



19th Annual
LEADERSHIP
2026
cademy
Park & Recreation Professionals



LEADERSHIP

– UNDER PRESSURE –

DECEMBER 2-4, 2026

**OSHKOSH MARRIOTT WATERFRONT
HOTEL & CONVENTION CENTER
OSHKOSH, WI**

WPRA 
FOUNDATION
Educational
Program Sponsor

WISCONSIN PARK & RECREATION ASSOCIATION
6737 W. Washington St., Suite 4270, Milwaukee, WI 53214 • (414) 423-1210 • www.wpraweb.org

SCHEDULE

All sessions will be held in Athearn AB and meals in Athearn C unless stated otherwise.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2ND

11:00 am – 11:45 am..... **Arrival & Check-in**

11:45 am – 12:00 pm..... **Welcome**

12:00 pm – 2:30 pm **Be the Type of Leader You Want to Follow**
Ali Starr

In this growth session, we'll discover what we truly appreciate about great leadership—and why it resonates with us. We'll explore how emotional intelligence is a strong starting point, but often isn't enough on its own to become the kind of leader others genuinely want to follow. We'll dig into values and priorities, and why living out our values through our daily priorities is essential to a more fulfilled life. We'll also examine how our thoughts, feelings, and the assumptions we make can quietly get in the way of leading ourselves and others well. Ready, set... let's grow, independently and together.

2:45 pm – 5:15 pm **Navigating the Ten Tensions for Leadership**
Neil Ihde

As a leader, you want to be effective- to get results and empower your team. You want to be friendly and approachable... but also authoritative and respected. You try to lead on a macro level, but find yourself slipping into micromanagement from time to time. You want to be relational and yet hold people accountable. If you've experienced these tensions, you're not alone. Dealing with these leadership tensions is a necessary part of developing your leadership style and increasing your self-awareness.

5:15 pm **Dinner**

9:00 pm **Social**
(Activity planned by year two students)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3RD

7:30 am – 8:30 am..... **Breakfast**

8:30 am..... **Group Photo**

9:00 am – 11:30 am **Leading Through Change**
Yvonne DeGroot

Change is inevitable - but how leaders show up during change determines whether people resist, comply, or commit. This interactive session equips leaders with the mindset, tools, and communication skills needed to lead themselves and others through change with clarity and empathy. Participants will explore the human side of change, practice and learn practical tools.

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm **Lunch**

1:00 pm – 3:30 pm **Lessons Learned Managing Crisis Events**
David Funkhouser

This session provides participants with strategies offering practical real-life experience advice for handling high-profile crisis events and universal lessons learned that can be applied in similar situations. The session will feature several incidents in Wisconsin that drew national attention. One particularly unique and complex incident lasted several weeks and involved multiple threats to individuals, local school and government officials and the community's entire infrastructure, all stemming from a local school district's Title IX investigation which garnered national attention. Each event presented unique challenges and placed significant demands on local government resources, requiring careful management to reduce further risks. The emotional impact on residents, officials, and first responders was profound, leading to political tensions and divisions within the city.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3RD continued

3:45 pm – 6:15 pm **Essential Tools for Challenging Times**
Neil Ihde

Organizations go through cycles. There are seasons of success and enthusiasm and then there can be seasons of challenges and overreactions. It is amazing (and a bit frightening!) how quickly a bright, positive, successful culture can turn toxic when an organization experiences setbacks, market changes, regulatory modifications, and organizational restructuring (if you have gone through this, you know the accuracy of that statement). During these challenging periods leaders and teams need effective tools to strategize, energize, and focus the culture on solutions. These tools include emphasizing one's identity, vision, values, and history. Change management, transparency, and authentic communication are critical. Throw in some timely decision-making skills and a healthy dose of moxie and resilience, and these challenges soon become another successful chapter in your company's narrative.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify the importance of psychological safety and its impact on productivity and engagement.
2. Recognize the importance of corporate canaries - i.e. truth-tellers - in keeping the organization on track.
3. Recognize the importance of finding efficient solutions in the midst of daunting challenges.
4. Identify the powerful impact positivity and progress has on performance and team culture.
5. Examine the role of authentic communication in the middle of uncertainty.
6. Identify tools to increase speed and confidence in decision-making.
7. Explore the role resiliency plays in recovering and learning from challenges.

