



# Emerging Leaders Alliance

## 2026 Conference Schedule

14-16 September 2026

The Landing Hotel & Rivers Casino Event Center  
757 Casino Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15212, USA

**All sessions will take place in the Rivers Casino Event Center - 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, inside Rivers Casino.  
(Take the escalators by the Drum Bar upstairs to the second floor.)**

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### Monday, 14 September 2026

- 6:30 – 8:15 a.m. Breakfast Buffet in the Landing Hotel (hotel guests only)
- 7:45 – 8:30 a.m. Check-In (Event Center, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Floor - Casino)  
Session Room is open for networking.
- 8:30 – 8:45 a.m. Welcome, Conference Overview and Introductions (Event Center, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Floor - Casino)  
*Sponsored guests are asked to stand while their organization is introduced.*
- 8:45 – 10:30 a.m.

#### **Become the Leader You Want to Be: Creating Your Leadership Vision and Action Plan**

Jamie Lewis Smith, PhD, Pixel Leadership Group

As the great football coach Vince Lombardi said, “leaders are not born, they are made.” Becoming an exceptional leader does not happen by accident. However, there is not one way to be a leader. It starts with a clear vision of what authentic leadership looks like for you built on your unique personality characteristics, motivators, values, and strengths. It’s knowing who you are and what you are passionate about while filtering out all the rest.

Once your leadership vision is clear, it’s critical to translate that into clear behaviors to embody your vision every day in your interactions and decisions. It is easy to become bogged down by all that comes your way in a day. Creating a clear plan for yourself to put your leadership vision into action ensures you don’t lose sight of what’s important and how you want to show up as a leader.

This working session offers participants the opportunity to engage in a self-exploration journey to uncover who they are, what’s important to them, and craft a personal leadership vision that will be their north star as they grow in their careers. Participants will complete a series of self-assessments, engage in group discussions, and self-reflection activities. They will identify their core values, strengths, personality characteristics, and passions. They will use what they learn to write a personal, powerful leadership vision statement they will share with the group. Next, the facilitator will walk them through the process of translating their vision into everyday behaviors, decisions, and actions to create a personal action plan to make their vision a reality.

- Understand why a leadership vision is important and how to create one
- Uncover their personality characteristics, strengths, values, and passions
- Clarify which behaviors are aligned with their vision and which are not
- Leave with a clear action plan for translating their leadership vision into their daily life

- 10:30–10:45 a.m. Break

10:45 a.m.–Noon

### **Making the Transition from Technical to Management**

Rahul Dogra, Vision to Market Ltd.

For many individuals, their careers are based initially on technical merit and their initial advancement is highly dependent on enhancing their technical capabilities. The “value add” is solely based on the level and depth of dealing and handling technical issues that arise. At some point, a career in management appears and this presents new challenges and their value add is based on a new range of capabilities: delegating, coaching, mentoring, monitoring their environment, handling, and managing conflicts, to name but a few.

Participants will be shown how to manage the transition to management and the skills on which to focus. It will enable them to focus their attention on skills that need to be developed. For existing managers, this represents an opportunity to take a look at and rate their existing “soft skill” portfolio and identify which areas need improvement.

Noon–1:00 p.m.

Lunch

1–2:30 p.m.

### **Collaborating Across Teams to Achieve Results**

Rahul Dogra, Vision to Market Ltd.

A team’s performance can be impacted by the role of the manager both positively and negatively. Managers need to focus on the needs of the individual whilst keeping an eye on the results. Achieving these results can become difficult as the team may operate in a variety of modalities: together, all virtual, hybrid, across distance and time zones.

Better outputs are created through collaboration that is formalized and shaped through the operating culture. This culture is shaped by trust that must be proactively created then built on. Trust takes time, but often the time is not allocated to the team and results are expected immediately. The role of the manager is to co-ordinate and communicate across the team and leverage the diversity that exists to create better results.

