



ERICSA 63RD ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION

MAY 3-7, 2026

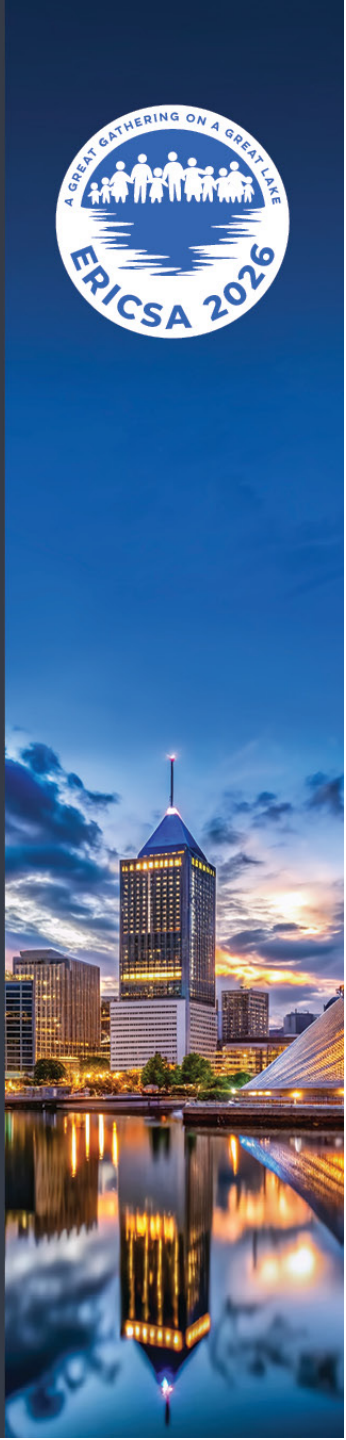
Milwaukee

WISCONSIN



Leading in Chaos: *Real-World Leadership for Extreme Workplace Challenges*

Presenter: Irma J. Neal
Owner & Partner, Onyx Rising



This session...

- Equips leaders to address workplace dysfunction and drive meaningful, sustainable change. We will address:
 - ▶ How everyday behaviors—when left unchecked—can erode culture, performance, and credibility.
 - ▶ Participants will gain practical strategies to act decisively, set clear expectations, and lead through resistance with confidence.



Session Objectives

You'll learn how to:

- Establish authority quickly in chaotic environments
- Identify and address root causes of dysfunction
- Set and enforce clear, consistent expectations
- Lead with intention, accountability, and purpose



Who is Onyx Rising?

- **FOUNDED: 2016**
- **Change Management Leader**
- **VISION:** *Empowering people to change.
Positive and Sustainable change.*
- **MISSION:** *Support people and organizations
in developing an intentional plan to rise.*
- **MOTTO: Plan to Rise!**
Your goals will NOT happen without a plan.



