



ERICSA 63RD ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION

MAY 3-7, 2026

Milwaukee

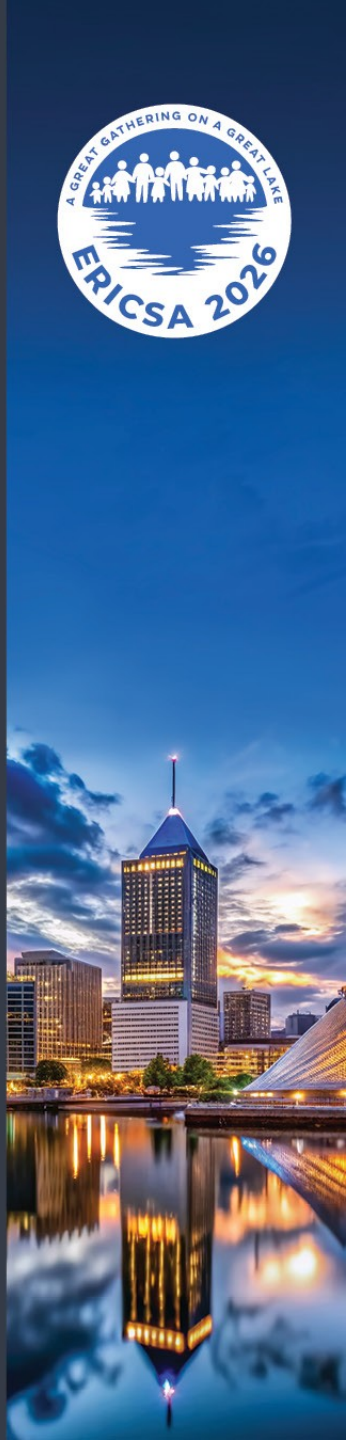
WISCONSIN

Too Much Change, Not Enough Capacity

Leading Without Burning Out Your Team

George Skenandore
Seven Ravens Consulting

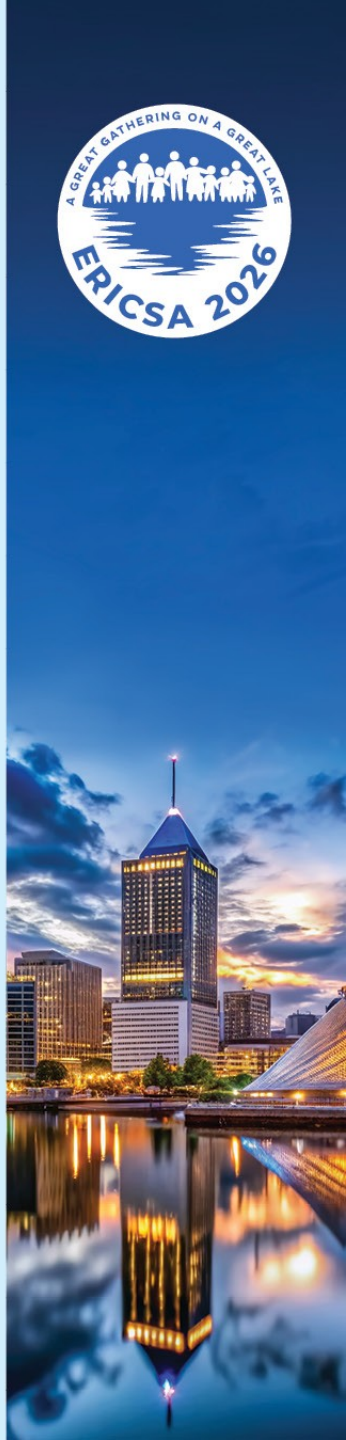
Tamara Thomas, Executive Dir
Edge Consulting and Training



Think About a Time...

Think about a time when change fatigue overwhelmed your team or organization.

- What behaviors did you observe?
- What core work or community obligations were impacted or interrupted?
- Which roles or functions became strained, unclear, or dropped?
- What did leaders assume was happening vs. what was actually happening?

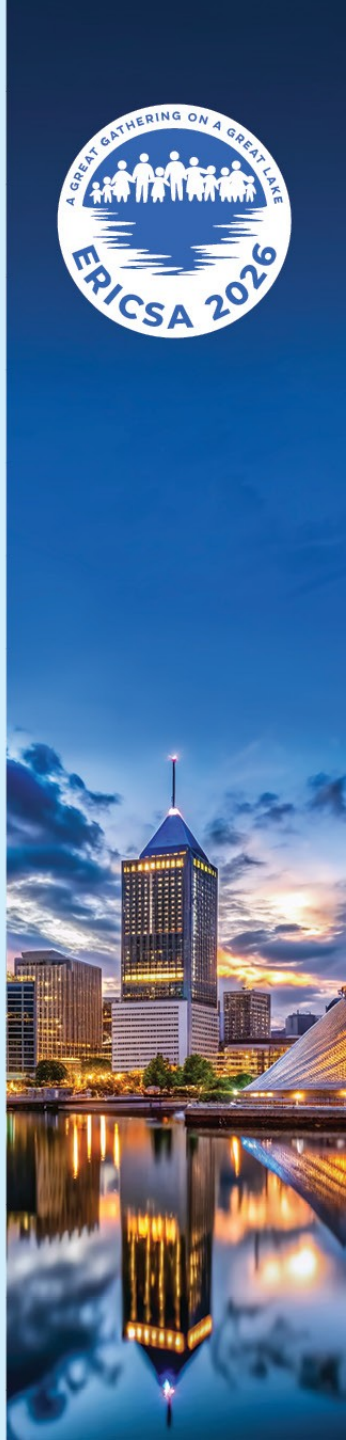


Why Capacity Matters

- Too many inputs (emails, system alerts, policy changes, cases to review, interviews) reduce decision quality
- Cognitive overload impacts performance → more errors, slower processing, missed details
- Exhaustion $\neq$ disengagement → people still care, but are mentally depleted.

“The limitations of working memory are a critical constraint on cognitive performance.”

— John Sweller



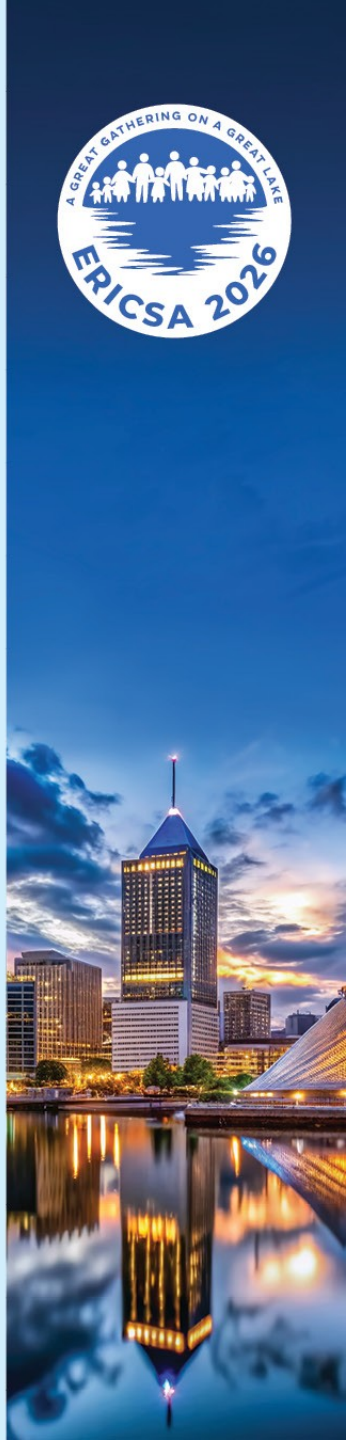
Capacity: Tribal Considerations

In tribal Communities,
capacity isn't just shaped by
workload—it's shaped by:

- community expectations
- cultural
responsibility/values
- systems that demand
more with fewer supports

