



ERICSA 63RD ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION

MAY 3-7, 2026

Milwaukee

WISCONSIN

A new ERICSA effort to grow and connect current and emerging child support leaders.

ERICSA NEXT equips professionals with leadership tools, mentorship, and a forward-looking mindset to strengthen services for children and families nationwide.

At the conference

This session is one of five leadership sessions offered as part of the ERICSA NEXT initiative and are designed to spark connection, reflection, and practical growth.

After the conference

Networking, mentoring, and growth opportunities are offered to ERICSA members throughout the year.

Who benefits?

- Leaders already guiding teams
- Professionals preparing for leadership roles
- People growing management and collaboration skills
- Members and friends of ERICSA seeking peer connection



BECOMING AN INFORMAL LEADER

David Ramroop • Trever Harwell • Petrina Travers • Monica Hall





WHAT'RE WE DOING HERE?

Through real-world examples and practical examples, we'll unpack how trust is built, how credibility is earned, and how everyday actions can shape cultures and results. We're providing tools for anyone who wants to lead from where they are and make meaningful impact, regardless of role.



David Ramroop

Child Support Specialist Senior



INFORMAL LEADERSHIP

Informal leadership is the ability to influence and guide others toward a shared goal without holding an official title or positional authority. Unlike formal leaders, whose power is granted by the organization's hierarchy, informal leaders earn their influence through **trust, expertise,** and **personal credibility**





KEY CHARACTERISTICS AND SOURCES

Informal leaders rely on “soft power” rather than official directives. Their influence typically stems from...

- **EXPERT POWER**
- **REFERENT POWER**
- **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**
- **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**



DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEADERSHIP



COMMON ROLES OF INFORMAL LEADERS



CULTURE CARRIERS

They set the daily tone and spread momentum for new initiatives.

EARLY ADOPTERS

They are the first to experiment with new tools or processes, signaling to others that a change is viable.

MENTORS

They naturally guide newer employees without being assigned to.

PROBLEM SOLVERS

Peers instinctively turn to them when stakes are high, or the path forward is unclear.



DEFINING THE SKILL

Informal leadership is earned, and it's powered by three things:



- **EXPERTISE**
- **EMPATHY**
- **RELIABILITY**



THE PROFESSIONAL EDGE

Informal leadership is your greatest "hidden" asset.

IT BREAKS SILOS

**IT'S A "SOFT LAUNCH"
FOR PROMOTION**

**IT CREATES "SOCIAL
CAPITAL"**





HOW TO START?

You don't need a budget or a promotion, just a change in focus.

LISTEN MORE THAN YOU TALK
SOLVE THE "SMALL" PROBLEMS
SHARE THE CREDIT



TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK!

TEAM

TOGETHER EVERYONE ACHIEVES MORE!

THANK YOU!



Trever Harwell

Planning Specialist (Staff Development and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion)



Quick question.



You're not all meant to be formal leaders.
AND THAT'S OKAY.



“Not leadership material.”





Earn trust. Navigate different perspectives. Lead without control.

SOFT SKILLS? HARDLY.





Informal Leadership: 2026 ERICSA Conference DEI Edition

UNOFFICIAL PLAYBOOK



NO TITLE?
NO SHORTCUTS. NO LIMITS.



BUILD TRUST LIKE IT'S YOUR ONLY CURRENCY

Do what you said you'd do. Give credit away like it's free. Be consistent.
NO TRUST EQUALS NO INFLUENCE.





DON'T JUST WORK THE ROOM EXPAND IT

Pull people in early. Go beyond your circle. Include before decisions.

INCLUSION STARTS BEFORE THE MEETING.





AMPLIFY – DON'T HIJACK.

Credit in real time. Protect original voices. Call back ideas.
MAKE SURE THE RIGHT VOICES LAND.





STOP CONFUSING LOUD WITH LEADERSHIP

Pause the pace. Invite quieter voices. Support overlooked ideas.

FAMILIAR DOES NOT ALWAYS EQUAL BEST.





ASK THE QUESTION THAT MAKES THE ROOM SLIGHTLY **UNCOMFORTABLE**

Who's not in this conversation? Who does this impact? What are we not saying?

IF IT'S TOO EASY, YOU MISSED SOMETHING.





SHOW THE WORK.