Onyx Rising Partners



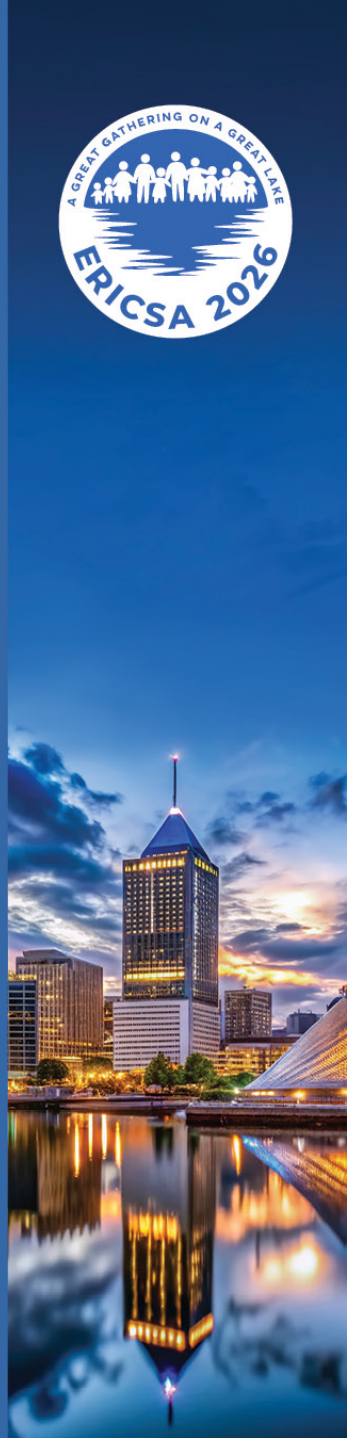
Kelli Lester

Executive Consultant



Irma Neal

Executive Coach /
Certified Financial Advisor &
Author

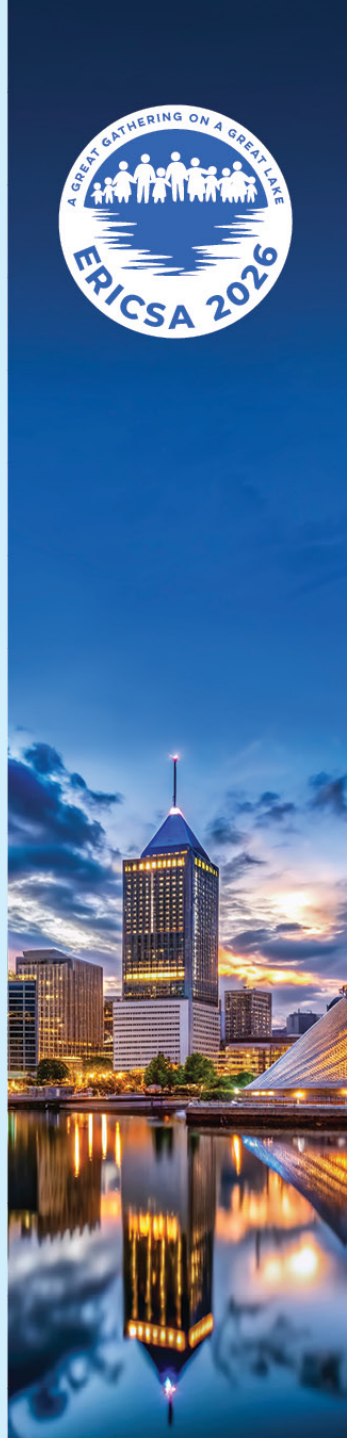


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Leading in Chaos: Insights to Lead through the Storms



Your Presenter, Irma Neal



Owner of Onyx Rising – A behavior change management company since 2016

Author of *Leading in Chaos: Insights to Lead Through the Storms*

Former **VP Center for Support of Families** (retired)

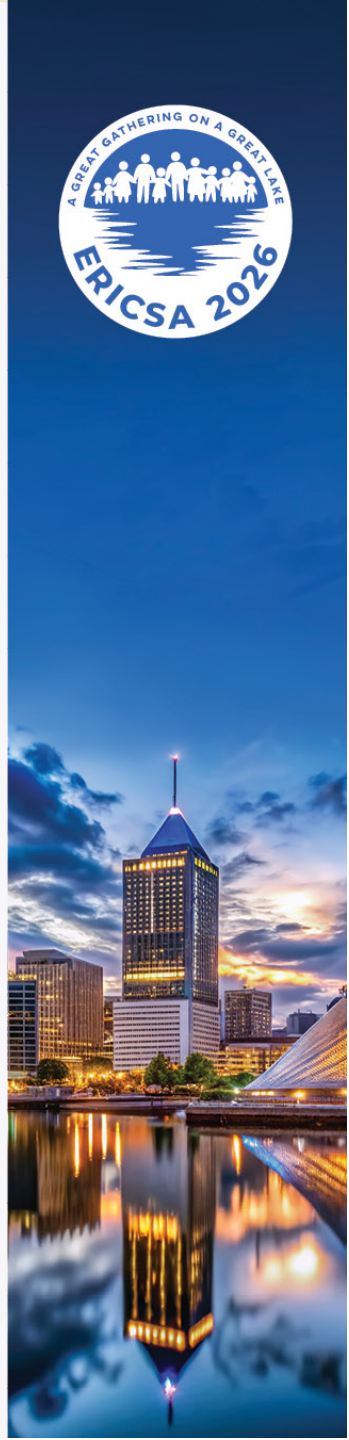
Former VP IBM Corporation,
Human Services National Practice

