

**Speaker 2:** 0:23

Welcome back to Third Thursday. My name is Huihui and by now you know this is a place where we come together to learn to grow as we work to help American work towards their retirement goals. In this group you'll find actuaries, advisors, CPAs, HR professionals, broker-dealers and home office team members, plan sponsors, service provider, TPAs, record keepers and relationship managers.

You ladies make the retirement plan go around and have kept our community growing. As you know, there's a wealth of knowledge in this virtual room. At WIRC, we focus on five key areas leadership, marketing, practice management, personal growth and advocacy. Today's topic is sorry. Today's topic is sometimes you have to slow down to speed up. It's made possible by the efforts of our Women in Retirement Third Thursday committee. Today we're delighted to have Alexandra Gerritsen, the Chief Operating Officer at PenChecks Trust, a leading provider of our source retirement plan distribution services that many of our TPAs are using. We want to thank PenChecks Trust for sponsoring today's events.

Our speaker, Ali, has over 15 years of experience developing and leading popularly and privately held organizations to grow their business nationally and internationally. Her demonstrated operational track record includes leading successful company-wise transformation initiative, optimizing day-to-day activities and expanding revenue opportunity in B2B and B2C companies in a variety of industries. An alumnus of Georgetown University and the University of Southern California, Ali's commitment to leadership extends beyond business strategy into mentoring and team building, reflecting her holistic approach to corporate success.

We are very excited to listen to Ali's insight today. Ali, the floor is yours.

**Speaker 3:** 2:48

Perfect, thank you for having me. Let me get my presentation up here and I will start giving one moment. I don't think I'm able to share my screen anymore, for some reason.

**Speaker 2:** 3:11

Yeah, I can do it Perfect.

**Speaker 1:** 3:21

Awesome.

**Speaker 3:** 3:23

Great. Well, thank you to the Third Thursday team for having me. I'm excited to be here with you all Today. I'm going to talk a little bit about a topic that is extremely important to me: leadership. One of the things we'll be discussing is how I learned to slow down, which, you'll soon find out, was not something that came naturally to me, as I mentioned. The one thing you need to know is this topic was counterintuitive. I'm fast. I'm from New

Jersey. If we go on to the next slide, I'll share a little bit about myself and who I am, and hopefully you guys can get to know me a little bit. I was born and raised in New Jersey.

As you can see from that center photo, I had no option other than to play sports. When I was younger, I played basketball and volleyball year round on the travel team, which means after school I was in practice for about four to six hours every day. I did get straight A's, so I had to somehow fit in studying social life. I went to parties. I did have a fake ID. I figured out how to have a social life, play sports successfully and focus on school. I did that really without knowing what Lean Six Sigma was at the time I figured out how to remove waste from my life and be efficient. I played volleyball in college as well as, as Huihui mentioned, I went to Georgetown University. I double majored, I double minored, I studied abroad. I just continued to do as much as I could in my life and I'd have to move fast to be successful and I'd have to be very efficient to get done what I needed to get done.

After graduation, I went to USC. I decided to work full time and drive up to LA. I live in San Diego. I drive up to LA, which was about three hours with traffic one way to get my MBA. I could only literally do that in my 20s. I was promoted fairly quickly when I was 28. I became the senior director of operations at a publicly traded entertainment and gaming company in Carlsbad, California. In my head I was like wow, I'm doing it, I'm successful. The CEO put me in a new role, the senior director of operations role. It was a turnaround role. He said we needed to cut our costs, be more efficient, and my entire bonus was based on hitting certain EBITDA numbers.

Additionally, he motivated me by saying hey, I'll give you an extra \$100,000 bonus if you do all of this and hit these stretch targets, and he also mentioned that he didn't think I would be able to at the end of that. Little did he know that I love a challenge. They excite and motivate me and I basically was going to accomplish it by any means necessary. And for me at the time, obstacles were what I saw when I took my eyes off the goal. So as long as I kept my eye on the prize, I would hit my goal.

So if we fast forward here about a year later, I did hit my goal. The only way I could do that was to move really fast. I had 12 months to achieve what my CEO frankly thought was impossible. I went into the department, decided hey, these are the economies of scales, we're going to combine these departments. I removed positions that I considered were obsolete. I put more efficient warehousing processes in place. I cut our inventory down by 25%, and I did all of this very quickly. I tried to work with the team as much as I could, but we were on a timeline and a deadline and I was very goal driven. The data and the metrics I created to drove people to those metrics were important. They were an important part of our daily routine.

