

NACCTFO Conference 2026

Leading with Purpose

The Skills, Habits, and Ethics of Effective Leadership



Designed and Developed by

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Table of Contents

Learning Objectives.....	3
Welcome & Framing.....	3
Module 1: Trust as the Foundation.....	4
Module 2: Courage and Authenticity.....	5
Module 3: Leading Yourself Before Leading Others.....	6
Module 4: Motivation and Team Culture.....	8
Module 5: Leading Change and Adaptive Work.....	10
Module 6: Integration.....	12
References	13

Learning Objectives

At the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Distinguish the habits and micro-behaviors that separate good leaders from great ones, using validated frameworks rather than personality-based assumptions.
- Explain why psychological safety and trust are prerequisite conditions for accountable, ethical, high-performing teams.
- Apply the four "daring leadership" skillsets to real conversations about performance, ethics, and public accountability.
- Identify your own reciprocity style and its effect on team trust and long-term influence.
- Distinguish adaptive challenges from technical problems and select the appropriate leadership response.
- Apply guiding principles for building urgency and buy-in around a change initiative.
- Leave with a written, personal leadership commitment tied to a specific habit they will practice in the next 30 days.

Welcome & Framing

Opening Reflection

Think of one leader, anywhere in your life, who you would follow again without hesitation. What is one specific action this leader took that stood out to you?



Module 1: Trust as the Foundation

Key Idea

Psychologically safe teams - where members feel safe taking interpersonal risks - report more errors early, because they catch and learn from problems instead of hiding them. Psychological safety predicts learning behavior, and learning behavior predicts performance (Edmondson, 1999).

The Five Dysfunctions Pyramid (Lencioni, 2002)

5. Inattention to Results — pursuing individual goals over the team's collective outcomes
4. Avoidance of Accountability — reluctance to call out underperformance or missed commitments
3. Lack of Commitment — feigned buy-in that creates ambiguity later
2. Fear of Conflict — avoiding honest, productive debate to preserve artificial harmony
1. Absence of Trust — unwillingness to be vulnerable or admit mistakes and weaknesses (the foundation)

Trust Diagnostic — Table Discussion

Which dysfunction is currently most expressed in my own environment right now? What is one specific, observable behavior that would signal improvement:



Module 2: Courage and Authenticity

Key Ideas

1. Research identifies four teachable skill sets of daring leadership: rumbling with vulnerability, living into your values, braving trust, and learning to rise after setbacks (Brown, 2018).
2. Inspirational leaders are not defined by a universal checklist of traits, but by authenticity expressed with skill, so be yourself more - with skill (Goffee & Jones, 2000).

Rumbling with a Real Conversation

One conversation I've been avoiding:

One open, curious question I could lead with instead of a defensive opening line:

Notes



Module 3: Leading Yourself Before Leading Others

Key Ideas

1. Outsight - the external perspective gained by acting, not reflecting - should come before, not after, real change in how you think as a leader. Too much introspection anchors you in old habits (Ibarra, 2015).
2. A 25-year research program found that what differentiates leaders is their "action logic," which is how they interpret their surroundings and react when challenged. Each of us can develop deliberately from one stage to the next (Rooke & Torbert, 2005).

The Seven Action Logics (Rooke & Torbert, 2005)

Action Logic	What It Looks Like
Opportunist	Wins any way possible; self-oriented; sees the world as a competitive, win-lose place.
Diplomat	Avoids overt conflict; wants to belong; conscious of not "rocking the boat." (Lower performance.)
Expert	Rules by logic and personal expertise; seeks efficiency; often a strong individual contributor.
Achiever	Balances near-term managerial demands with longer-term goals; meets strategic targets effectively through others.
Individualist	Interweaves competing personal and organizational logics; comfortable with complexity and contradiction.
Strategist	Generates organizational and social transformations; builds shared vision across very different groups.
Alchemist	Rare; integrates material, spiritual, and societal transformation; leads at a whole-system level.