Former Owner of **Service Design Associates**

Former Deputy Mayor, Indianapolis Indiana

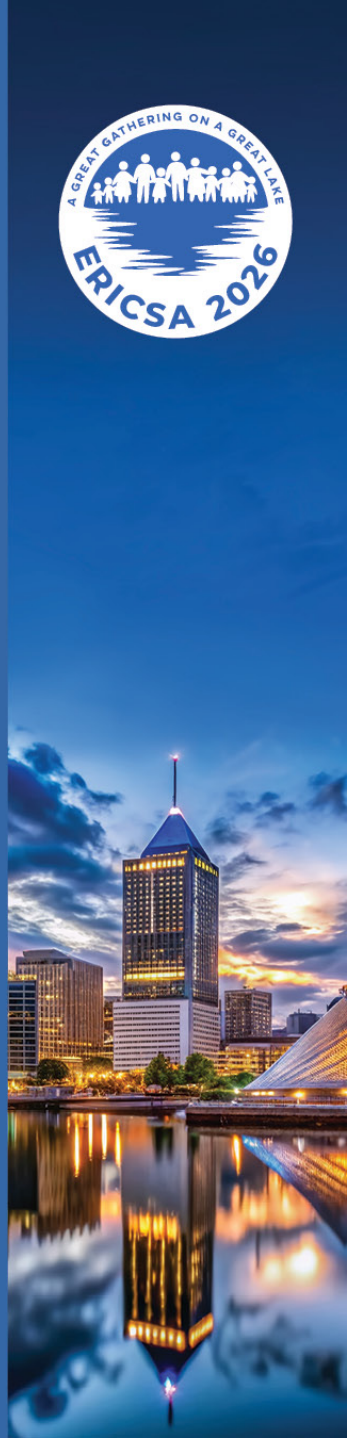
Former IV-D Director, Washington DC

Former IV-D Director, Marion County Indiana



Establishing Authority in a Chaotic Culture

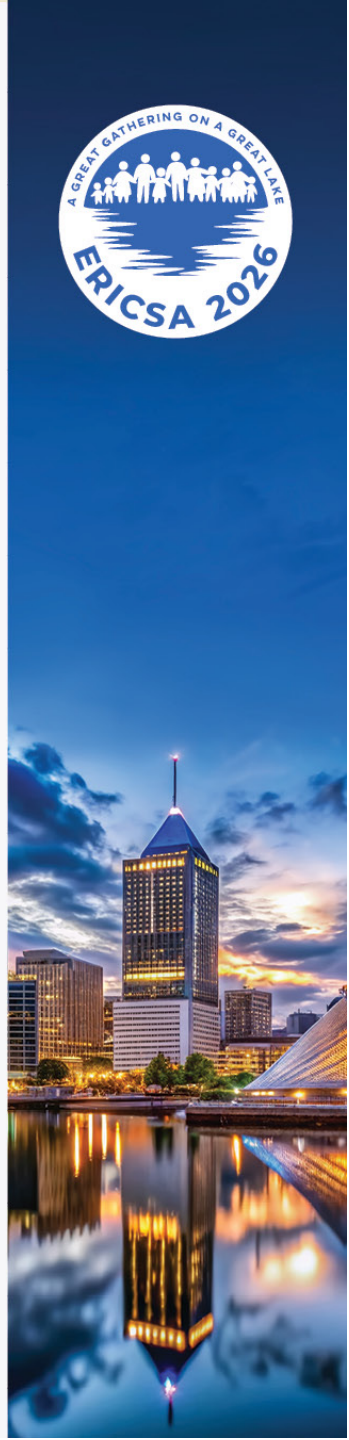
- Chaos is most often not the massive external crisis or event.
- One of the most common (and underestimated) sources of chaos: **Workplace culture gone unchecked!**
- It's the everyday behaviors — left unresolved — that chip away at performance, morale, and even leadership credibility.



Case Study: Toxic Culture

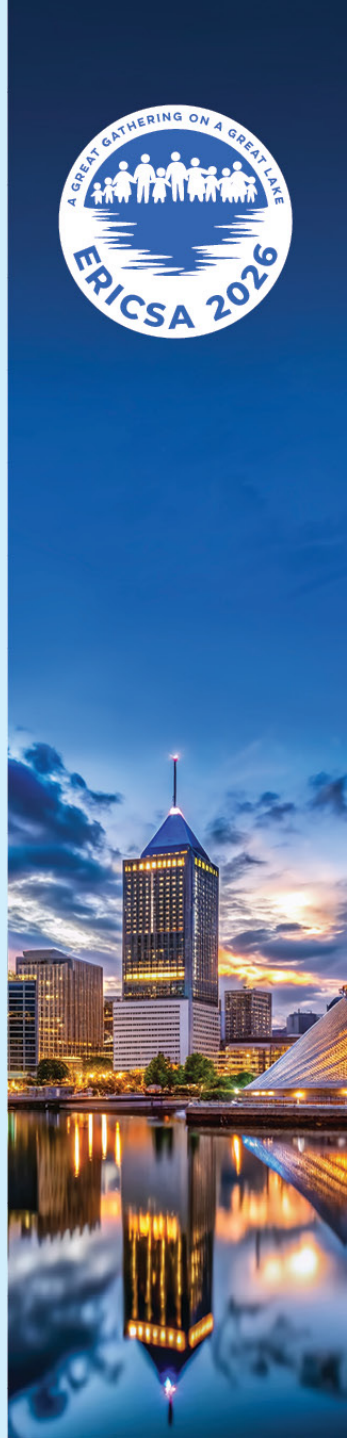
As the New IV-D Director you discover:

- Staff has portable TVs at workstations
- Weekly fish fries happen inside the office
- A “secret office” is used for illicit activities



TV's, Fish Fries & Sex

- I was the the new IV-D Director in Washington DC, conducting my first manager's meeting. In walking around the office, I discovered several workstations had portable TVs. I addressed this issue at my first manager's meeting.
- “Ms. White (Manager of the Intake section) asked: “Are YOU going to tell Marsha she has to take her TV home?” I replied, Ms. White, you are the manager, so YOU are going to tell her!”
- Another manager chimed in: “Well Ms. Neal, while we at it, SOMEBODY ought to stop them from frying fish in the office ever Friday! The whole fourth floor smells like fish!”
- There is also a “secret” office that is used for all sorts of illicit behavior from using drugs to an infamous couch that was said to be a place for sexual encounters!



TV's, Fish Fries & Sex – Pertinent Facts



The **Manager's meetings** were scheduled on **Friday mornings**

16 Managers – All had been managers **five years or more**

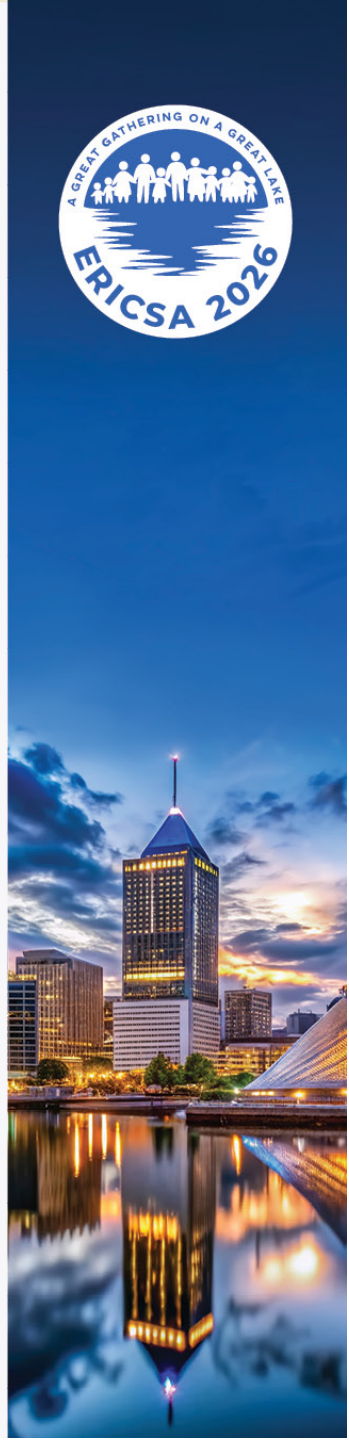
Total staff:
120

Two-thirds of the staff had portable **TVs at or near their desks**

There was **no dispute** about **fish fries** happening in the office **every Friday**

The "secret" office did exist and there was **evidence of sexual encounters**

Change in policy would be **met with retaliation**



**WHAT
WOULD
YOU DO?**



What really happened?



I changed the policy regarding TVs in the office verbally and in writing immediately.



I informed and trained the managers and staff on the new policy.



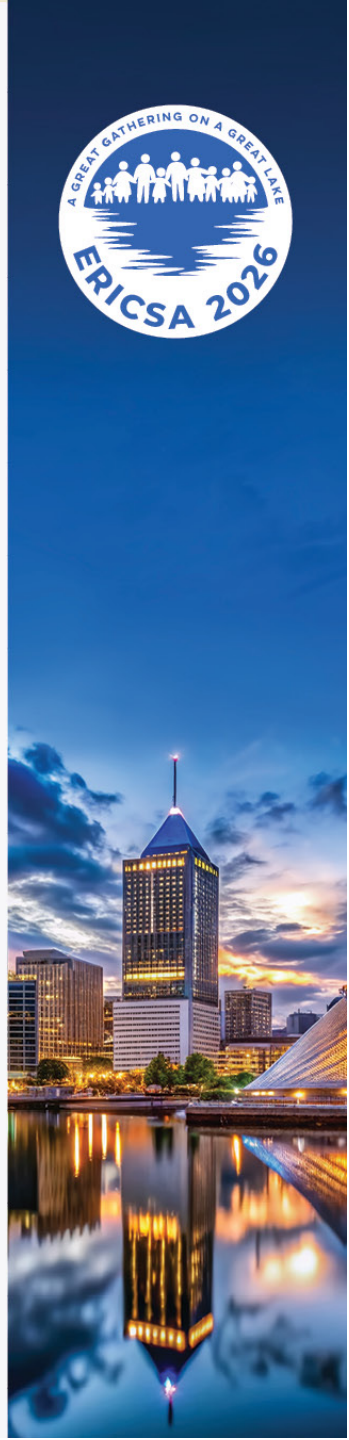
Effective immediately Fish Fry Fridays were permanently cancelled.