Again, at the end of the year, my boss sat me down and handed me the biggest bonus check of my career, told me you hit the numbers. I didn't think that you could. And also, in the same breath, told me he could no longer have me lead that department. That was my oh shit moment. He had gotten so many complaints about the way that I had

managed the team and my disrespectful leadership that he put me in charge of a much smaller department after that and I'm assuming he was hoping I would quit. I had gotten no feedback and my first reaction was anger, anger. Externally. Right, why didn't I get feedback? What was going on? I hit the goals that you set for me? And if I was that bad, why didn't anyone tell me? Why did I get no feedback. These are all the questions I asked and honestly, for the first time in my career, I wanted to quit. I've never quit anything in my life before then and I never wanted to until that moment.

But instead I hired a business coach because I needed someone to help me see clearly what I had done wrong, because I couldn't figure it out. The business coach took me six months to convince me that relationships were the most important thing, meaning I had pushed people to achieve this goal right. I didn't get their buy-in. I didn't get their consideration. I probably asked their opinions but didn't really care at the time what their opinions were, because I was so set on achieving the goals of the department that I put the people part of work secondary to achieving the goals. I've always been a driver. It's always been something I was promoted for, praised for, and I got to a point in my career where that was no longer how I could operate. I realized that I really messed up and I was committing to fixing it, to be honest, and first I apologized to my former teammates and really set the intention for a year to get back to running that department.

At the end of the next year the CEO did bring me in and asked me to run that department again, and in that moment I actually resigned. I realized that I couldn't go back and I was excited that I'd earned the respect of the team. But I needed to move forward and I was ready for the next step in my career. So flash forward a few years from that and a couple of companies and I started a new organization. Here in San Diego I worked at a clinical trials company. I had an opportunity to meet the founder, who wanted me to come in for a similar challenging opportunity. He said he needed to sell the company in a couple of years, wanted to grow it and maximize the profit and needed someone to really lead and help them get the company to where it needed to be.

Now, frankly, I'd never worked in healthcare. I didn't really know what a clinical trial was at the time. I thought it was being a guinea pig, frankly. So I knew I was up for the challenge, but I also knew I had to learn a lot about the business. So the first thing I did right was understand what the goals were. So my goal was to increase EBITDA to 25% it was sub 20% at the time, probably 15, 16% and make the team more efficient in two years. So we looked at key metrics such as revenue per employee. Our efficiency was really for those of you that don't know a lot about healthcare was seeing more patients a day with the same amount of staff. How could we do that? And if I did this, I would not only be promoted to their president and COO, but I would also gain a significant amount of equity in their company, which was important prior to sale.

So the first thing I did which was a little different than the last time around was really assess employee engagement. I wanted to understand what was going on in the business. For the first 90 days I decided I would make no changes, something again very different from my previous history. I had to get to know the team. I'd have to understand

how to motivate them, what their pain points were, what their barriers were, and work with them to become more efficient. I truly had zero expertise in healthcare, so the only way I could be successful was to work with the team and not push them. So the results of my 90-day assessment was really extreme disengagement the if you click through there, yeah. So the results were really horrifying. We had 70% rolling 12-month turnover. We had 50% of the employees that were extremely disengaged and 80% said they were looking for a job in the last month. And I thought you know what, like I'm screwed, this is going to be the most difficult thing I've ever done. So I identified the challenges and I presented them to the owners.

The three kind of buckets that I talked to them about were one psychological safety—the employees didn't feel safe. I had to have a tough conversation with one of the founders because she created extreme fear in the company culture. She actually worked very much the way that I did in my last organization when I had my 'oh shit' moment, where I just worked through the team and told them what to do instead of working with them and getting their expertise. There was a hierarchy in healthcare, and there still is. Doctors are at a different level than the employees themselves. There's a very hierarchical organization and in clinical research it's a little bit different. The clinical research coordinators that are running the trials actually spend a lot more time with the patients than the doctors. So we were getting input from the doctors who were making decisions, but they weren't really the ones doing the majority of the operations.