Reflection

Over the past year, what unfamiliar experience helped me grow?

Which action logic does my office culture currently reward?

Is that the action logic I want it to reward going forward? If no, discuss what I might do to change that? If yes, how can I continue to strengthen those rewards?



Module 4: Motivation and Team Culture

Key Ideas

1. Research identifies three reciprocity styles: givers (contribute without expecting a specific return), takers (aim to get more than they give), and matchers (operate on even, tit-for-tat exchange). Successful givers integrate genuine concern for others with healthy boundaries (Grant, 2013).
2. There are four core leadership capabilities: sensemaking, relating, visioning, and inventing. Leadership works best when these are distributed across a team rather than held by one person (Ancona, 2005).

Self-Assessment: My Default Reciprocity Style

Rate yourself Giver (G), Taker (T), or Matcher (M) in each context:

Mentoring new staff	Giver ()	Taker ()	Matcher ()
Interaction with your supervisor	Giver ()	Taker ()	Matcher ()
Cross-department requests	Giver ()	Taker ()	Matcher ()
Interactions with elected officials	Giver ()	Taker ()	Matcher ()
How would others see me?	Giver ()	Taker ()	Matcher ()

What steps can I take to better balance my reciprocity styles across audiences?

Table Discussion: The Four Capabilities

Which capability - sensemaking, relating, visioning, or inventing - is most underused in my office right now?

One concrete way to strengthen it this quarter:





Module 5: Leading Change and Adaptive Work

Key Ideas

1. Technical problems (solvable with existing knowledge and procedures) are different from adaptive challenges (ambiguous, values-laden, requiring people to change their own beliefs or habits). The most common leadership mistake is treating an adaptive challenge as though it were technical (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009).
2. Research on more than 100 organizations found that most change efforts fail from insufficient urgency, an underpowered coalition, or a vision that isn't communicated often enough. Roughly 75 percent of genuine buy-in is required for a change effort to succeed (Kotter, 1996).

Scenarios

Scenario A: The Reluctant Reconciliation

Your office is moving from a paper-based daily cash reconciliation process to a new digital system mandated by the state. Two long-tenured staff members, both excellent at the old process, have quietly continued using their own paper backup "just in case," doubling their workload and creating a risk of discrepancies between systems. They have not raised concerns directly with you.

Issue type: ☐ Technical ☐ Adaptive ☐ Both

Using content presented thus far, discuss some appropriate ways to address this issue.

Scenario B: The Public Complaint Spike

Wait times at the counter have increased noticeably after a retirement left a staffing gap that budget constraints prevent you from filling. A local news story quoted a frustrated taxpayer. Some staff believe the answer is simply hiring; others believe the underlying issue is an outdated intake process that adds unnecessary steps for routine transactions.

Issue type: ☐ Technical ☐ Adaptive ☐ Both

Using content presented thus far, discuss some appropriate ways to address this issue.



Scenario C: The Cross-Department Handoff

A recurring year-end reconciliation error keeps surfacing between your office and another county department. Both offices privately blame the other, and a joint meeting last year produced polite agreement but no actual change in either office's process.

Issue type: ☐ Technical ☐ Adaptive ☐ Both

Using content presented thus far, discuss some appropriate ways to address this issue.

Which of Kotter's early steps (urgency, coalition, or vision) does my office most often skip under time pressure - and why?

In what ways could my office address all steps more often? What are the barriers to success?



Module 6: Integration

Apply the full session's content to one real-world situation.

My challenge: What is a current challenge I am facing?

Trust (Lencioni): Where on the pyramid is this challenge rooted, and what impact does this have on its potential outcomes??

Courage (Brown): What is the "rumble" conversation I need to have? How?

Challenge type (Heifetz): Is the core of this technical or adaptive. Has my response matched that and how will I match it moving forward?

Next step (Kotter): What is the best next move I can make upon return?



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