The “secret” office was converted to a new workspace.

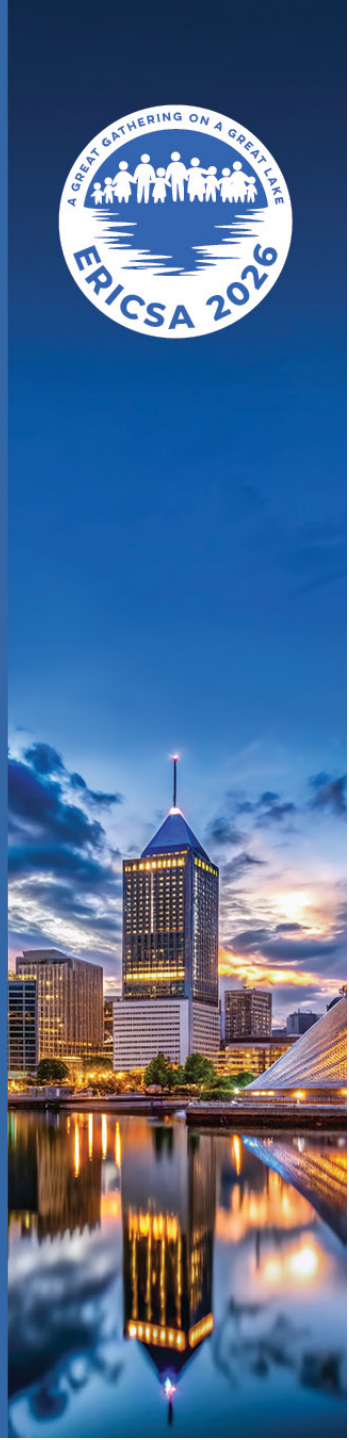
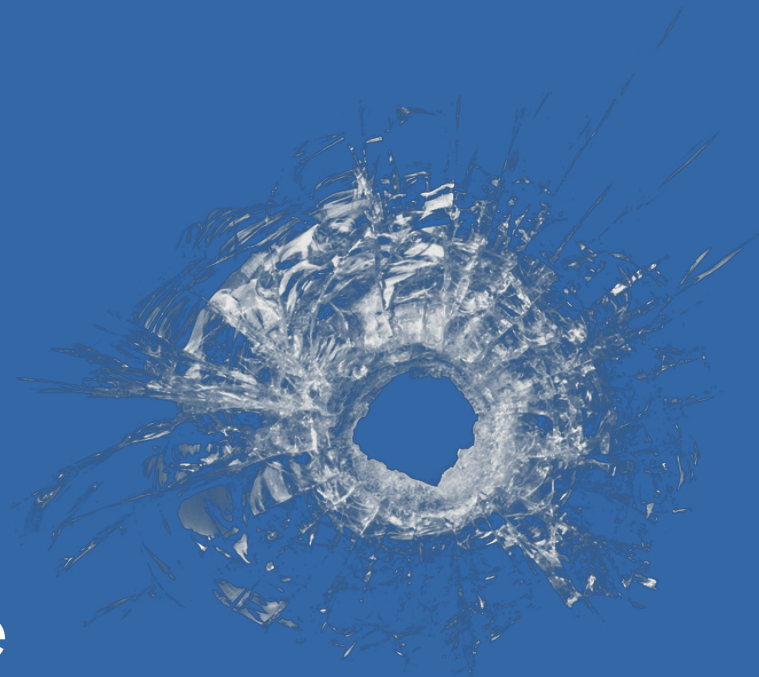


The Infamous couch was sent to the dumpster.

