Marissa Levin (00:00)

Hello everyone. Welcome to another episode of Motivational Mondays. I am Marissa Levin, the host of this podcast. If you're just tuning in for the first time or haven't been with us in a while, I'm very happy to welcome you. As the new host, we have introduced a new format. We are compressing the length of the podcast into very short actionable bursts of information, inspiration, and motivation.

so that you can get what you need, learn how to apply it, and move on with your day. That being said, we are always open for feedback. And at the end of this podcast, I'm going to share the URL for a link for a survey where we can get your feedback to learn how we can be better. Life is always about evolving, and we follow that motto here at Motivational Mondays. I am so excited for our guest today. He is a world-renowned

culture and leadership expert. And he focuses on something that is near and to my heart. As the Chief Human Resources Officer and Chief Culture Officer of NSLS, I am committed to creating an environment with NSLS where all of the employees can thrive and feel valued for the work that they do. Our guest today, Zach Mercurio, he follows the same mantra in terms of leadership and culture.

He is the author of a book called The Power of Mattering. And his core purpose is to help organizations and leaders create cultures where employees feel valued, seen, heard, and relevant. And we all know at the end of the day, this is the core human need to feel seen. So what a beautiful honor it is for me today to introduce Zach and welcome him to Motivational Mondays.

as he shares his expertise and his wisdom and knowledge about leadership and corporate culture. Welcome, Zach.

Zach Mercurio (02:07)

When you look at the evidence from the last five years, it becomes very clear that we're facing a mattering deficit in a lot of areas of our lives. More people than ever report that they feel unseen, unheard, overlooked, ignored, undervalued, unneeded in everyday life and in the workplace. And one of the symptoms of this mattering deficit is loneliness, for example.

⁓ One out of every three people listening right now feels perpetually lonely, according to the American Psychiatric Association. One of the things we've gotten wrong about loneliness is that we've told people to connect more. Right? So now we're sending more messages to each other, we're involved in more things, we're on more platforms than ever, but we're still lonely. And why is that? Well, when you look at the research on what predicts loneliness,

It's not the quantity of connections that matters. It's the quality of connections. And what makes a quality connection? Researchers call it companionate love, experiencing the behaviors of attention, of care, of compassion, of affirmation from others. So really what's happening in our personal lives when it comes to things like loneliness is the opposite of loneliness is not having more people around you. It's feeling that you matter to the people around you, feeling significant.

And so this, so the solution for loneliness, the solution for a lot of what we're facing actually resides in our everyday interactions, how we see and hear and value the next person we interact with. And I think that's what's exciting about this topic of mattering.

And you're right, it plays into every moment of our lives because in every moment of our lives, we're having interactions at some level with somebody. You know, when my first son was born, I remember very vividly, he reached his hand out and he gripped my index finger very tightly. And he calmed down, his crying stopped. And it was one of the only times I was able to calm him down during those first couple of years. But it was miraculous. But scientists call that grip a grasp reflex.

We're encoded with several reflexes right after we're born and they're all designed for us to matter to some.

⁓ We reach out to matter before we search to eat food. Now, as we age, that instinct to matter turns into this fundamental need to feel seen, valued, and needed by those around us. And the way it relates to leadership and for students of leadership is that if something's a basic human need, it needs to be a basic leadership skill because a leader's craft is people. ⁓ And so...

Fulfilling that basic most fundamental need to feel seen heard valued and needed has to be the priority of a leader because If someone doesn't believe that they matter it's almost impossible for anything to matter It goes back to that Initial need that turns into the psychological need to feel seen heard valued It's why when your friend passes you by without saying hi You get that feeling that sinking feeling when a boss talks over you in a meeting you get that feeling that sinking feeling who am I when you?

someone doesn't remember when you were working on something really important. That's that instinct to matter not being met and we react very strongly. I would say focus on your interactions. Too often we focus on what's going to happen one, two, three, four years from now, where we want to be four years from now. But I would argue that you should focus on what kind of impact do I want to make in my next interaction. No matter where you're starting out, you don't need your organization's permission or approval.

to see, hear, value the next person you interact with. Ironically, that's what sets great leaders apart when we ask people who are the most influential people in their lives. They won't tell me that was when they got a quarterly earnings report or had a great product launch or made a lot of money. They talk about feeling seen, feeling heard, feeling valued by someone else. So think small when you're starting out.

The other thing is to ask yourself better questions instead of like, what do I want to do in five years? What kind of impact do I want to have made in five years?

instead of what kind of job do I want, what problems do I want to solve with my strengths. Interestingly, there's two things that happen when you ask yourself these questions. One is when you ask yourself what kind of impact do I want to have made in five years, you're already assuming that you can make an impact. So helps reinforce your own sense of mattering. The second, when you ask what kinds of strengths do I have and what kinds of problems do I want to solve, you're already assuming that you are enough right now to solve those problems.

You build your sense of belief to do that. And that focus on contribution is important. There's a great, ⁓ there's a psychologist, her name is Jennifer Crocker. She distinguished between two types of goals that we have. And she did this work with younger people in their careers. Self-image goals, and it's kind of a crude term, but self-image goals are goals that we are setting for ourselves to acquire and achieve for ourselves. They're not bad, but they're like resume goals.

And then there's contribution or compassionate goals, goals that we make to help other people and to solve problems. What she argues for and what I argue for is a balanced goal sheet. Look at your goals. Do you have too many self-image goals? And do you have enough compassionate contribution-centered goals? ⁓ So that's some piece of advice that I would offer people starting out. ⁓ One is think about that impact that you want to make. Think about your next interaction.

balance out your goal sheet, right? Have contribution goals in addition to the goals you wanna achieve for yourself.

Marissa Levin (08:06)

Well, that was incredibly inspirational. That's it for this episode of Motivational Mondays, and I hope you enjoyed Zach as much as I did. I feel very inspired by what he shared. Do you? We would love for you to take a survey at the end of this podcast and let us know your thoughts about this episode, about the format, and about things that you would suggest on how we can make this even better.

for an experience for you. Please visit nsls.org backslash mm hyphen survey and let us know what you think. Thanks again for tuning in and join us next week. We will have another wonderful guest that will provide insights, wisdom and actionable ideas to help you step into your greatest life. I'm Marissa Levin and have a wonderful day.