

# Creating a place to Thrive

By Jodie Hill



**You describe yourself as a neurodivergent solicitor. How important to you is it to put this across and have you found that clients choose you to work with because of this?**

For me, it's everything. For years I tried to fit into a mold the profession quietly hands you – polished edges, perfect focus, zero "distractions". But being openly neurodivergent isn't a branding exercise; it's liberation. It's also an invitation. When clients choose to work with me because I'm transparent about how my brain works, what they're really choosing is honesty – and a working relationship grounded in trust. People come to me saying, "*I finally feel seen*". That matters more than any marketing strategy ever could. Imagine a client coming to me because they want to *help* someone who is struggling with their mental health or neurodivergence rather than coming to me to find a way to get rid of them.

It also helps junior lawyers who are questioning whether they can do this see someone in a leadership role who is openly neurodivergent – and hopefully shows they can do this too!

**You've reframed your mental breakdown as a mental breakthrough. This is such an empowering statement. Do you think attitudes towards mental health are changing? How can leaders role-model vulnerability without losing authority?**

Attitudes are changing, albeit slowly and unevenly, but undeniably. More people are rejecting the old narrative that strength means silence. For me, calling it a breakthrough wasn't spin; it was survival. It cracked open a version of myself who could actually breathe.

Leaders don't lose authority by being vulnerable – they lose authority, and most importantly, respect, by pretending. Vulnerability, when it's intentional and bounded, builds credibility. It signals to your team: "You're safe to be human here". And nothing fuels performance like true psychological safety.

**What are the key things that you do at Thrive that help employees work well? What makes Thrive different to other law firms?**

Thrive wasn't built to look like a law firm – it was built to feel like a good place to work. A place where I

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could show up as my true self and unmask and where others can do the same. We design work around humans, not timesheets. Smart working, asynchronous work, trust over presenteeism, and open conversations about neurodivergence and mental health – those aren't perks, they're foundations. We offer paid days off to focus on wellbeing and wellbeing budgets (for staff to spend money on what actually supports their wellbeing, not just ticking a box with a free gym membership).

What makes us different? We don't ask people to leave parts of themselves at the door. We'd rather create a culture where every part of you has space to breathe and belong.

**How do you measure the real impact of wellbeing on performance and retention?**

The impact shows up in the data and the dynamics. Yes, we track things like retention, sick days, engagement, output. We use data from monthly 360s that score against values and behaviors, and we also look into the data from our biannual wellbeing risk assessments too. Data-driven approaches are so helpful. But we also look at the lived experience: Are people speaking up more? Are conflicts handled with more empathy? Are clients noticing the difference?

Wellbeing isn't soft. It's structural. If your people are thriving, your numbers will tell you long before your annual review cycle does. With that in mind we don't have annual reviews – instead we have pulse points much more regularly (at least once a month) to keep our insights accurate and relevant.

### The importance of inclusion

Research published by workplace expert ACAS highlights the importance of training and proactive action to support neuro-diverse staff. Neurodiversity describes the natural differences in how people's brains process information, and how they feel and behave. Well-known types of neurodivergence include neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia.

The report emphasises the importance of training and supporting managers, so they know how to treat and support their neurodivergent staff.

The research shows that creating inclusive environments and personalised adjustments can be achieved proactively, without the need for a formal diagnosis or staff disclosure.

ACAS Interim Chief Executive Dan Ellis said: *"It is estimated that between 15% and 20% of UK adults are neurodivergent. This is a potentially enormous number of workers who may not be getting the support they need. Our research outlines the urgent need to put support for neurodivergent people at the heart of workplace policies and training, and the huge benefits for businesses when that happens."*

*"Taking steps to support neurodivergent staff is often quick, easy and inexpensive, but the advantages can be widespread. We encourage employers to make sure they do everything they can to support their staff."*

### What led you to set up "This is Me Yorkshire"? How has it helped the legal community in the region?

I started *This is Me Yorkshire* because I was tired of watching people suffer in silence. I had seen the impact of storytelling in the south and across the UK and been sharing my own story for some time. The legal world carries a huge amount of stigma around mental health – we're trained to be "the strong ones." I wanted to build a space where people could share their stories without fear of judgment or professional consequence up here in Yorkshire. We launched during lockdown, trying to bring people together and share the experience we were all feeling.