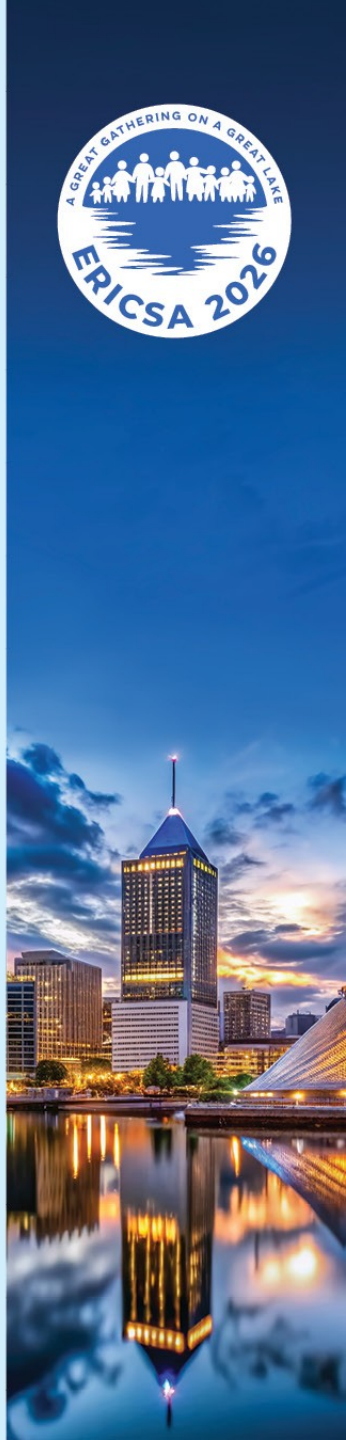
QUESTION:

How do community or
intergenerational
obligations (past, present,
and future caretaking
duties) show up in your
role when your
organization is
experiencing change or
strain?



Capacity: Built Over Time, Managed Every Day

- Capacity can be built over time through training, tools, and experience
- Capacity grows gradually—not at the pace of demand
- Demand is immediate and constant
- Leaders must prioritize, reduce, and protect capacity in real time
- You can't out-train unlimited demand—you have to manage it

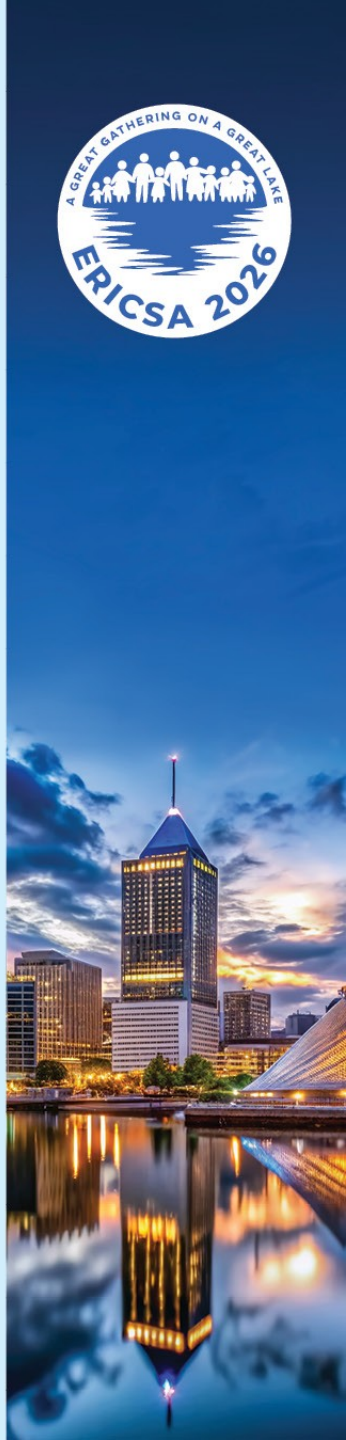


The Shift in Leadership

- What looks like resistance → Often a capacity saturation issue, not a will issue
- Teams are willing but overwhelmed
- Capacity is the new leadership currency

“Burnout is not a problem of people—it’s a problem of the workplace.”

