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An Invaluable Experience at the 2025 Emerging Leaders Alliance Conference: A Young Professional's Perspective

Hajara Abdulfatah shares her experience as one of six SPE-sponsored participants at the 2025 Emerging Leaders Alliance Conference.

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By [Hajara Abdulfatah](#)



Attendees of the 2025 Emerging Leaders Alliance Conference.

Source: All photos provided by the author.

What if you could unlock a hidden level of leadership potential within yourself? I was incredibly fortunate to have that opportunity as one of six SPE members sponsored to attend the 2025 [Emerging Leaders Alliance \(ELA\)](#) Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, from 15 to 17 September. This annual cross-disciplinary leadership training event proved to be a truly transformational experience, packed with over 14 hours of invaluable professional development. I'm excited to recount the highlights, share my personal reflections, and the key lessons I learned that I believe will resonate with you.

From the outset, the conference promised a deep dive into essential leadership skills, and it certainly delivered. We explored crucial topics, including identifying social styles to foster stronger relationships, mastering the art of feedback for improved outcomes, and developing practical techniques for effective negotiation, conflict resolution, and even stress management.

Day 1: Laying the Foundation for Leadership

The conference kicked off with a warm welcome and introductions, with acknowledgment of the organization's partner societies and SPE that made our attendance possible. The sessions that followed were engaging and insightful.

- **Become the Leader You Want To Be: Creating Your Leadership Vision and Action Plan**, facilitated by Jamie Lewis Smith of Pixel Leadership Group, reminded me that exceptional leadership doesn't happen by chance. It requires a clear vision built upon our unique personalities, values, and strengths. The self-exploration journey we embarked on, culminating in a personal vision statement, was particularly powerful. Translating that vision into daily actions with a concrete action plan felt like a real step towards achieving my leadership aspirations.
- **Making the Transition from Technical to Management**, led by Rahul Dogra from Vision to Market Ltd., offered invaluable guidance on navigating the shift from a technical role to a management position. Dogra helped us identify the critical skills to focus on during this transition, ensuring we channel our efforts effectively.
- **Mastering Feedback To Maximize Results**, also by Smith, emphasized the power of feedback as a tool for boosting employee motivation and improving performance. The S-B-I (Situation-Behavior-Impact) framework provided a structured approach to delivering specific and impactful feedback, and I left the session with practical tools to foster a feedback-rich culture.
- **Social Styles: Building Highly Productive Relationships That Matter**, led by Bob Heavers from Priority Management, was arguably the most personally impactful session. It opened my eyes to how others perceive me and revealed the level of endorsement I receive from them. Through practical exercises, we explored various social styles, gaining a deeper understanding of ourselves and others. The key takeaway was the importance of observing interpersonal behavior to identify different styles and consciously practicing "growth actions" to enhance our versatility and turn potential "people problems" into relationship assets. After all, there is a remarkable correlation between effective management and high versatility.

Day 1 concluded with a vibrant networking reception, offering the perfect opportunity to connect with fellow attendees and exchange ideas.

Day 2: Mastering Collaboration, Negotiation, and Well-Being

Day 2 was equally packed with insightful sessions.

- **Collaborating Across Teams To Achieve Results,"** again led by Dogra, focused on creating a collaborative operating environment that fosters high-performing teams. Dogra underscored the manager's role in shaping team performance, emphasizing that trust is the foundation of successful collaboration.
- **The Art and Science of Negotiation,** with Taya R. Cohen, an associate professor from Carnegie Mellon University, delved into the core principles of successful negotiation and conflict resolution. The Dynamic Negotiating Approach Diagnostic (DYNAD) helped us assess our responses in situations where interests diverge. The session truly highlighted the importance of preparation, so it introduced us to a negotiation planning document, the key concept being BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement), Reservation Price, and Target Price/Aspiration.
- **Conflict Resolution** by Dogra highlighted that workplace conflict can occur for several reasons and the outcomes, if not managed, lead to damaged relationships and poor productivity and that there are constructive ways for responding to conflicts.
- **Stress Management,** with Brent Darnell from Brent Darnell International. This session let us know what stress is doing to our body and how to create lifestyle choices for the highest levels of performance and stress management.

Day 3: Mastering Presence and Influence

The final day of the conference focused on enhancing our presence and influence, culminating in a dynamic session.

- **How To Present Like an Award-Winning Actor: Increase Your Presence and Influence,** led by Darnell was a highly engaging session that explored how our body, face, voice, movement, and energy impact an audience during a presentation. We learned how to harness these elements to create more-effective and memorable presentations, and to enhance our impact in one-on-one interactions. We left with tools to develop a powerful presence, enabling us to exert greater influence on projects and work environments. The session culminated in a group activity where we practiced the newly acquired skills in mini-presentations, focusing on the power of storytelling, the use of metaphors, the basics of rhetoric, and the effective application of status. It was an incredibly practical and empowering way to conclude the conference.

The 2025 ELA conference was a truly transformative and invaluable experience. The lessons I learned will undoubtedly shape my approach to leadership and collaboration within SPE and beyond. I'm deeply grateful to SPE for sponsoring my attendance and hope

they continue to support young professionals in participating in this outstanding program. I highly encourage all young professional members to apply for next year's conference.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the facilitators Jamie Lewis Smith, Rahul Dogra, Bob Heavers, Taya R. Cohen, and Brent Darnell for their engaging and insightful sessions. Their expertise and guidance were instrumental in making this conference such a success.

The ELA Conference is an investment in the future leaders of our industry. The skills and knowledge gained at this event will undoubtedly empower young professionals to make a significant impact on SPE and the energy sector as a whole. Don't miss the opportunity to be part of this incredible experience!