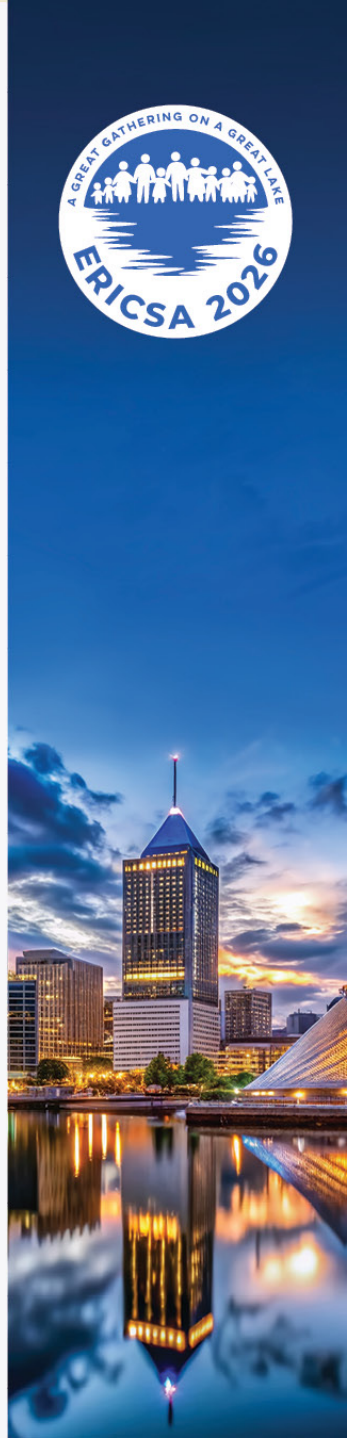


It's Not Over...

On Monday, after the policy change, my locked office was broken into. What looked like a bullet had pierced the Plexiglas window. Everything in the office was destroyed including a valuable painting given to me by my mentor.



**WHAT
WOULD
YOU DO?**



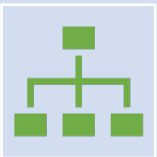
What really happened?



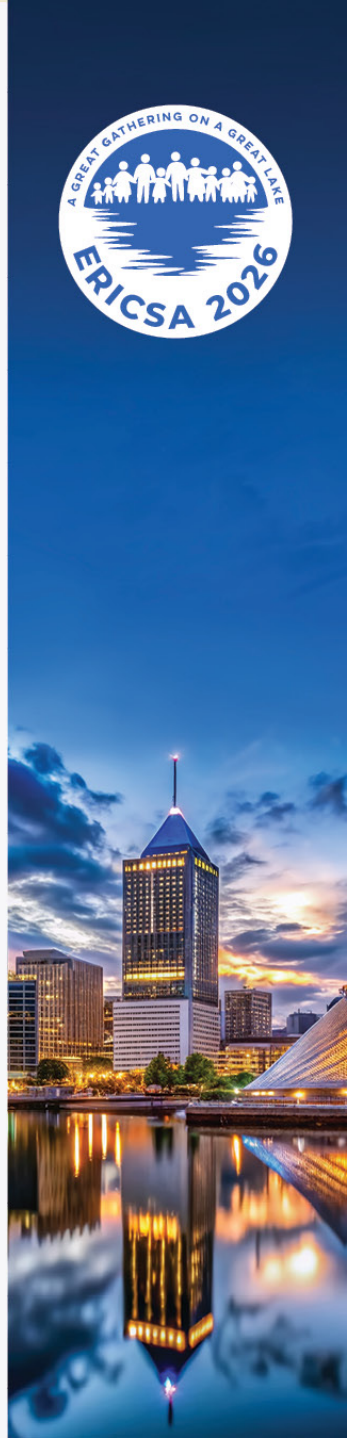
I called my allies—the Mayor, the Police Chief, the Judge, the Councilman.



They stood with me, publicly, visibly.



“Because in chaos, leadership is not just about setting rules—it’s about showing you are not alone when you enforce them!”



Action Steps

1. Establish leadership immediately

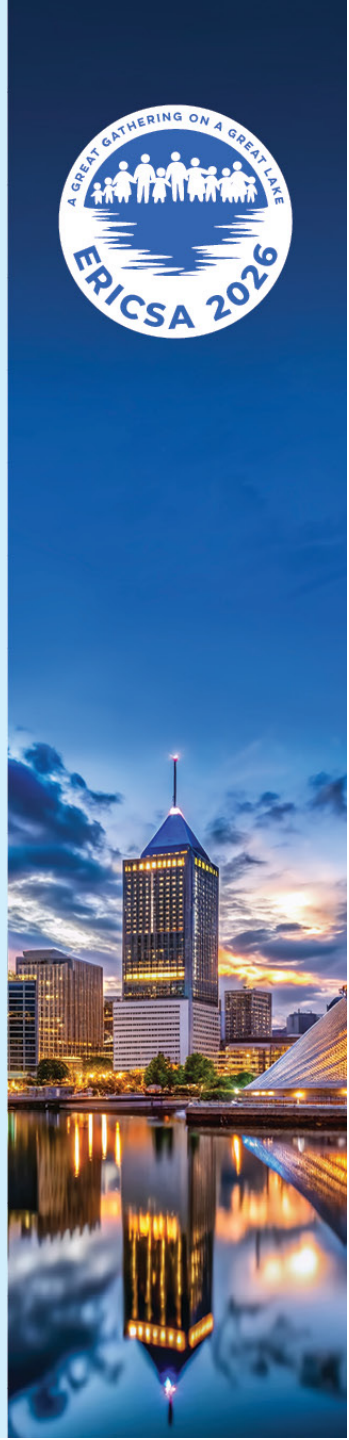
- In dysfunctional environments, employees watch the first decisions carefully.
- Clear expectations in the first 30 days determine whether chaos continues.