— Christina Maslach



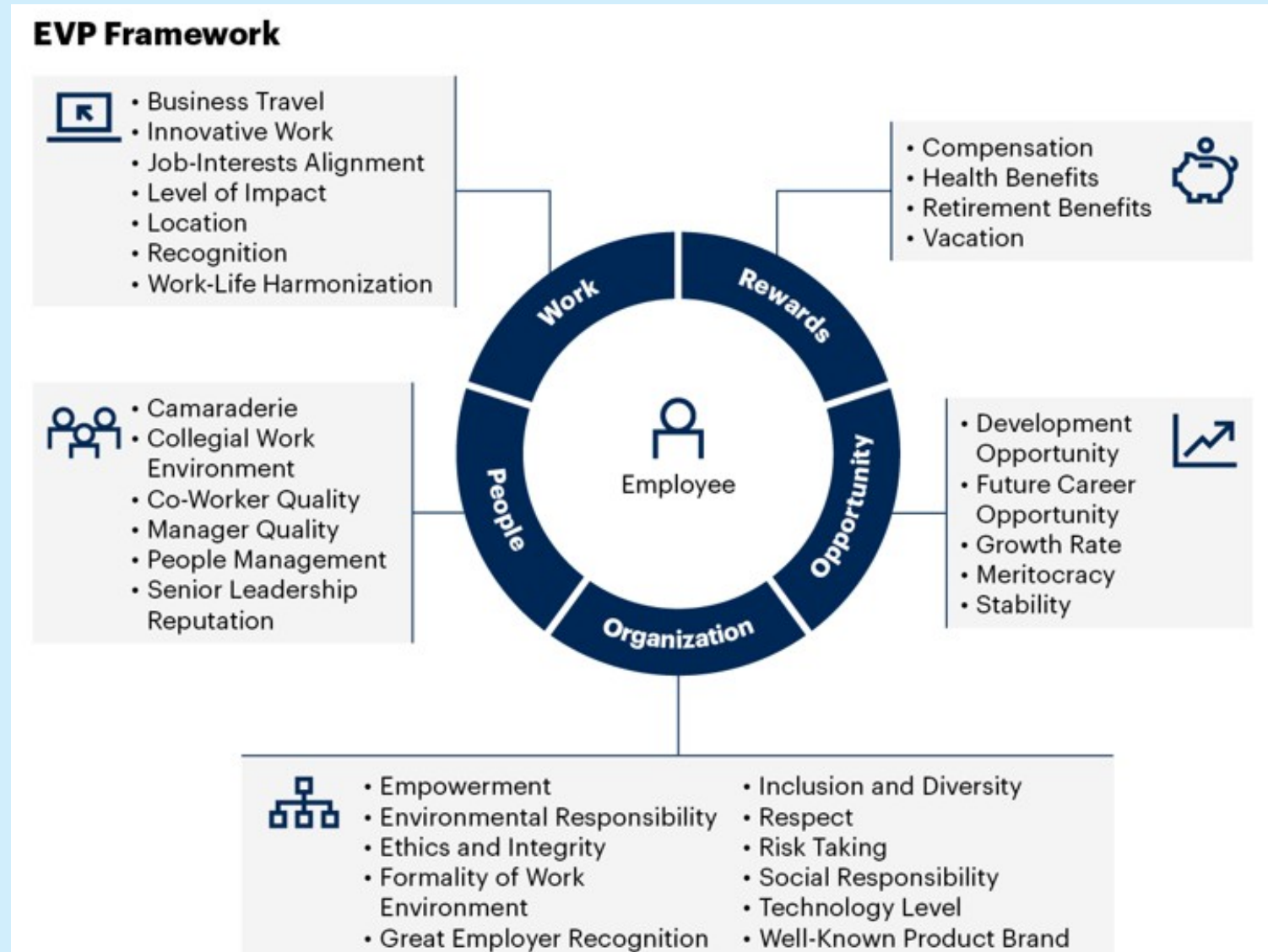
Employee Value Proposition Framework



Work-Life
Balance

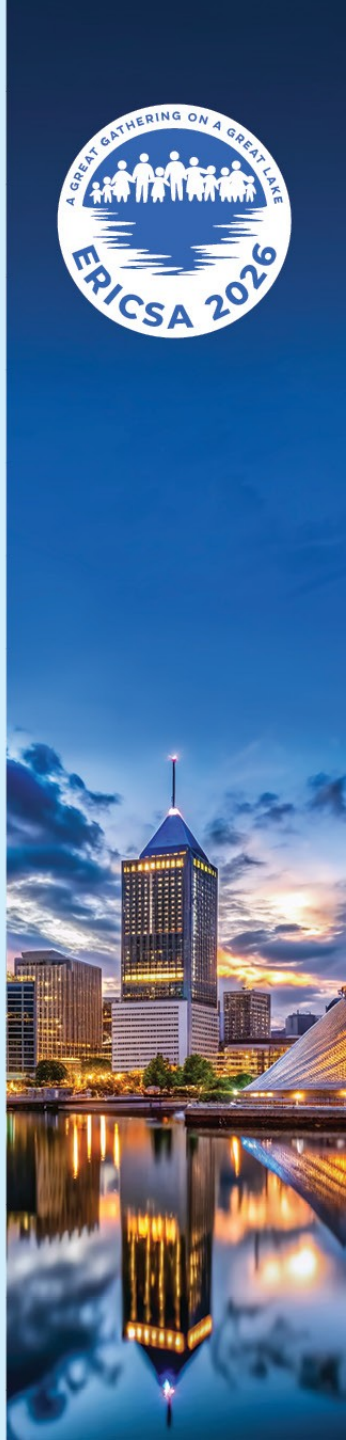
People
Management

Work
Environment



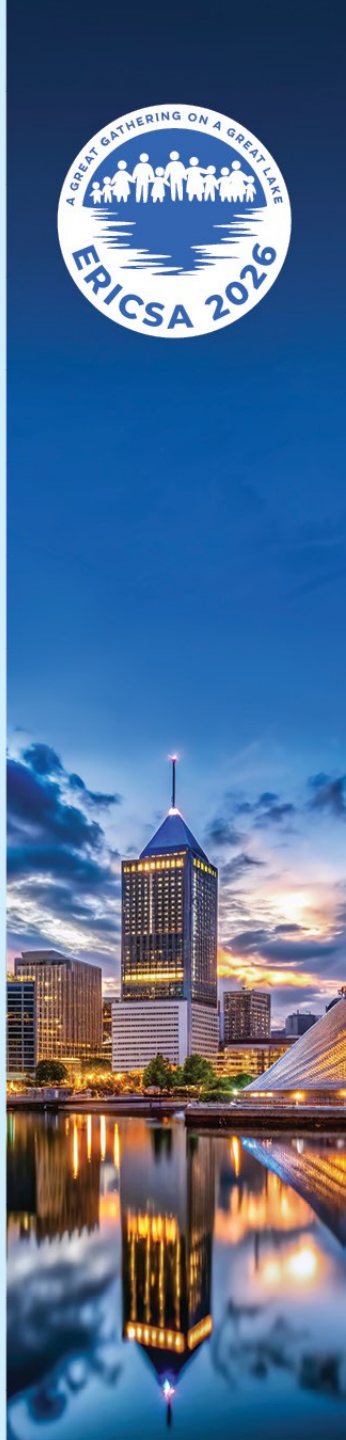
Change Saturation

- Volume + pace + ambiguity
- Competing priorities → everything feels urgent
- Constant shifting expectations → no stable focus



Hidden Workload

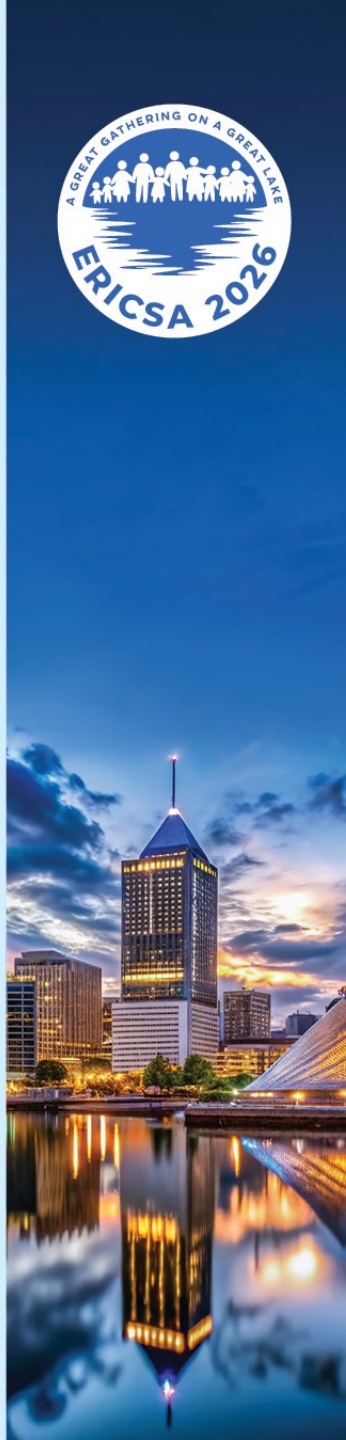
- Meetings, rework, unclear direction → time spent not moving work forward
- Shadow work → side tasks, follow-ups, and fixes not formally assigned
- Unseen mental load → tracking, remembering, and juggling competing demands
- Constant interruptions → emails, alerts, and “quick asks” breaking focus
- Workarounds → manual steps created to compensate for system gaps
- What isn’t visible still consumes capacity



Capacity Challenges Beyond the Task List

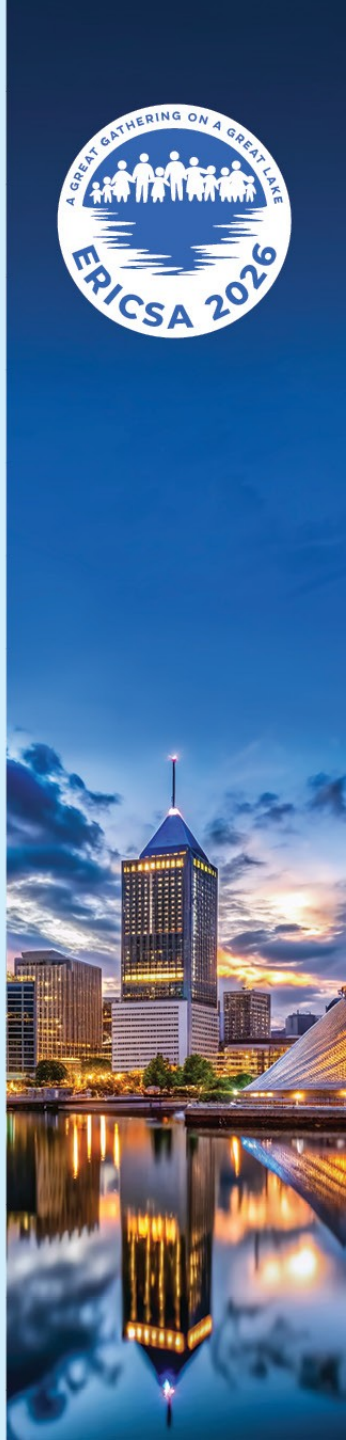
In tribal organizations, some of the most capacity intensive work never shows up on a task list.

- external reporting requirements
- securing funding
- consultation/education efforts
- community engagement
- ceremony activities/responsibilities
- relationship maintenance
- negotiating timelines and decision-making practices (consensus and relational driven)



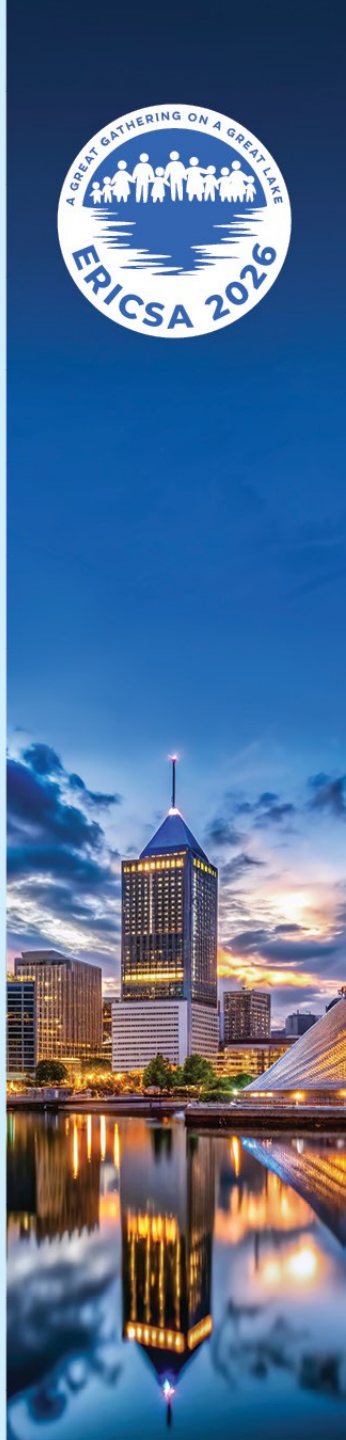
Capacity Line

- Where performance begins to decline
- Sustainable → Strain → Burnout
- Performance declines once strain begins