Name contributions. Highlight unseen effort. Put impact into words.

IF IT'S INVISIBLE, IT'S UNDERVALUED.





KNOW WHEN TO STEP UP AND WHEN TO GET OUT OF THE WAY

Step in when necessary. Step back when it's not your turn. Watch your airtime.

LEADERSHIP IS BOTH.





DON'T AVOID CONFLICT JUST STOP DOING IT BADLY

Be curious before you get defensive. Name tension. Refocus on shared goals.

AVOIDING IT MAKES IT WORSE.



PROTECT YOUR ENERGY LIKE IT'S PART OF YOUR JOB

Say no. Don't take everything on. Learn to recognize overload.

DON'T LET OVERUSED AND UNDER-RECOGNIZED BE AUTOMATIC.



LEAD YOUR WAY

NOT THE WAY THAT GETS APPLAUDED FASTEST

Ignore the template. Lean into your strengths. Focus on impact.

BRING YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF TO EVERYTHING YOU DO.



**Leadership isn't about who reports to you.
IT'S ABOUT WHO'S BETTER BECAUSE YOU SHOWED UP.**



NO TITLE?
NO SHORTCUTS. NO LIMITS.





Petrina Travers

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Impact of Informal Leaders

Flexibility and Speed

- Adapt to changes faster than formal hierarchies

Improved Communication

- Connectors who facilitate the flow of information



Impact of Informal Leaders

Enhanced Culture

- Promote a positive, collaborative environment

Innovation

- Early adopters of new tools and ideas



Traits of an Informal Leader

Builds Relationships

- Connect with many diverse people across the organization

Organizational Knowledge

- Understands policies, culture, and goals of the organization



Traits of an Informal Leader

Emotional Intelligence

- Empathetic listeners who act as mentors

Proactive

- See tasks that need to be done and take initiative, without requiring incentives

Authentic

- Lead by example, humble, and focus on supporting others



Developing Informal Leadership

Build Trust

- Be reliable and help colleagues without ulterior motives

Proactive

- Deepen your knowledge on a specific topic to become the go-to resource

Authentic

- Understand other viewpoints and listen to others' ideas



Developing Informal Leadership

Share Credit

- Highlight team contributions rather than seek personal credit

Solve Problems

- Be a part of the solution by actively engaging in improvement

Continuous Improvement

- Identify opportunities to learn and grow



Informal Leaders

- Are often identified by their peers, as their influence is granted and not mandated by title
- Recognizing and empowering informal leaders improves organizational efficiency and culture
- Titles don't make leaders, actions do



*“Do not follow where the path may lead.
Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson





**Georgia Department
of Human Services**
Division of Child Support Services



Monica T. Hall

Deputy Director, Training and Professional Development





Understanding Informal Leadership

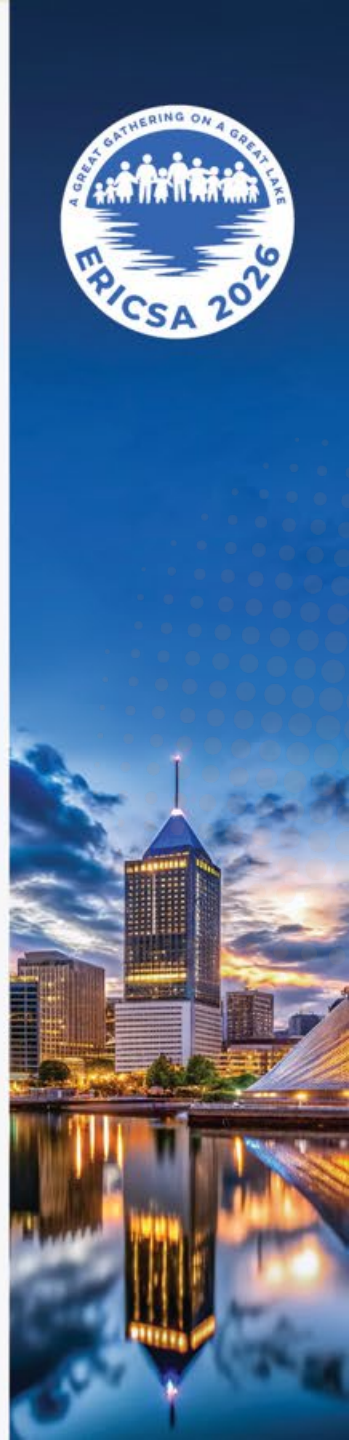




Informal Leadership: Leading Without the Title



- Leadership influence does not require a formal title
- Informal leaders model behaviors that positively influence teams
- Demonstrate initiative, accountability, and problem-solving
- Support team goals and organizational mission
- Reflect on personal leadership strengths through self-assessment