The organization was siloed. We had three locations. One was associated with the corporate office and communication was poor. There was no town halls, no, all staff meetings. There were no clear goals or strategy or direction and we had one director with 47 direct reports and I'll never forget in my interview saying that that needed to change. And the last was there was no career development. The owners were really focused on hiring people who had little to no experience, and then we invested in training in them. So we paid lower than our competitors but we trained them. So what happened is, when we train them, they then went and got a 15, 20% jump somewhere else. There was no career planning, there was no leveling, there was no way to motivate employees internally. So I thought it's probably going to take me longer than 90 days to assess this and figure out next steps. So I created an action plan and it really was to build the team's trust, and this was in January of 2020. So this was my plan for 2020. I was excited for 2020. I had started to gain some trust of the key staff and I proposed to the executive team you know some, some changes and actually investment in the organization.

So it was really the antithesis of the goal of the of the CEO, founder and owner right, it was like you need to save money, but I'm asking for an investment in, in leadership training. Right, we were all one team. It was a cultural shift. We started calling doctors by their first names, for instance, instead of doctor so and so to level the playing field. We focused on career development and growth. We promoted people. We no longer had one to 47, right, we had five middle managers in my first six months. We did an emerging leaders program, had external trainers come in and we salary adjusted up the employees

to help with retention. And, last but not least, we needed better communication. I rolled out a monthly all staff meeting. We had senior leaderships go out to the actual sites and not just stay in the corporate office and we set goals and shared them. And we also rolled out, because employee culture was so poor, an employee engagement survey with a partner of ours Emplify on a quarterly basis. The founder was bathful right that none of my ideas had to do with how I'm going to save money and cut costs. In the beginning, he reluctantly agreed with my plan when I told him I would forego my bonus to invest in these initiatives and for the first time I thought, wow, look at me, I'm slowing down to speed up. Never thought that I would actually consider this.

So we had another oh shit moment and that I'm sure everyone here remembers COVID in March of 2020 and the world shut down. The founders called me in their office and said they had let go of their VP of sales and now is running that department as well, and we had to let go of 40% of our staff. Now, it's important to note that clinical trials is a project-based organization, which means the minute patients stop coming in is the minute our revenue went to zero overnight. They told me that we needed to cut a good amount of our staff, as I mentioned, and we needed to do whatever we can to preserve the organization. We went from tens of millions of dollars in a run rate to zero, with no end in sight. There was panic and we needed to make a decision.

So my proposal was different, something different than the founders had thought about. My proposal was to honestly lead with love and respectful leadership right, because this is where we have, to put for lack of a better phrase, money where our mouth is, right. 40% of our staff would make our business inoperable. There was no way to do that, so I cut my salary 100%, along with the two founders, and when I proposed it to them, they luckily didn't have any concerns with it until our PPP loan came through. After that, I continued to have my salary cut for another nine months. It was about a year. We forego bonuses. We forego as much as we could to invest in this team and preserve as many people as we could. So instead of the 40%, I had to cut 25%, but we did it strategically and we did it as respectfully as possible. So the people we terminated were people who didn't meet our cultural expectations. We kept the people that might not have less technical skills, but have the soft skills that we needed to build a team during this time of crisis.

We also doubled down on our communication. We went from monthly all staff meetings to weekly. We over communicated and shared the full truth. I went and personally spoke to every person we had to let go that day, cried with them, talked with them, told them we would bring them back if we could, and a few months later I was able to do that and because we were so transparent, we built the team's trust and it helped us get through the pandemic. So I'll give a few facts here next. But disrespect is expensive. It's really something that we don't think about, but 10.4 times more likely to lead to someone resigning than compensation is toxic corporate culture. So building a team of people who are all rowing in the same direction and love what they do and love where they work is extremely, extremely important. Right, it's also very expensive to organizations if we don't really think about the hidden costs to a toxic organization or feeling disrespected,

as you can imagine, when employees are decreasing their time at work and their quality of work, right, this costs the company money. Can you? 80% lost work time because they're worrying or ruminating about an incident, just an example. So we culture and team building and building relationships is truly the most important thing.

So what happened? So flash forward to 2021. And we had our lowest turnover in company history and we achieved our goal of under 30% of rolling 12 month turnover, which, in the pandemic and during that time, was extremely difficult. Healthcare was seeing turnover rates in unprecedented amounts and we were able to decrease our turnover versus the industry, which was increasing it well over 100% year over year. Our employee engagement results had an all time high. We were a highly engaged team in 2021.