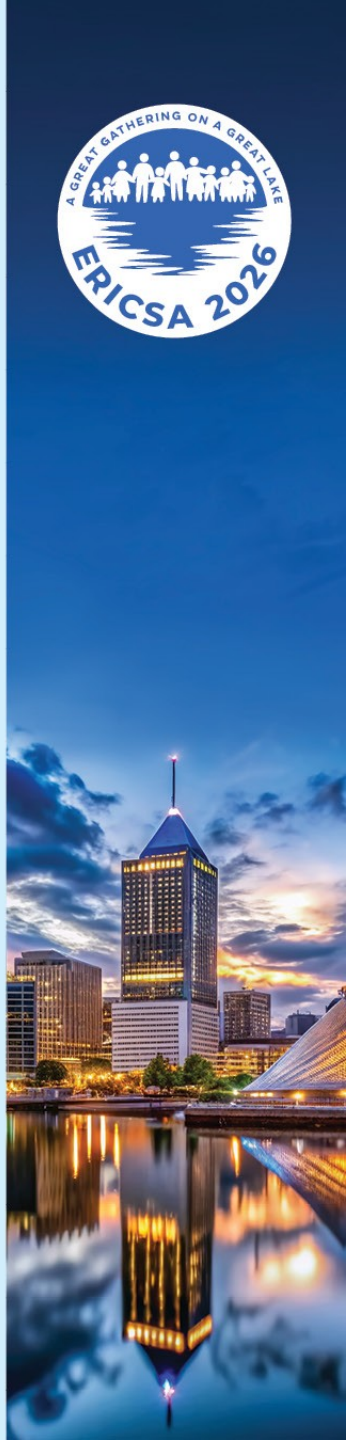
Spotting Overload

- Behavior: withdrawal, irritability
- Work: errors, missed deadlines
- Team: conflict, silence, low engagement



Misdiagnosis

- Performance expectations are real—and often non-negotiable
- When results drop, its often labeled a performance issue
- Capacity constraints go unexamined (caseload, change load, system demands, budgetary constraints)
- Pressure increases instead of being redistributed or reduced
- Sustained misdiagnosis drives burnout, disengagement, and turnover.
 - It works against EVP



Same Pressure, Different Expression

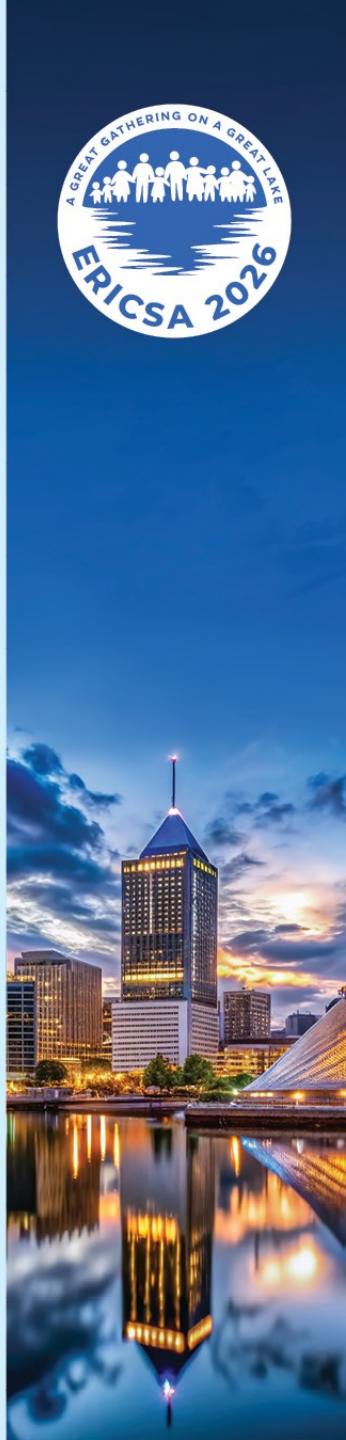
In tribal communities, cultural strengths and lived experiences can change what overload looks like and how it shows up.

What Leaders Might See

- Quiet agreement or compliance
- Absences tied to community needs
- Slower decisions or less visible participation
- Work continues despite growing strain

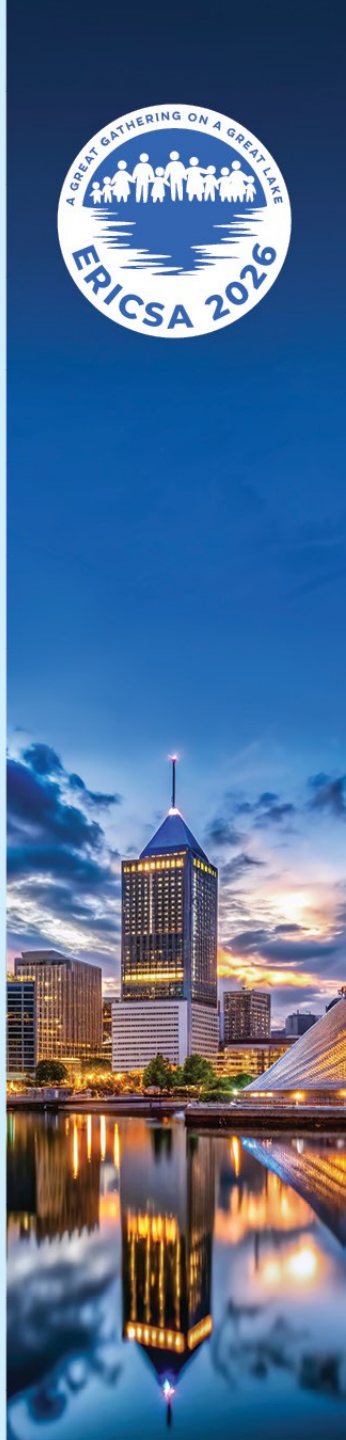
What May Actually Be Happening

- Cultural values emphasize humility, respect, and harmony
- Community, ceremonial, and family obligations are non-negotiable
- Decision-making requires consultation and relational accountability
- Historical and intergenerational trauma shapes stress responses
- Strong commitment and resilience can mask unsustainable load



Prioritization: The Leadership Move When Capacity is Constrained

- Motivation is not the fix → capacity is the constraint
- Prioritization is the leadership move
- Leaders must decide what gets focus
- Leaders must decide what does NOT get focus





Prioritization as Stewardship

Prioritization is not just efficiency, it is stewardship

- In tribal organizations, priorities affect people, families, and community well-being
- What we sustain (or stop) signals what we truly value

Motivation is not the fix → capacity is the constraint

- Commitment is already high in community-centered work
- Asking people to “push harder” risks long-term harm

Prioritization is a leadership responsibility

- Leaders decide where limited capacity goes
- Leaders protect people by making tradeoffs visible and intentional