6:15 pm **Dinner**

7:00 pm **Social**

More information to come!

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4TH

8:00 am – 9:00 am..... **Breakfast**

9:00 am – 11:30 am..... **Courageous Growth: Leading with Strength & Confidence**
Jason Kotecki

In this tumultuous era of ongoing change, strong leadership seems to be in short supply. The good news is that great leadership can be cultivated from within all levels of an organization. With insight and humor, Jason will share the one trait the best leaders have in common and how everyone can develop it. He'll help you devise practical strategies to re-energize and reclaim your passion for doing your best work, allowing you to be more present with those you lead. And he'll show you how to uncover old ways of thinking that are holding you back while revealing some unexpected ways to foster a more fun and engaged culture. This inspiring presentation will empower you to model positive behavior with lasting effects, providing a solid foundation for growth and innovation.

11:30 am – 12:00 pm..... **Recognition & Graduation Ceremony**
Congratulations & Safe Travels!

FEATURED FACULTY



Ali Starr

Ali is the founder of Tashi Deley, a movement built around a powerful message: "I see you, and I honor the greatness within you." She is on a mission to help teams and organizations enhance their culture by taking radical ownership, forgiving deeply and having bold conversations.

Before creating Tashi Deley TA-SHE DELAY, Ali served in several different roles:

►NBA ►NCAA ►NBC 26 ►Elementary School Principal ►Personal Trainer ►Varsity High School Girls Basketball Coach

She's a proud wife to her husband Jeff and proud mom to four amazing kids—PJ, Vinny and her two bonus daughters - Ava, and Lilly. She'll tell you she's a mediocre cook and golfer, but pretty darn good at dance parties in the kitchen

Her motto: *"Who you are is good enough. Don't ever stop creating the next best version of yourself—it feels great to grow."*



Neil Ihde

Neil Ihde (pronounced Ee-dee) is a sought-after keynote speaker, trainer, and expert in personality, leadership, and organizational culture. As the founder of Life IQ, he equips leaders and teams with practical strategies to work smarter, build stronger relationships, and create high-performing cultures where people thrive.

With more than 25 years of experience in clinical and organizational psychology, Neil combines research-backed insights with engaging storytelling and actionable takeaways. He holds a master's degree in Counseling and bachelor's degrees in Psychology and Sociology, and is a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® Master Practitioner.

Neil has spoken and trained at more than 30 Fortune 500 companies, including Nike, Domino's, AT&T, and Transamerica, helping organizations strengthen leadership, improve communication, and elevate team performance.

A TEDx speaker, Neil recently accomplished his goal of speaking in all 50 states. His Life IQ YouTube channel is approaching one million views, extending his message to audiences around the world.

Neil and his wife, Deb, live in Appleton, Wisconsin, and have two adult children.



Yvonne DeGroot

Yvonne DeGroot, MBA, has over 12 years of experience as a trainer, speaker, facilitator, and coach. Her company, EBI Consulting, LLC, asks a simple but powerful question: how can your organization be Even Better If?

EBI Consulting, LLC partners with organizations to identify your unique needs and build customized solutions that drive meaningful results. Services include: training & development, strategic planning & execution, facilitation and coaching. Examples of training topics include: Problem Solving / Continuous Improvement, Coaching for Success, Strategy Development & Deployment, Emotional Intelligence, Generational Differences, Time Management, Effective Communication, Delivering Impactful Messages, Critical Thinking, Giving Effective Feedback, and more!

Yvonne's goal is to support organizations to be more effective and productive while engaging team members and unlocking their potential to achieve sustainable success.



David Funkhouser

Dave Funkhouser is a veteran of almost 36 years of law enforcement service in the State of Wisconsin, including 17 years as Chief of Police. Throughout his distinguished career, Dave has earned numerous awards and recognition for his leadership and commitment to excellence including service as an elected President of the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association, and he also served two terms as President of the Wisconsin Police Leadership Foundation. His expertise in leadership, crisis management, organizational culture, and trust

building has made Dave a sought-after speaker, and he has presented to a wide range of audiences in both the private and public sector including presentations for the WI Department of Justice, the FBI, several universities, various professional organizations and associations, and community groups across the United States.



