

WELL-BEING IN BRIEF

Recognition and Value

BY ROBIN OAKS

This month's issue will launch a new column called "Well-Being in Brief." As the SBCBA's "Well-Being" Director and Section Chair, I'm excited to create this monthly column spotlighting topics that promote wellness, well-being, and thriving for legal professionals. The idea, in brief, is to raise awareness about the many life dimensions, skillsets and competencies vital for professional success and through a holistic approach make fostering well-being and wellness a center post supporting our legal practitioners, clients—and community.

In the spirit of a legal *brief*, each month will highlight an important well-being issue. Citing stories, science-based strategies, studies, and legal realities, I'll make an argument in favor of fostering well-being and you can be the judge to decide what's relevant for you. In conclusion, I'll include a practice or question to reflect upon to bring the concept alive and spark discussion with others.

At times, others will be invited to share expertise, and the focus might be on a relevant current book, article, study, or local event. All readers are considered de facto members of a community-wide well-being task force, so become involved and contact me to share resources and topics of interest.

Because our Bar Association has recognized the value of fostering well-being by creating a new section and Board position, I'm highlighting for this first column a study exploring how recognition and values matter.¹ The study led by Patrick Krill, surveying nearly 2000 attorneys, researched whether the perceived values of employers, i.e., what the lawyers felt they were valued for, were "differentially associated with lawyer well-being."

Those lawyers (62%) perceiving they were valued for "my overall talent and skill as a lawyer, and inherent worth as human being," (Professionalism/Individual group), scored highest for mental and physical health and lowest for risk of attrition and substance use issues. Those lawyers (27 %) perceived to be valued for their billable hours and responsiveness (Revenue Generation/Availability) scored significantly lower on health and well-being. Those who fared the worst in wellbeing ratings were those lawyers

(10%) who perceived that they weren't valued for anything or never received enough feedback to even know.

Krill noted, "In short, our findings revealed a striking health hierarchy among lawyers that appears linked to their employers' values." Not being recognized, feeling de-valued, or lacking a clear sense of "I matter and my work matters" are tangible mental and physical stressors—and contribute to burnout and attrition. Understanding the power of recognition, aligning work with values, and consciously sharing with others how their work matters, will fuel engagement, motivation, energy, and sustainability and profit legal professionals.



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Practice

1. Pause and take a moment to jot down three reasons why you are doing the work that you do—and for whom. Identify what reason feels most meaningful—or more draining.
2. Say thank you to someone. State specifically why you value their work and what quality or talent they've demonstrated that reflects the firm's values.
3. At your next team meeting, recognize someone for their work contribution, and describe how their work was important overall to a legal matter or case progress.
4. For one week, write down how your work each day benefited others, identifying one value you care about that is connected to your work. ■

Robin Oaks has been an attorney for nearly forty years, and for twenty-five years has provided legal services focused on independent workplace investigations and mediation. She is certified in and has studied a wide range of healing, emotional intelligence, cognitive fitness, and mind-body practices. She is a well-being consultant and offers confidential professional life coaching sessions for legal professionals seeking to optimize potential, restore balance, and thrive during stressful life changes and challenges. Contact: Robin@RobinOaks.com or 805-685-6773.

ENDNOTE

1. Krill, et al., *People, Professionals, and Profit Centers: The Connection between Lawyer Well-Being and Employer Values*, Behav. Sci, 2022, 12, 177.