It's shifted the conversation in our region and

The independent research was conducted by Birkbeck, University of London, for ACAS. The researchers combined insights from experts working in neuro-inclusion, in-depth case studies and a summary of published evidence.

The research found that neuro-inclusion is possible in all workplaces, whether large or small. The research documents good practice, including how to manage performance in neuro-diverse teams and the benefit of small changes, such as accessible written materials.

The report found that:

- Proactively supporting neurodivergent staff and creating inclusive work environments where neurodivergent talents are supported can benefit everyone at work.
- Mandatory and regularly updated neurodiversity training is key to promoting inclusive workplaces.
- Line managers are pivotal in supporting neurodivergent employees so it's vital they have the necessary training to facilitate inclusion.
- Being proactive in making reasonable adjustments shouldn't require a diagnosis or formal disclosure from staff.
- Specialised adjustments may require balancing of individual and organisational needs.

Source: ACAS.

beyond. Firms are talking more openly, leaders are stepping forward, and people are getting support earlier. That's real change.

### How can law firm leaders position themselves as people-first? What does it take to create a psychologically safe workplace?

Being people-first isn't a slogan – it's a discipline. It's how you make decisions, how you communicate, how you show up when things are messy. Many law firms try to achieve this with tick box initiatives but when their culture and processes don't match it becomes lip service.

Psychological safety is created through consistency:

- Follow through on what you say.
- Treat feedback as a gift, not a threat.
- Reward honesty.
- Don't weaponize mistakes.

Your culture is the worst behavior you tolerate – and the best behavior you model.

### Do you feel there is more of a trend towards healthy workplaces in 2025? Has the pandemic had a noticeable impact on how employees show up to work, and view their careers?

Absolutely. The pandemic ripped the veil off the old way of working. People are far less willing to trade their health for a job title. Purpose, flexibility, and culture now outweigh prestige.

But more than that, people are showing up with a deeper sense of self-respect. They know what burnout feels like, and they're not going back there. Firms who ignore this shift are already losing talent – they just haven't realized it yet.

### You're a strong DE+I advocate. Do you have any advice for firms serious about creating belonging, not just representation?

Representation is counting heads. Belonging is making heads and hearts matter. It's a bit like the quote – "Diversity is inviting people to the party and inclusion is being asked to dance".

If you're serious:

- Move from performative statements to measurable action.
- Diversify leadership, not just junior ranks.
- Remove barriers, don't just create committees.
- Listen to lived experience – then change something because of what you heard.

Belonging isn't a project. It's a practice. Embed



Jodie Hill is a neurodivergent solicitor, ED&I consultant, coach and trainer, author, and campaigner. She is passionate about employment law, mental health and wellbeing, equality, diversity, and inclusion (ED&I), and neurodiversity.

A qualified barrister initially called to the Bar by The Inner Temple in 2010, Jodie then cross-qualified to become a solicitor in 2013. Her mental breakdown in 2017, which Jodie now describes as her "mental breakthrough", led her to establish Thrive Law in 2018. It was the first law firm in the UK founded with wellbeing and mental health at its heart.

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this into your decision making and your culture for real impact.

### What habits or practices do you have that support your own wellbeing?

I time block self-care and rest. From little moments of calm with my dog, breath work, gym and yoga to surfing, movement, journaling, time to reflect, time in nature – they ground me. ADHD means my brain is loud and busy, so anything that connects me back to my body is essential.

I also say "no" more than I used to. Boundaries are a wellbeing practice, and one I'm still learning every day.

### What would you like Thrive's legacy to be?

I want Thrive to be known as the firm that changed what a law firm *could* be – human, inclusive, commercial, authentic and courageous. A place where people found their voice, not lost it.

If, years from now, someone says, "Thrive showed me I didn't have to break myself to belong in this profession," that would be enough.