2. Diagnose before fixing

- Effective leaders observe systems, behaviors, and power dynamics before making structural changes.

3. Culture follows enforcement

- Workplace culture is shaped not by policies, but by what leadership allows to continue.



Leadership Action in Chaos

Act

- In moments of chaos, effective leaders must act quickly—but thoughtfully

Set Expectations

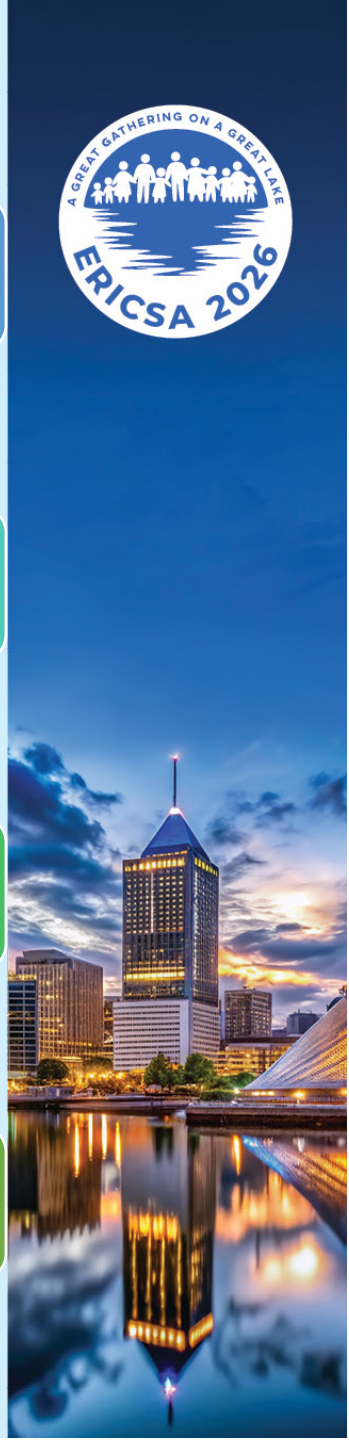
- Effective leaders must set clear expectations: Immediately and unambiguously

Communicate

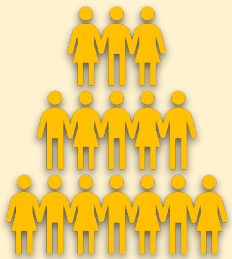
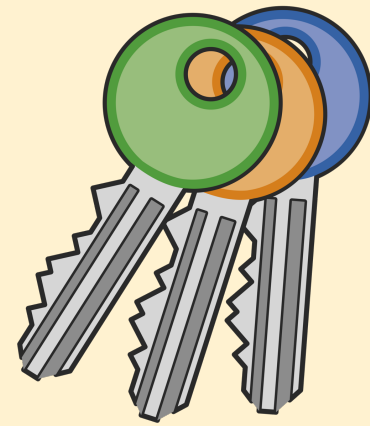
- Communicate the WHY: Policy isn't about control; it's about protecting the vision, the clients, and each other

Demonstrate

- Demonstrate Consequences: Not through threats—but by showing that standards will be consistently enforced