This session focusses on what you can do to create a collaborative operating environment that moves towards a high performing team status. This will be achieved by looking at:

- Team stages and how to manage them
- Keeping the team motivated and on track
- What to consider when operating in a hybrid state
- The role of the manager in conducting the team towards success
- Where healthy conflict might benefit the team
- Identify how to make diversity work for you and not against team performance

2:30–2:45 p.m.

Break

2:45–4:30 p.m.

### **Coaching Skills for Managers**

Jamie Lewis Smith, PhD, Pixel Leadership Group

As leaders step into greater responsibility, the biggest shift required is learning how to stop carrying the work themselves. Many emerging leaders are promoted because they are strong problem-solvers and technical experts - but continued success depends on their ability to empower others to think, decide, and take ownership. This interactive workshop introduces a practical “manager as coach” approach that helps leaders move from doing and directing to developing people who can own their work with confidence.

Participants will explore the science behind learning, motivation, and ownership to understand why telling and fixing often backfire - especially in fast-paced, high-pressure environments. Through real-world examples and hands-on practice, leaders will learn how to ask better questions, listen for thinking rather than compliance, and resist the urge to jump in too quickly.

The focus is on everyday coaching moments - not formal coaching sessions - that can be used to enhance their delegation, feedback, and talent development skills.

Participants will apply what they learn by practicing the skills during short coaching conversations, giving them the opportunity to provide support while creating space for others to solve problems and learn. By the end of the workshop, they will walk away with concrete tools to shift ownership without disengaging or lowering standards..

- Shift from a “fix-it” leadership style to a manager-as-coach mindset that builds capability and ownership
- Use simple coaching questions to improve thinking, encourage decision-making, and shift ownership
- Recognize and interrupt common habits that keep leaders over-functioning and employees under-developed
- Structure short, effective coaching conversations that fit into real-world, fast-paced work environments
- Increase engagement, confidence, and performance by helping people think for themselves

4:30–5:30 p.m.      **Networking Reception**

*[Dinner on your own]*

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## Tuesday, 15 September 2026

6:30 –8:45 a.m.      Breakfast Buffet in the Landing Hotel (hotel guests only)

8–9:00 a.m.          Session Room is open for networking.

9–10:15 a.m.

**Mastering Feedback to Maximize Results** (Event Center, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Floor - Casino)  
Jamie Lewis Smith, PhD, Pixel Leadership Group

Feedback is a powerful tool in a manager’s toolbox to boost employee motivation and improve performance. Yet, 65% of employees feel they are not getting enough of it. This isn’t a surprise given that a Harvard Business Review survey reported that 44% of managers believe giving feedback is stressful and 21% say that avoid giving it when possible. When they give feedback, the data suggests managers are using ineffective techniques and lacking the skill, missing opportunities to delegate to and empower employees to achieve successful results.

This interactive helps participants to master feedback skills to create a feedback-rich culture on their team and to dramatically improve employee performance and engagement. During the session, Dr. Jamie Lewis Smith will provide attendees with an overview and understanding of the power and importance of regular behavioral feedback to drive exceptional results. Jamie will discuss feedback mistakes that managers commonly make and how to overcome them, and she will help them to shift their mindset about feedback from something to be dreaded to a relationship norm. During the session the attendees will learn a framework for providing specific, behavioral, and actionable feedback, they will reflect on the importance of how they receive feedback, and they will gain skills for incorporating feedforward and appreciation into their ongoing conversations with employees.

Participants will have the opportunity to apply the tools to one of their employees and prepare for a real feedback conversation they will have after the session. They will leave the session with best practices and specific science- backed hacks that managers can apply right away to elevate their skills and make giving effective feedback a habit. Key takeaways include:

- Identify common feedback mistakes managers make and why they are ineffective
- Learn how to use the S-B-I framework to generate specific, behavioral feedback
- Understand the importance of role modeling asking for and receiving feedback in setting it up as a relationship norm
- Discover the power of feedforward and how to use that regularly with their teams
- Leave with best practices and tools they can apply to provide effective feedback to their employees

10:15–10:30 a.m.      Break

10:30–11:45 a.m.