Jason Kotecki

Jason Kotecki is an artist who speaks really well! A master of wit & whimsy, he is an expert at helping people "Escape Adulthood," in order to beat burnout and create lives with adventure, meaning, and joy. Jason uses his extraordinary artistic gifts, combined with humor and memorable storytelling, to spark intentional thinking that re-energizes people to reclaim passion for doing their best work.

His mission is to fight Adulthood, sharing strategies from childhood to create lives with less stress and more success. Jason is passionate about sharing his message that there is more to life than the hectic busyness, cynical lethargy, and overwhelming stress that are typical of most modern lives. Jason's inspiring, entertaining, and heart-warming programs are visual masterpieces jam-packed with relevant, practical information coated in fun.

Get a sneak peek: <http://EscapeAdulthood.com>



Leadership Academy Accommodations

Meals

All meals are provided in the Leadership Academy registration fee.

Special Needs Statement

If you require any special accommodations/menu, please call the WPRA Office two weeks prior, at (414) 423-1210 or office@wpraweb.org and we will be happy to assist you.

What To Wear / Bring

As this is a professional academy, business casual attire is appropriate. Water bottle and sweater suggested.

1.5 CEUS AWARDED



WPRA Leadership Academy Sub-Committee

Chair: Ron Grall

Kristin Grissom

Marty Kosobucki

Jen McCollin

Scott Jaquish

Shelly Strasser

Board Liaison:

Dan Wick

Thank You to Our Sponsors!



Registration

- **Online:** www.wpraweb.org OR simply complete and return registration form below.
- **Mail:** WPRA • 6737 W. Washington Street - Suite 4270 • Milwaukee, WI 53214

Whatever your method of registration, don't delay—space is limited!

Upon receiving your enrollment, a confirmation will be emailed. Be sure to bring your confirmation with you for easy check-in. **Registration deadline: November 9, 2026 (11:59pm).**

- **Cancellation/Refund Policy**
Cancellations made prior to November 9, 2026 (11:59pm) will be assessed a 25% penalty.
NO REFUNDS AFTER REGISTRATION DEADLINE.

2026 REGISTRATION FORM

(Please print clearly)

☐ Year 1 ☐ Year 2 ☐ Alumni/Graduate
Last Year Attended: _____

Name (First/Last) _____

Title _____ Affiliation (Agency/School) _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone Work: (____) _____ ext. _____

Email: _____

Emergency contact phone/cell, in the case of medical emergency:

Name: _____ Phone: (____) _____

Special Needs: _____

T-Shirt Size: ☐ S ☐ M ☐ L ☐ XL ☐ XXL

Base Rates

☒ appropriate boxes

☐ Traditional (Individual).....\$505

☐ Group Rate (Must be enrolled from same Agency/School)
\$505 each first 3 enrolled, \$329 for each additional enrolled.

☐ Leadership Academy Alumni
(Completed 2 or more years of Leadership Academy).....\$285

☐ Student discount (Current / Full Time)
\$50 discount to Traditional/Group Base Rates.....**-\$50**

Additional Charges (added on to the rates stated above)

☐ Non-WPRA Member.....\$50

☐ Late Fee (after November 9, 2026).....\$50

Payment **TOTAL:** _____

☐ Check enclosed (payable to WPRA) ☐ Invoice my agency

Invoices will be sent to the email noted above unless otherwise stated and will include a link to pay online via credit card.

NOTES

Rates noted on Leadership Academy Registration Form only include the actual Leadership Academy and meals.

LODGING NOT INCLUDED.

Please see Lodging Reservation information to reserve your room.

Oshkosh Marriott Waterfront Hotel
& Convention Center
1 N Main St, Oshkosh, WI 54901

Lodging Reservations

A block of rooms has been held at the best possible rate for Leadership Academy participants at the Oshkosh Marriott Waterfront Hotel & Convention Center.

To reserve your room, call:
(920) 230-3200

When reserving your room, be sure to request a room in the WPRA block.
Deadline – Monday, November 9, 2026.

Rates: \$101/night
**The rate for the event will be the prevailing state per diem for overnight accommodation in Oshkosh, WI on the day of arrival.*

All room requests are processed on a first-received basis.

Anyone requiring special accessibility or accommodations for their room must specify in advance when contacting the hotel.

Check-In is at 3:00 pm and
Check-Out is at 11:00 am.

Questions

For more information,
call WPRA (414) 423-1210
or email office@wpraweb.org