Choosing focus means choosing impact

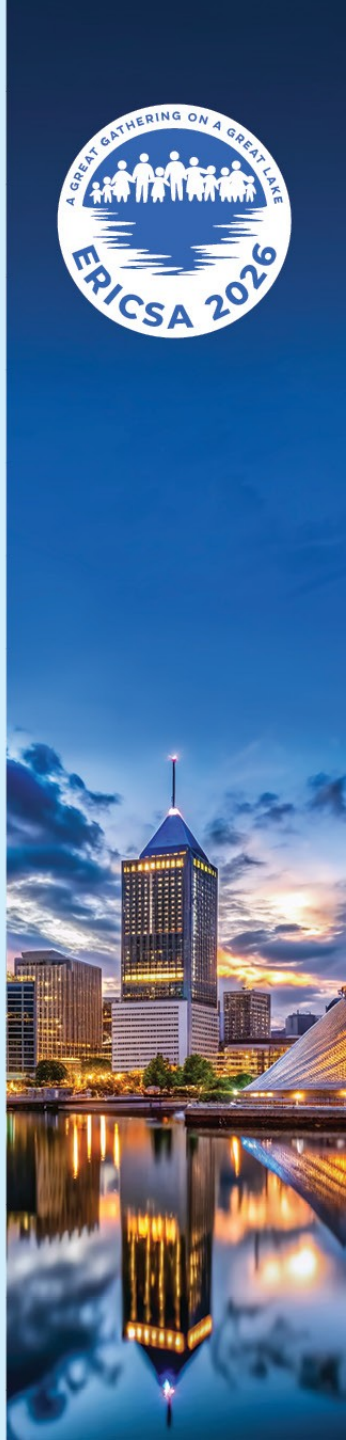
- What gets attention receives care and energy
- What continues unchecked drains wellness and sustainability

Stopping work is not failure

- It is an act of responsibility to current and future generations
- Protecting capacity today preserves leadership tomorrow

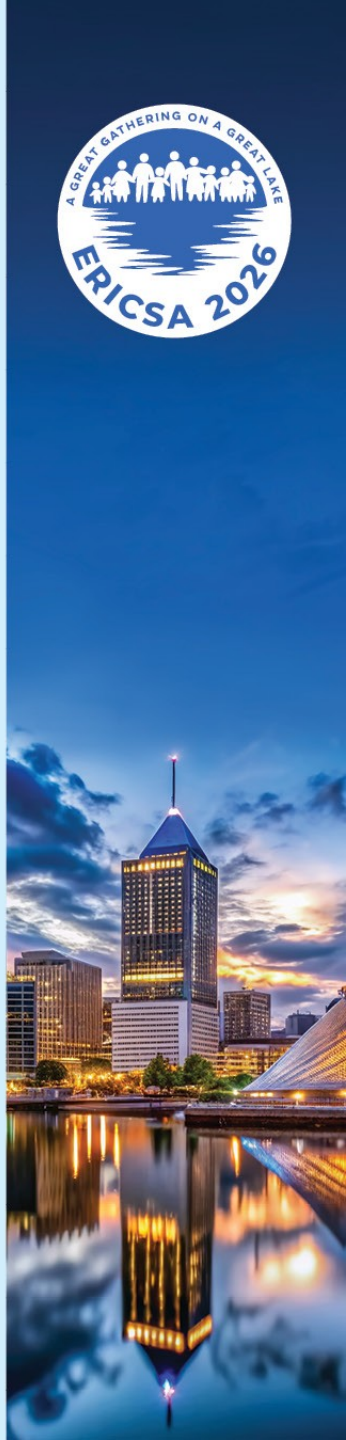
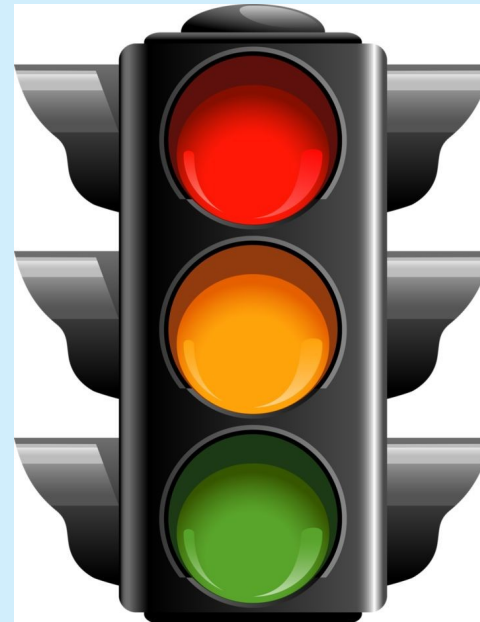
What Effective Leadership Prioritization Looks Like

- Clearly define what must get done now (top priorities)
- Explicitly name what can wait or be deferred
- Align work to what moves performance areas most
- Reduce or redistribute lower-value work
- Communicate priorities consistently and often



The Stoplight Tool (Simple, Practical Prioritization)

- Red: Stop
- Yellow: Pause
- Green: Priority

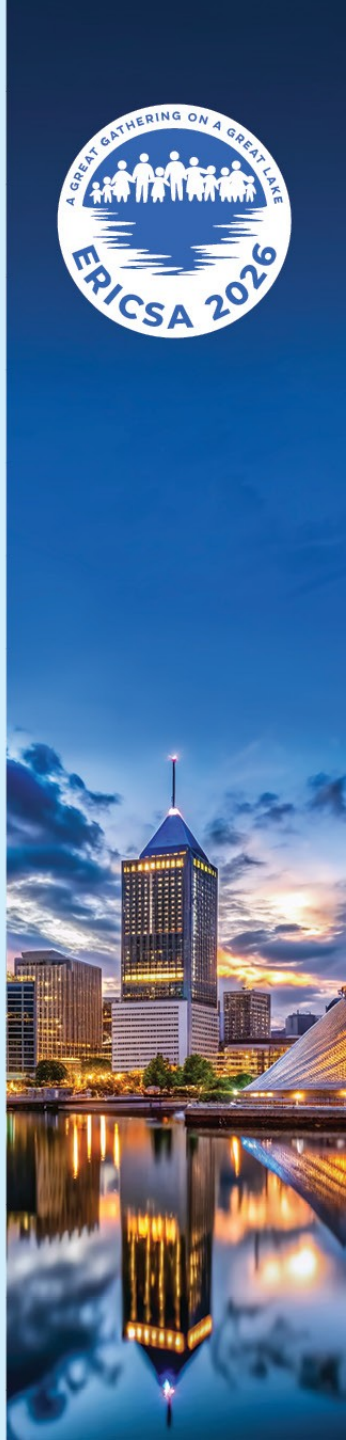


Stoplight Feedback

- A simple structure to deliver clear, balanced, and actionable feedback
- Stoplight Feedback helps people understand in a way that reduces confusion and defensiveness.

It represents:

- **Green** → What to keep doing (continue priorities)
- **Yellow** → What to adjust or pause
- **Red** → What must stop



Stoplight Activity

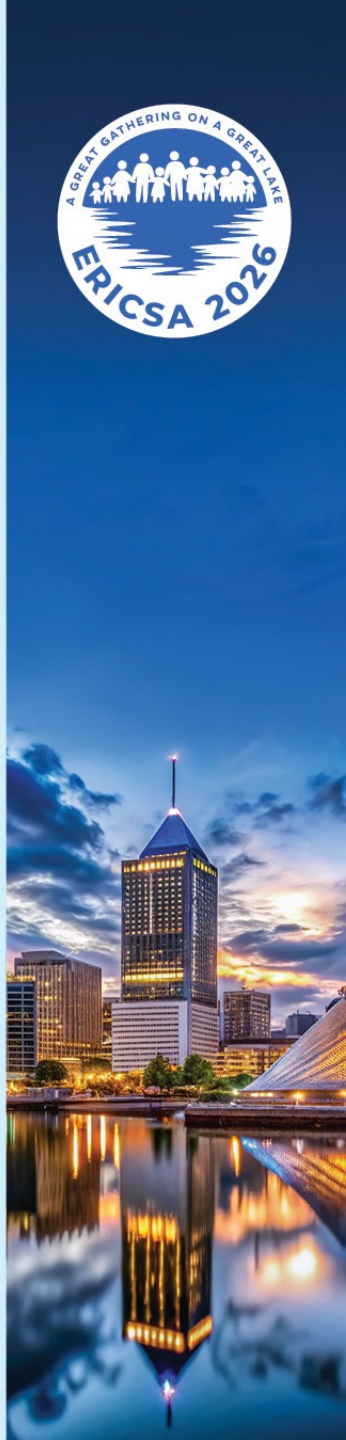
Situations:

A child support unit is managing high caseloads while also implementing multiple changes—new system updates, policy shifts, and increased expectations tied to federal performance measures. Staff are attending more meetings as a result, responding to urgent requests, and trying to keep up with documentation requirements.