### **Difficult Conversations**

Taya R. Cohen, Ph.D., Professor of Organizational Behavior and Business Ethics, Carnegie Mellon University

In high-stakes, heavy industry environments engineers and technical leaders routinely face difficult conversations, especially when safety, quality, environmental compliance, or ethical decision-making is on the line. This session equips emerging leaders with a research-backed communication framework for navigating these conversations clearly, respectfully, and effectively. We will begin by exploring strategies for addressing routine, team-based conflicts, then shift to discussing how to raise ethical concerns with supervisors or peers. The session will focus on how to advocate for safety, sustainability, and integrity while maintaining professional relationships. Participants will have opportunities to share their experiences with difficult conversations and to practice applying and adapting the framework to real situations from their own work.

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Apply a research-backed framework for initiating difficult conversations.
- Adapt this framework to navigate increasingly complex situations, including those that involve ethical or safety concerns.
- Reflect on challenging conversations they've experienced and collaborate with fellow attendees to identify effective approaches.

11:45–12:15 p.m. Group Photos

12:15–1:15 p.m. Lunch

1:15–2:45 p.m.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Rahul Dogra, Vision to Market Ltd.

Workplace conflict can occur for several reasons including managing the impact of change, poor communications, increased workload, with insufficient resources. The outcomes, if not managed, lead to damaged relationships and poor productivity, but there are constructive ways for responding to conflict.

Adopting a proactive approach to conflict rather than a reactive one allows issues to be detected at the source where less time and efforts are required, as opposed to handling them when the impact significantly increases causing more stakeholders to get involved and the issue takes longer to resolve meaningfully.

In this session we will:

- Identify the underlying causes of conflict
- Assess the impact of conflict avoidance
- Moving from conflict management to resolution
- Being comfortable with having a difficult conversation
- Use collaborative approaches to conflict resolution
- Why healthy levels of conflict may help unlock the power of the team

2:45–3:15 p.m. Break

3:15–4:45 p.m.

### **Stress Management**

Brent Darnell, Brent Darnell International

This course lets you know what stress is doing to your body and how to create lifestyle choices for the highest levels of performance and stress management. In this course, you will learn:

- the symptoms of stress and how they affect your performance
- recovery activities to offset your stress
- how to make better lifestyle choices for reduced stress and increased performance for better project outcomes
- about the Body Battery Inventory, how it can be used to control your stress, and increase performance and wellness

After taking this session, you will be able to:

- describe stress symptoms and how they affect your mental, physical, and emotional health, as well as your project performance
- implement recovery activities such as mindfulness, meditation, and yoga, to offset your stress
- implement better lifestyle choices to elevate your mental, physical, and emotional performance, which will positively affect project outcomes
- implement a stress/recovery plan based on the Body Battery Inventory and use it daily to reduce stress and perform at a higher level

*[Dinner on your own]*

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## **Wednesday, 16 September 2026**

6:30–8:45 a.m. Breakfast Buffet in the Landing Hotel (hotel guests only)

8–9:00 a.m. Session Room is open for networking.

9–11:45 a.m. Event Center, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Floor - Casino

(Break from 10:15 - 10:30 a.m.)

### **How to Present Like an Award-Winning Actor: Increase Your Presence and Influence**

Brent Darnell, Brent Darnell International (

This course shows participants how their body, face, voice, movement and energy affect an audience. They will learn how to use these factors to create more effective, memorable presentations and also increase their effectiveness with one-on-one encounters. This presentation also examines the power of storytelling, the use of metaphors, the basics of rhetoric (creating powerful argumentation) and the use of status. This course goes far beyond learning to create inspiring speeches. It will give participants the tools to create a powerful presence so that they can have more influence on their projects and work environments.

11:45 a.m.–Noon Closing