Leadership Through Two Lenses





Leadership Development: Director Lens vs. Trainer Lens



Director Lens

- Strategic thinking and decision-making
- Organizational priorities and outcomes
- Developing future leaders within the team

Trainer Lens

- Skill development and continuous learning
- Coaching and mentoring others
- Supporting growth through feedback and practice

Informal leaders benefit from understanding both perspectives





Developing Informal Leadership Skills





Building your Leadership Capacity

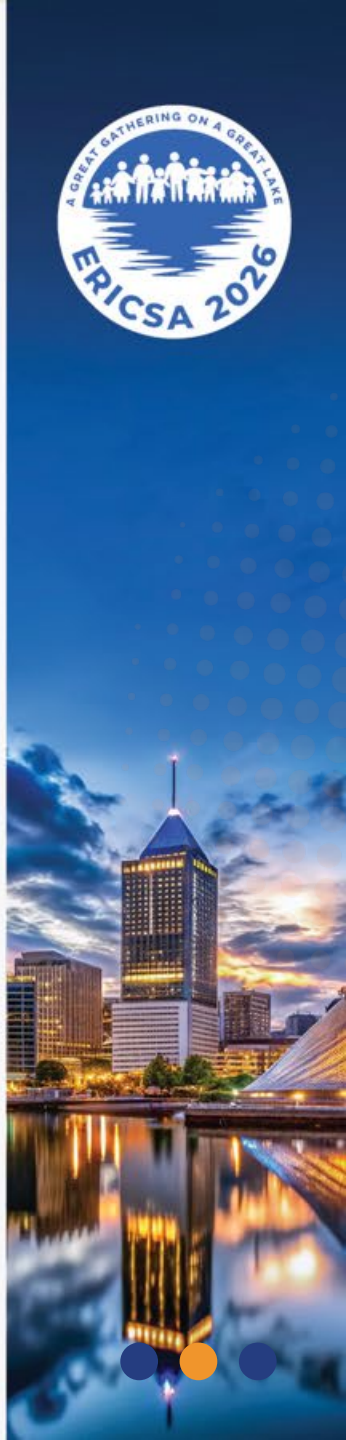


○ Leadership Capacity Tips

- Seek exposure to new responsibilities or projects
- Volunteer for team initiatives or committees
- Strengthen technical skills relevant to your role
- Develop soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution
- Utilize leadership development resources and training opportunities

○ On-the-Job Coaching & Mentoring

- Leadership development courses or workshops
- Professional reading and leadership podcasts
- Mentorship and peer learning opportunities
- Organizational training programs





Informal Leadership Self-Assessment Activity



INFORMAL LEADERSHIP SELF-ASSESSMENT

INSTRUCTIONS

Rate yourself from 1 (Rarely) to 5 (Consistently) for each statement:

- I take initiative to help solve problems without being asked.
- I support my teammates and encourage collaboration.
- I communicate clearly and respectfully with others.
- I volunteer to assist with new projects or team efforts.
- I seek feedback to improve my performance.
- I remain positive and solution-focused during challenges.

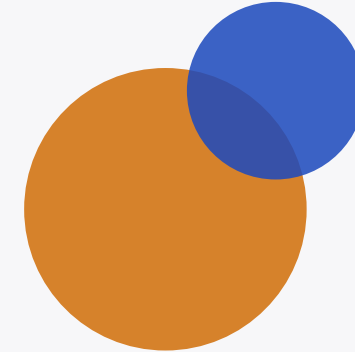




Reflection and Commitment



REFLECT AND GROW



> REFLECTIONS QUESTIONS

- What leadership quality do you already demonstrate in your role?
- What is one action you can take this month to strengthen your leadership skills?
- How can you use your influence to positively impact your team or organization?

Leadership is not defined by position, it is demonstrated through actions, mindset, and influence.



ANY QUESTIONS

???



THANK YOU!