What's Happening:

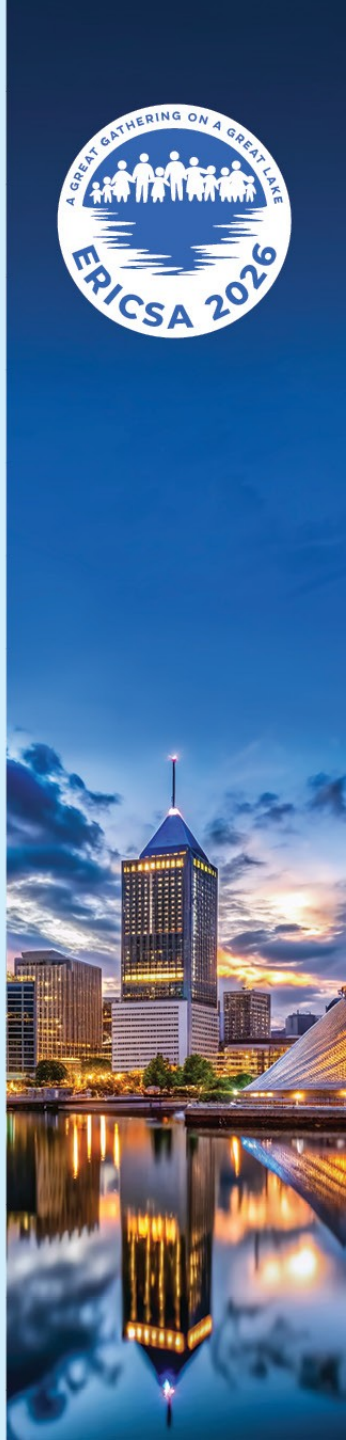
Performance is starting to slip in key areas, and leadership has responded by increasing check-ins and emphasizing accountability. Morale is declining, frustration is rising, and employees feel like they are constantly working but never catching up.

Using Stoplight Thinking: What should this team Keep, Pause, or Stop to better manage capacity and sustain performance?



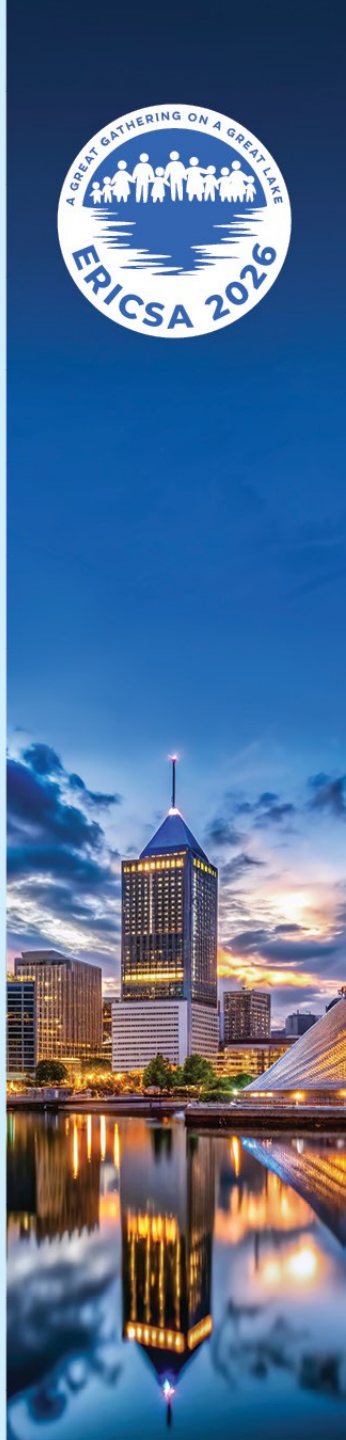
Strategic Abandonment: Choosing What Stops

- Not all work can continue → some work must stop
- Tradeoffs required → you can't improve everything at once
- Every “yes” requires a “no” → capacity is finite
- Stopping work is a leadership decision → not a team failure
- *If nothing stops, everything slows*



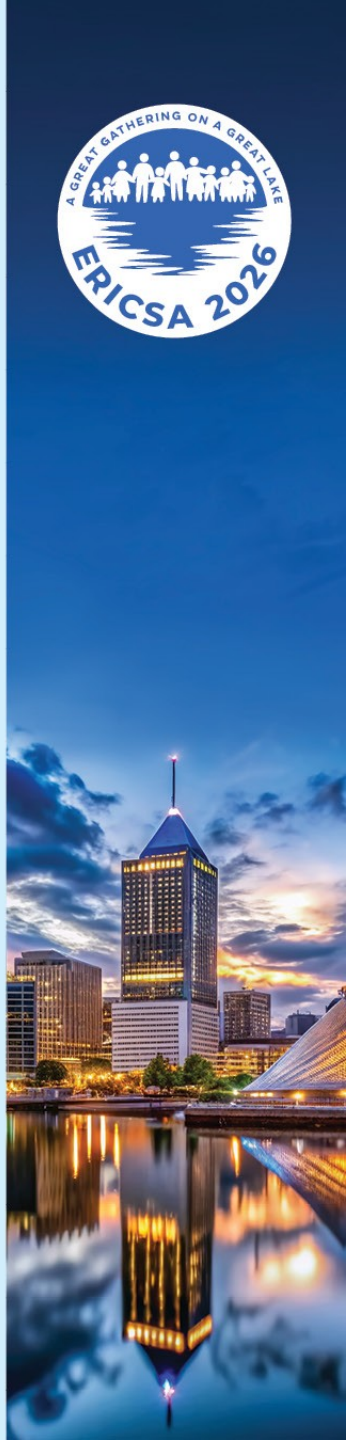
Debrief: Real World Challenges

- Sort work by Red/Yellow/Green
- Challenge urgency
- Clarify priorities
- Use data to support your opinion
- Ask for trade-offs
- Elevate capacity concerns
- Use your influence to shape priorities



Leading Without Adding

- Subtract before you add → what can be paused delayed or removed?
- Clarity reduces stress → performance improves when priorities are clear
- Alignment matters → work should connect to what drives results most



Leading by Subtraction as Stewardship



Leading without adding more isn't about lowering expectations.

It's about ensuring our people aren't the cost of meeting expectations.

Leading Without Adding More

- Simplifying work can feel risky in systems shaped by scarcity and scrutiny
- In tribal communities, subtraction is often an act of stewardship, not retreat

Leading by Subtraction

- Aligns with Indigenous teachings of simplicity, care, and sustainability
- Choosing less protects people, not performance

Clarity Reduces Strain

- Clear priorities support staff navigating professional roles, identity, and community responsibilities
- Fewer competing demands = more focused, sustainable effort

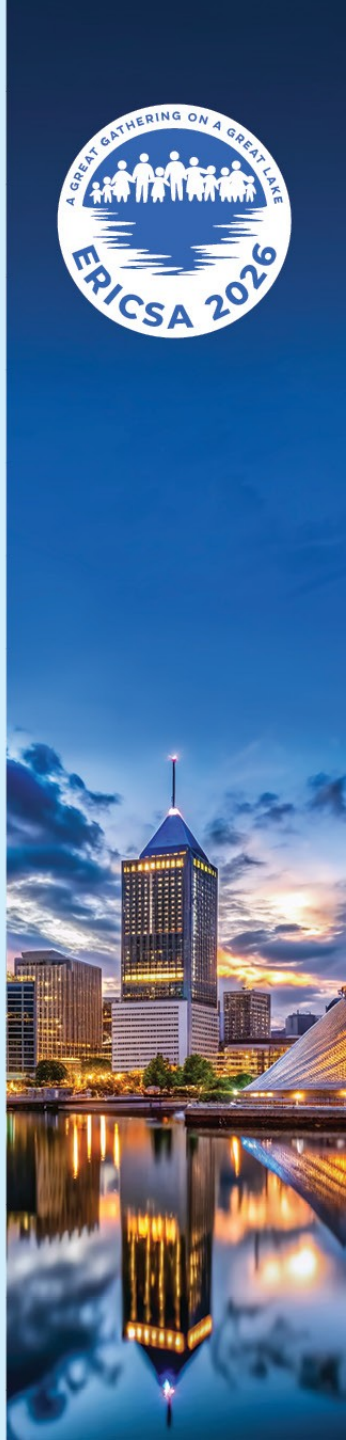
Retention Is Protection

- Reducing overload helps retain talent
- Protecting capacity today strengthens communities tomorrow