Resulting from that extremely disengaged team about 18 months prior, we had our highest revenue in EBITY year in the company history and we sold the company in 2021 and I became the president and chief operating officer in late 2020. So what did I learn, right? What's my recommendation? Over my history? Right, I've learned that building relationships and slowing down before you speed up is the most important thing For those of you that are considering job changes, promotions, things like that. It's so important to absorb and understand and be curious about what's happening and get the team on board before you make significant change.

Without that, the change management part of our jobs becomes almost impossible. So definitely slow down before you speed up, build relationships and, as you can see from the last slide, this is my senior leadership team here at the clinical trials company that I was at. We had a good time together celebrating that 2021 record year, so I will pause there for any questions and comments for the group.

**Speaker 2: 21:28**

Thank you, Ali, for such an insightful and candid presentation. Your journey and the story really resonated with many of us, especially me. So we are now open the floor for questions and you can use the raise hands functions or you can type your questions in the chat. I have a question so, for I kind of similar like you, so I like to run run run and then, especially now you know, I enter into the ownership role in my company. I'm always like trying to get some results and sometimes lost sight about teams. So how do you kind of balance the need for the quick results and, equally important need to slow down and understand the team needs, like where's the thresholds or where's the signal that you know when is the time to switch?

**Speaker 3: 22:29**

Yeah. So I think you, you have to almost do both in parallel, if that makes sense in my mind, and what I mean by that is obviously if you have an immediate, pressing need, right like something, something's happening, your revenues down even as down like and you have to kind of solve the problem. You know, my experience is sharing that right,

really being transparent with the organization, because you'd be surprised how many great ideas come from the people on the floor and doing the job. So I think if you're, if you're new and I was new to Penchecks a little over a year ago and we had an immediate problem you know I would try to bring the people in, share the larger why get them on board. I might still have to make a decision and move, but hopefully they would understand where I'm coming from and why and in the meantime, you know, come up with a long term initiative and strategic plan that includes team building, culture building and, honestly, me personally, building relationships with people, and carving that time into my schedule is important. So hopefully that answers.

**Speaker 2:** 23:33

Yeah, of course. Yeah, that's very, very helpful. And Tami has a question. So in after the COVID environments we have in the hybrid. So how do you support the culture in the hybrid environments with the remote employees?

**Speaker 3:** 23:50

Let me tell you, I enforce cameras on right. Body language is 60% of communication, so cameras are on. I become a bit of a dictator about that, right, I want people to see each other and here's the thing you know during COVID, I was in office because I was in healthcare, right, so I didn't have the same impact as a lot of people did, but we were three sites so we couldn't necessarily go see each other.

There's some really great team building and companies startup companies that came out that actually do team building for remote organizations and do fun activities and things like that that allow you to get to know each other and kind of break out into subgroups. Man, I think we all wish we invested in zoom prior to March of 2020 and, but they've come out with the breakout rooms and all of that that allow for, I think, really good collaboration. But I think, at a minimum, you know cameras on. I think the we people, when you can't see each other and you can't, you know, see body language, it's you're missing a huge part of communication.

**Speaker 2:** 24:59

Yeah, I think that's how we this third Thursday, virtual things come out because of the pandemic and then we want to get together. So maybe we should have everybody's camera on.

**Speaker 3:** 25:10

I know, as you start seeing it like all these cameras start going on as I say, that yeah.

**Speaker 2:** 25:14

So Amanda asked, What type of team building or culture energizing activity do you find seem to have the largest impact?

**Speaker 3:** 25:25

Yeah. So I think it would really depend on the team, meaning like what you know, where is your team at? You know, from a forming, storming, norming perspective, how new is everyone, how long have they worked together? Because then the activities are going to be a little bit different.

What I can tell you that I do with my teams especially when teams are siloed and you're trying to work together and build the team culture is do a lot of activities where people have to share, you know about themselves, maybe personal history activities or something like that. This presentation that I gave right is me being vulnerable and open about my mistakes and how I've learned and grown, and I think if, as leaders, it's important we share those things because you're creating psychological safety through that. So but it really depends, I mean, if you can get everyone together in person. That's, I mean, leadership.

**Speaker 2:** 26:26

Yeah, so yeah, that's very interesting. So next question What is the single most important quality leader can have and how did that contribute to the success in your turnaround as a leader?

**Speaker 3:** 26:45

Yeah. So I think if I had to pick and I now hire for this it's my, it's a soft skill that I'm non-negotiable on, and it's humility. So I think it's really important that a leader be humble, right. If you're a continuous learner, value continuous improvement. Without humility, right, we don't realize we did anything wrong. And I think you know, when I first got that feedback from the CEO and as I reflected, you know, six months later, there were hints like he was not a great communicator.

