work colleague, but they do need to be able to form meaningful connections at work.

Have a question or need help accessing a resource referenced in this leadership brief? Reach out to Kristen:
kloomis@natleadership.org



Affirm each person's contributions



Many of us appreciate [being recognized](#) for the work we do and the successes we have. Sharing a 'thank you' and a 'good job' is great, but being more specific and tying those to the actual qualities, actions, or work that a person has/did is even more beneficial.

Lead with strengths-based approaches to show people how they contribute

Use strengths-based approaches to development. By acknowledging the strengths a person brings to their role, you can more easily build on and ensure that good work gets tied to those strengths. Use paid (such as [Clifton Strengths](#) or the [DISC assessment](#)) or unpaid (such as the [High 5 Test](#) or [Leadership Skill Inventory](#)) assessments to identify areas of strength and highlight how those strengths and actions contributed to success in the team and organization. This can also help you delegate with intention. Delegating tasks based on strengths and skills of others can boost morale and confidence in individual employees and the team overall.

Connect feedback to strengths and specific actions of employees. This helps people to better understand how they specifically impacted the outcome and affirms their feeling of being valued and adding value.

Share [the why](#) behind the work your team is doing and why they are the right people for the job. It isn't just about getting it done, but it is about a greater mission and highlighting this can increase people's confidence that they are in the right spot and they are meaningfully contributing.



Demonstrate how needed each person is to the work & mission.

Many of us work on teams with open positions, constant turnover, and "everyone pitches in where they can" cultures, it can be difficult for people to feel like they themselves are needed instead of just a warm body to do the work. As leaders, we have the opportunity and the duty to ensure each person on our team feels needed, that they are valued for what they specifically bring to the work and how they contribute to the overall work of the organization.

Tailor your approach so that employees feel more like a lynch pin than a cog

Highlight how your team members impacted you, the team, or the organization. Make it a habit – weekly, monthly – [be selective](#), [be timely](#), [be genuine](#).

Encourage employees to consider how they can [make themselves indispensable](#).

Support team members to explore their strengths and how they can further develop. You have a unique opportunity to highlight the areas of strength that you see in each employee and how those impact the work being done.