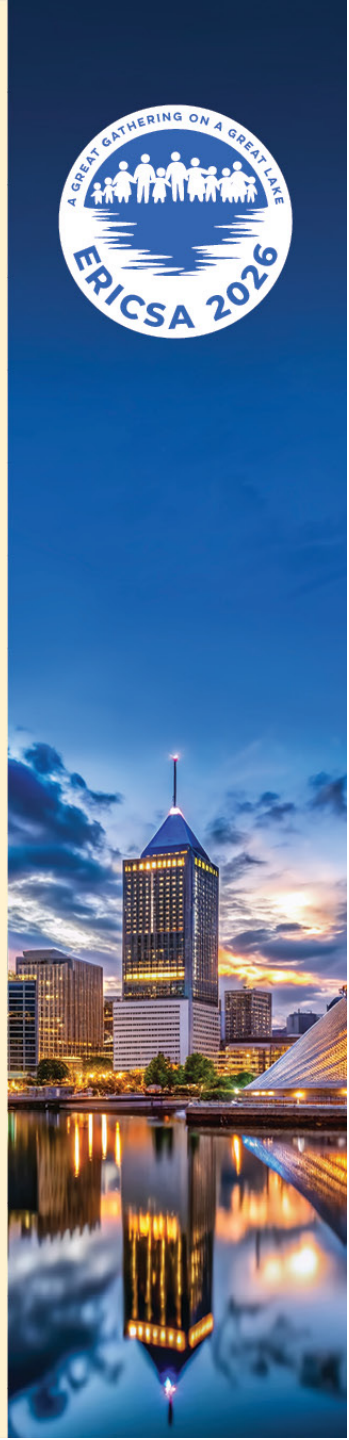
Final Key Takeaways



As a leader:
Where are you tolerating
small dysfunctions today
because addressing them
feels too hard?

Who are your potential
allies when you must
make unpopular
decisions?

In chaos, weak
standards grow
stronger. So too must
your leadership.



FROM



CHAOS & CONFUSION



**LACK OF
ACCOUNTABILITY**



TOXIC CULTURE



TO



CLARITY & FOCUS



STRONG ACCOUNTABILITY



POSITIVE CULTURE

LEADERSHIP

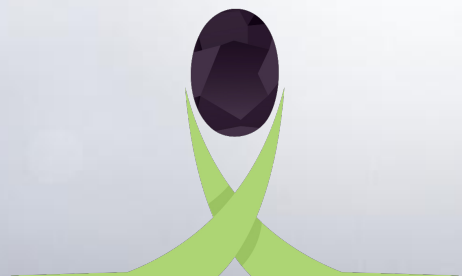
Reactive



Intentional

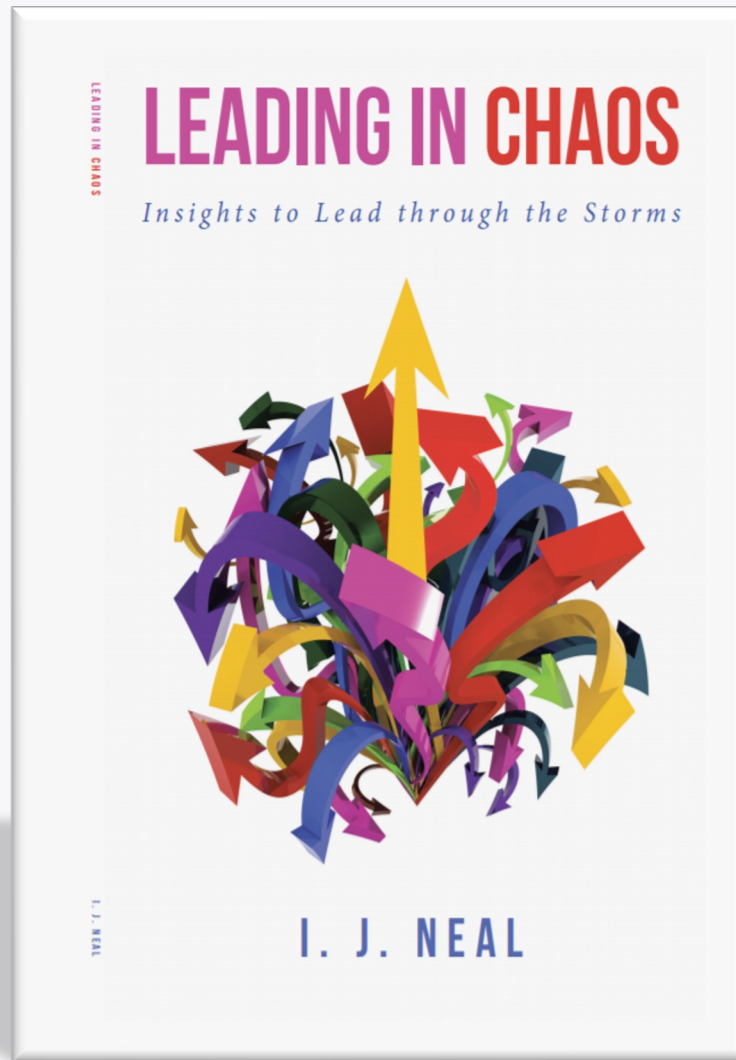


Thank You



ONYX RISING





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