And here's the thing I learned from that experience that being on the other side of not of not knowing where I stand, right that there should be no surprises in anyone's review. Right, I need to give constant feedback and be honest, because it ultimately is going to help that person learn and grow. But I can lead a horse to water, right, I can't make it. Drink is if you're not humble, then they won't be able to turn around or see the changes that they need to make. It'll all be an external deflection, which, frankly, is the thing I've seen in people with a ton of potential but just can't get there.

**Speaker 2:** 27:52

Yeah, that's very true. Johnny responds, says I'm a full-time remote and absolutely we do camera on that feels connected even though my team is in California, I'm in Georgia. So yeah, she agrees with your camera on approach. So Patricia asks who is your... Who's an inspiration for you as a leader?

**Speaker 3:** 28:21

You know, if I had to, the first person that comes to my mind is actually my father. He was a great businessman. He didn't have a lot of opportunity, grew up in Kentucky very,



very rural part of Kentucky but became a senior executive at Toys R Us back in the back in the day, for those of you guys that remember when it was at its height and then actually moved to San Diego because he became the president and COO of Petco, where the pets go.

So I learned from him what resilience looks like, what you know how to work hard, and he's the one who told me there should be never surprise. There should be no surprises in anyone's review. So I always take that to heart. He was a people man. He didn't have an education but he led through people and he's always been the person that inspires me. And there's great leaders out there Simon Sinek, I mean. There's other ones that have written books and things like that that I think are excellent, but the first person that popped in my head was my dad.

**Speaker 2: 29:19**

Yeah, I can see the resilience in you, like going through all the challenges and obstacles. Yeah, I appreciate that. Let me see. Johnny said I agreed 200% on the toxic environments. You know, I guess you're 10.3 times yeah. Carrie asked what are some of the resources you used to change your approach. For example, how did you know to focus on psychological safety?

**Speaker 3: 29:50**

Yeah, I mean, I think one of the resources I used was I knew I needed better feedback and someone who was going to give me that and I wasn't going to get it at the company I was at. Clearly, I was very surprised and asked for feedback and they couldn't really articulate what I had done wrong because there was nothing specific, there was no HR complaints, there was no you did and said this thing. It was just how I went about doing what I needed to do.

So the business coach was huge and I had the same business coach for 10 years now. I still meet with him on a monthly basis. Super helpful. It's basically he sets. He interviewed my team, talked to people, did a 360 degree feedback at the time and I've done that almost in every organization that I've been in. I brought him in to help give me feedback because here's the thing the higher up we get in an organization, there's very few people who are going to give us feedback because they're usually beneath us and it's very uncomfortable to give feedback to your boss. You have to be really, really safe.

So when my team gives me feedback, I basically hug them because I'm so excited that they feel comfortable enough to do that. That means I've created safety. To be honest, how did I know to focus on safety? I honestly just delved into so much leadership from a continuous learning perspective and really when I went to the clinical trials company, that's when I realized I mean, the team was literally saying I don't feel safe. So I really dug into that more. But ultimately it's the foundation of trust. How do you trust your spouse, your family member, your best friend? You have to feel safe with them, to be yourself, and I think that's the same thing, that's the foundation at work, and you have to

cultivate those relationships that allow people to feel safe, which means mistakes are okay. I mean, within reason they happen 17 times. Same thing. But people making a mistake is how they learn. Now, when people can own mistakes and talk about them openly and try to prevent them, that's how people learn and grow in an organization.

But when people try to hide and say, oh God, I hope no one finds out I made this mistake, that's not helping anyone, and so I think for me it was just if you read Five Dysfunctions of the Team, or Ideal Team Player, any of those key books by Patrick Lencione or anything else safety, just it's a common theme across a multitude of leadership books and the hard part about it is it's great. How do you create safety? In my opinion, you create it by leading by example. Right, you share when no one else will. Right, you're vulnerable when you don't want to be right. As leaders, we have to get really comfortable being uncomfortable and leading the way for other people to feel safe to do the same thing.

**Speaker 2: 32:53**

Yeah, that's very true. So, dealing with that safety, remember you talk about the owner that everybody feared of. And how do you - I think Patricia asked - how do you recommend dealing with a disrespectful owner?