Leadership Reminder: If nothing is removed, strain—not results—increases

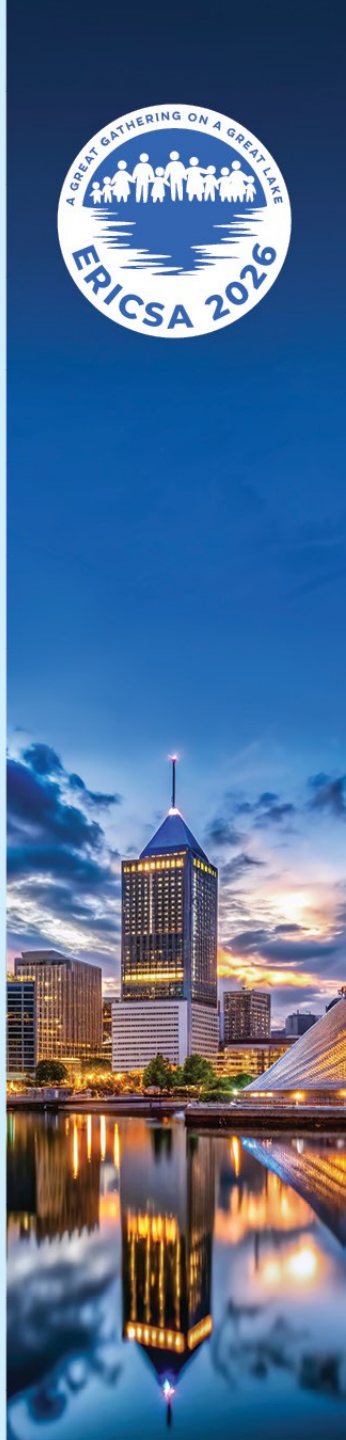
Reduce the Noise

- Eliminate duplication where possible
- Reduce meetings
- Clarify expectations
- Standardize processes → fewer competing demands
- Streamline communication → less duplication and confusion



Quick Table/Group Discussion

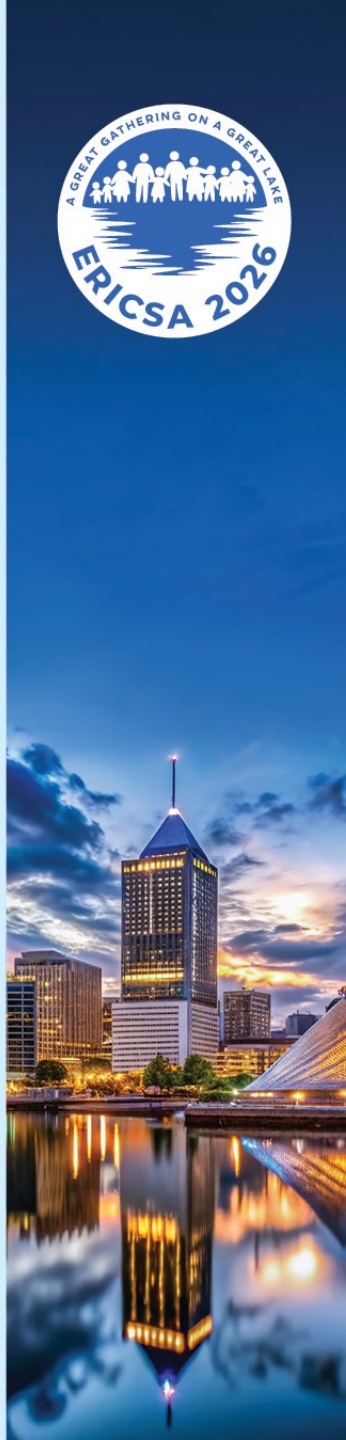
- Take 3-5 minutes to discuss with those around you
 - What is one activity, report, meeting, or process your team continues out of habit?
 - What would happen if you reduced or stopped it?
 - What makes it hard to let go?



15% Solutions

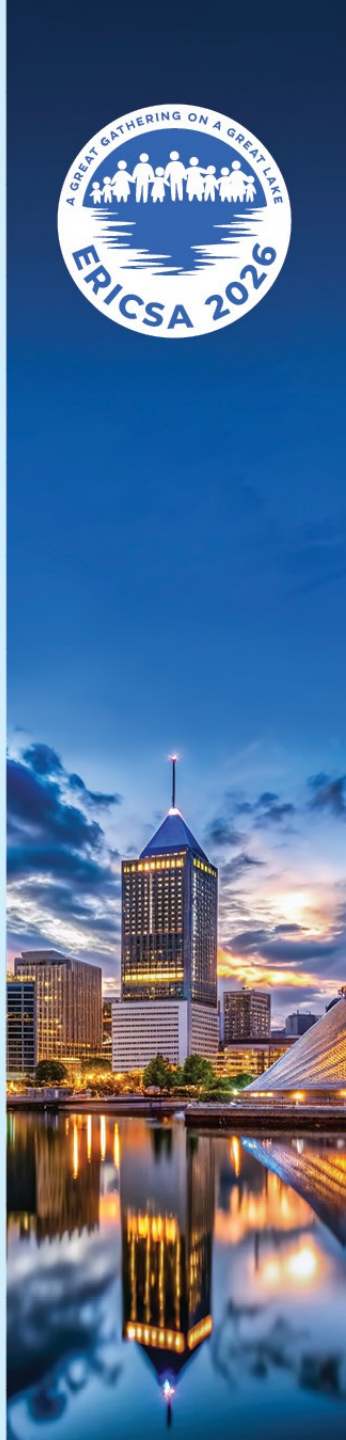
Identifying what you can do right now.

- What can you move forward today?
 - Shifts the focus from “It can’t happen”
 - Not about solving everything
 - Creates immediate, realistic, momentum
- With what you have
 - Using current resources, knowledge, and team strengths
 - Leverage existing processes with existing tools, automation, and functions
- Without permission
 - Take action within your role and authority without waiting for approval
 - Move forward on decisions that do not require escalation or policy change
 - Focus on what you can initiate now while larger decisions are pending



15% Solutions

- Within your control
- Immediate action
- Small shifts matter



Unbundle the Scenario

- How could you encourage this employee by using the 15% Solution Model?

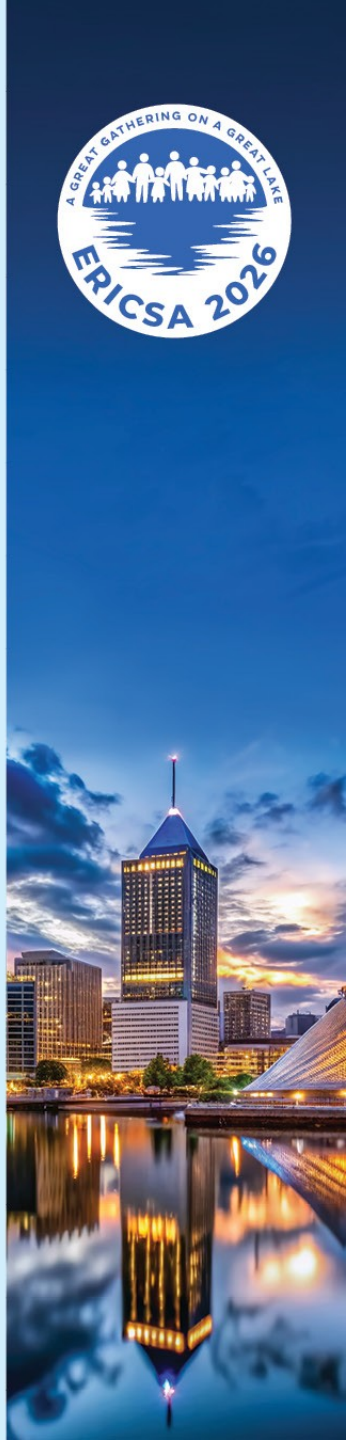
Scenario:

A caseworker has a large backlog of cases and feels overwhelmed. They are behind on follow-ups, new cases keep coming in, and they feel like they are constantly reacting instead of making progress.

Challenge:

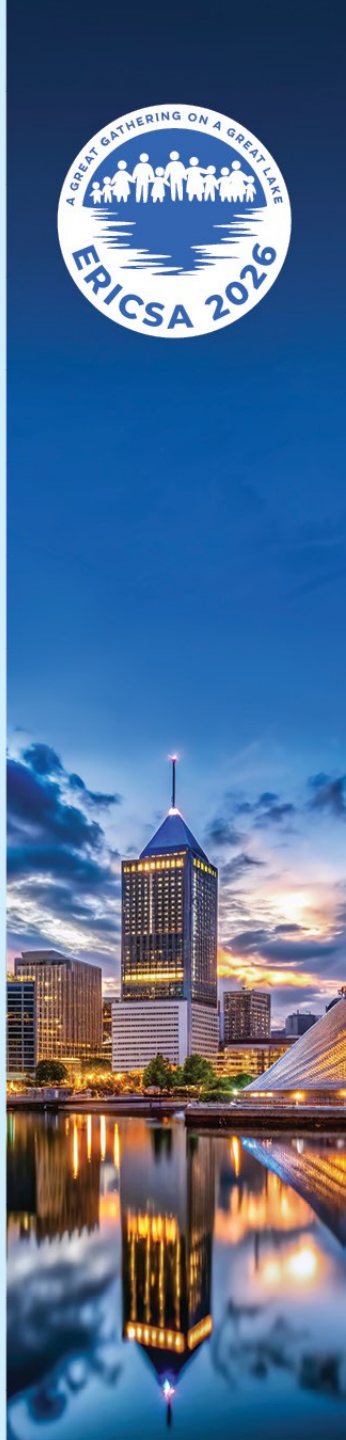
They say: “There’s too much to do. I can’t catch up until things slow down or we get more help.”

Choose a solution that strengthens both organizational capacity and community well-being



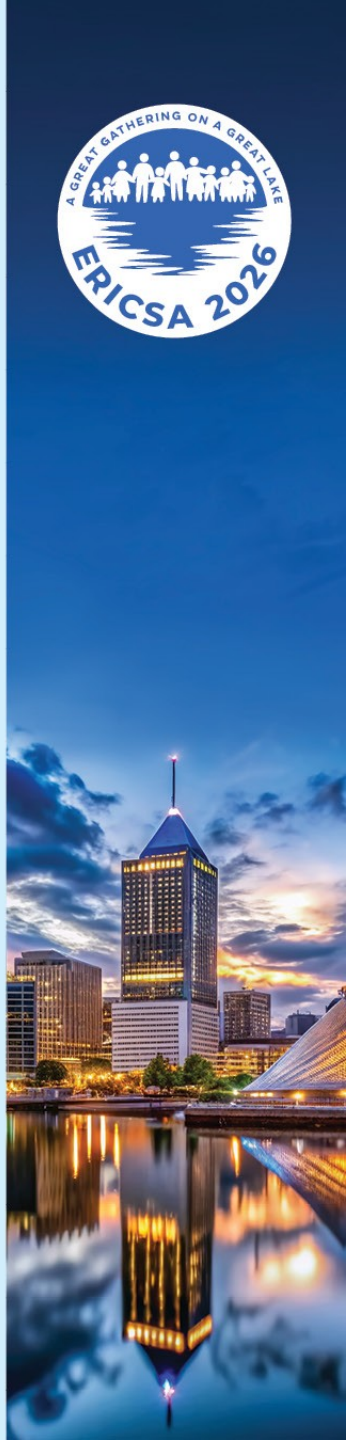
Solution-Focused Leadership

- Focus on application, not just concepts
- Strengths-based → build from existing capability
- Progress over perfection → move work forward without waiting for ideal conditions
- Small steps create momentum
- Break challenges into manageable actions that build confidence
- Accountability without blame
- Hold expectations while focusing on ownership and next steps



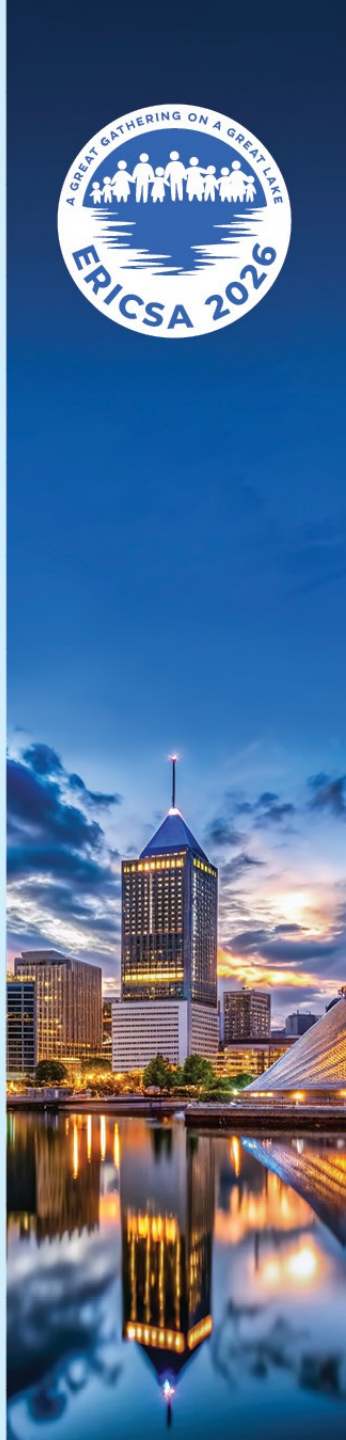
Ask Yourself

- What opportunities exist within your teams?
- What's in your control?
 - Where do you already have influence?
 - What influence can you create?
- What conversation could change things?
 - Where am I creating work instead of enabling action?
- What expectation can be clarified-or moved?
 - How would you go about introducing these new expectations to your teams?



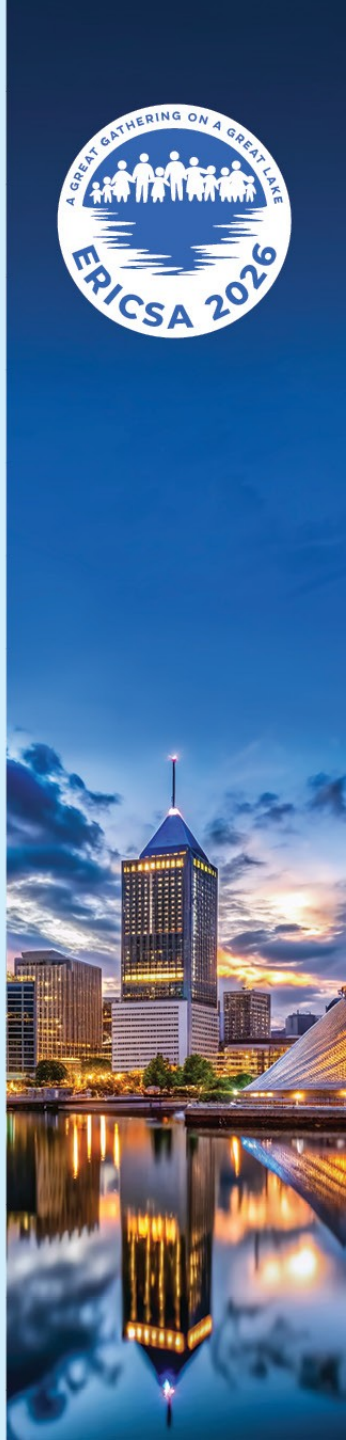
Key Takeaways

- Capacity is a leadership responsibility-not a team failure
- When everything is a priority, nothing moves forward
- You don't add your way out of overload-you subtract
- Small, focused actions create momentum



Closing Reflection

- What is one thing you will do differently this week?
- What will you stop, pause, or reduce to protect capacity?
- How will you protect your team's capacity-not just your own?
- How does our responsibility to community, culture, and future generations inform the choices we make to protect capacity today?



Q&A

Thank you for attending.

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