**Speaker 3: 33:12**

Yeah, you know, as I mentioned right, it's always hard to give feedback up and it's always that fear of are they going to treat me differently, right? Is there going to be some kind of retaliation? So I think that's normal and I really think it would depend on the role, your relationship with that person. But here's the thing there's a feedback model that I love. I teach it at work. It's called situation behavior impact and then you're asked right, like, what you want? It's an unemotional way of giving feedback, right.

A lot of times people don't hear you because you're coming at it, maybe emotionally, you're frustrated, whatever the reason is, and it's hard listen, it's hard to give feedback. It's also hard to hear feedback. I think there's a misnomer out there where it's like oh, it's not personal, it's just work. We're not all of our time here, so it is personal, especially when you're putting all of your effort into your job and you're trying to be good and then someone's telling you you're missing the mark, Like there's probably nothing more personal than that.

So my suggestion would be depending on the relationship, right, Hopefully you have a good relationship with the owner, but check out the situation behavior impact model and my advice. I also love Radical Candor and she does a really good job about talking about how you can challenge directly and care, but care personally so you can even say, right, use decreased defensiveness upfront by saying this conversation makes me really uncomfortable because I'm in this role and you're the owner, right, but I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't tell you where I think some of these specific examples were possible. Right, or making a negative impact, and what we can do right.

And here's the thing, certain people are really good at certain things. Right, they have key strengths and certain people are not. So maybe the owners and kind of doing something that isn't playing to their strength, right, Like a lot of times, owners and CEOs and things like that need to kind of focus externally right, and they're visionaries and they're doing those things.

So an operator like myself right, Like my job is to focus internally and kind of down and run the day to day. So it may be a little bit of a role adjustment too, but that's very difficult for owners. They really have to trust you and really know that you've got their back. So making sure you're building a relationship with that person so that they can trust you, I think is equally as important as giving them the feedback, because, listen, they're human too, and as long as they're not you know the 1% of people that are psychopaths and you know things like that they're probably going to take the feedback to heart and appreciate it.

**Speaker 2:** 35:54

Yeah, that's true. So probably a fear of giving employee honest feedback is probably the biggest issue. Probably, as a HR expert, the biggest issue that she see managers as a bit and hold the manager as an employee back. So giving the employee like you say, employee, give you feedback and how you give the employee feedback that doesn't hurt their feeling.

**Speaker 3:** 36:24

Yeah, no, it's important. I mean, there's so many surprises. I know I've run HR teams for years right, consistent feedback and how we get people comfortable giving feedback. And new managers definitely have this problem. I've seen it really commonly, because here's the thing. They were probably they're peer or we're friends with their teammates right, they're doing all the things that I've done, right, I've done. I was a friend with a teammate I had. You know, one of the guys was a groomsman in my wedding when I was younger. I mean, it was just not a good idea and you kind of have to learn some of these lessons on your own. But also, I think, as a leader, what construct can you give them so that they're not falling off a cliff? Right, I let people learn the lessons, but don't let them fall off a cliff, right, and I say that because I fell off a cliff and I would have appreciated a guardrail or two.

So, yeah, I think HR is really important in partnering on, you know, leadership programs, even internally, right, I do one at Penchecks. I started it a few years back in a few companies ago and we talk a lot about why giving feedback is important and how you're honestly doing a disservice if you're not giving it because it's just really truly unfair, and if you can focus on the fact that you're caring about that employee more by giving them the hard feedback and maybe shifting the mindset, it might work a little bit.

**Speaker 2:** 37:46

Great from Elizabeth: How about an older employees? How can they increase engagement and decrease burnout?

**Speaker 3:** 37:58

So increase engagement and decrease burnout.

**Speaker 2:** 38:01

Yeah.

**Speaker 3:** 38:04

First of all, I'd measure it. I assume you're measuring it, so you know that already by the question, but I would measure it to make sure you're not having assumptions around that. And what truly is employee engagement. Emplify actually - and I don't get paid by them or anything - they're a great partner to do engagement surveys and you can do them. It's an annual fee and you can do them as frequently as you want.

So if you're in a company where culture is struggling a little bit, constant feedback right from employees is important and then burnout, right. Why are the employees burning out? What's the root cause of the problem, I think for I know when I was at clinical research it was we couldn't find enough people, like the people had to do more jobs than could be found. So what kind of creative ways can you get? Is there global staffing? Is there virtual staffing? Is there ways to help employees that maybe are at a reduced cost to the organization but they feel supported?

My experience with people is they feel burnout when they don't feel heard and they don't feel like anything's going to change. So if this is a temporary thing and they understand and they're loyal to the company, and again it goes back to over communicating right? Are you being really transparent about the state the company's in, why we're having to do this right and what the next steps are and how they can help? Then I think you know they probably will. Can it's gonna change a burnout from maybe feeling motivated, but I think burnout comes again from just not understanding what's going on and why, and they're feeling like they're giving a lot with no outcome. And Simon Sinek has a great book right, the Power of Why.

And it's you've got to be able to tell people why we're doing things. You know, when I laid off 25% of the staff, I told them we had to lay them off and why. And honestly, it was the hardest thing I've ever done in my entire career. Like I still probably tear up thinking about that day. It was difficult, but I was. I told them the truth, right, like I mean, I just was honest. And it was a hard conversation, but the team appreciated that we were honest with them instead of being dishonest or, you know, not treating them like they had any say in the matter. So those kind of my two cents on that, I guess.

**Speaker 2:** 40:19

Yeah, and then you eventually hired them back, a lot of them, which is yeah, yeah, I did get to hear from you back, which was the, and they're still there actually today. So that's great. So I think Rian has some comments, says the business coach and personal life coach can be a game changer and then the culture will help employees feel safe. Let me see, I think Anna has, maybe I don't know if we have time for one more question. I love the Radical Candor. How do you approach goal-objective settings?

**Speaker 3:** 40:56

Yeah. So really, we're going through this at PenChecks too. So we set I think it starts top down in some ways, meaning where is the company going, what is the strategy, what's our three to five year plan, what's our big, hairy, audacious goal? And then you take that three-to-five-year plan and then you break it down into what's your 2024 plan. You have three to five company goals and then you break it down at the department level and you share ideally, if you can have your department managers in some of the strategic planning, I think that's helpful and then you break it down there right To departments having their goals that tie to the company goals. So there's consistency. And then you share it with the individual employees, right. So I think top down is a way that works.

From a tactical perspective, I always have culture goals as well, so we always have soft goals for the department. We just completed we're Penchecks is one of the best places to work and in San Diego, so our culture is luckily pretty great, but there's still areas for improvement. So I'm deep diving with all of the department managers over the next couple of weeks so that those leaders can then create a goal for their department around how to better the culture and that team, their team dynamic, which might be different than another department. So I think again, it's being transparent. Having data and metrics is always helpful and then getting the team involved. It should never be here's your goal, from the top down in like a box. It just never works. People don't understand it.

**Speaker 2:** 42:32

Awesome, I guess. The last question maybe quickly how do you figure out what will engage your team?

**Speaker 3:** 42:41

Yeah, every team's different. So sometimes it's trial and error, right, like I'll try things and they don't work right, so I'm like, well, that didn't work very well. I'm a big fan of failing fast and failing quickly and cheaply. Right, so, fast and cheap, that's how I like to fail wherever possible. But here's the thing ask them, right, what's gonna make you engage? What's gonna motivate you? What do you guys think the problem is? What do you think they need from the company? That's where those surveys come honestly in, super helpful employee engagement surveys and they're anonymous and they have to be because employees don't feel safe. Right, so I would say ask, right, what do you guys want to do? How do we break down silos? Like, I'm very transparent with you know, there's silos at PenChecks. Still, I'm very transparent about them. I talk about the silos

openly. I'm saying what are we going to do to solve the problems? Right, so I think, and asking what do they need? What would motivate them? And I think that helps, and coupled with some trial and error for sure.

**Speaker 2:** 43:42

Awesome. Yeah, thank you, Ali again for your time and presentation. Thank you everyone for attending today. It's great to see everyone and sorry for the technical difficulties. So please allow two to three weeks for your CE credits to be applied to your account. If you are still considering signing up to become a mentor, please do. We have mentees that have applied and we are looking for some volunteer mentors for a period of one year. So scan the QR code on the screen to sign up.

And the most exciting conference of the year is coming up. The Woman in Retirement Conference is going to be on January 10 to 12 in Isles of Palms, South Carolina. Early bird registration ends tomorrow, so don't miss out. You can register at [womeninretirement.org](http://womeninretirement.org). And finally, starting next year, Third Thursday is going to be quarterly. Please make sure you save the dates on your calendar so we hope to see you in March, June, September and November. Thank you everyone. Have a good, happy, early holiday. See you.