

From Supervisors to Leaders: Empowering the Frontline for Tomorrow's Challenges.



HWWA Conference
October 16, 2025

Presented by:
Michele Rodriguez-Flores

I'm Here For A Reason.

I support
employees and
the agencies they
work for to
become the best
versions of
themselves.



Michele Rodriguez-Flores
People Development Consultant



Learn. Grow. Lead.

Background

- ❖ Education Guru 25+ Years
- ❖ Certified Professional Training Manager
- ❖ Multi-Industry Experience

Expertise

- ❖ Curriculum & Content Creation
- ❖ Knowledge Management
- ❖ Leadership Development & Planning
- ❖ Workforce Development

Utilities

- ❖ CWEA SS-WDR Training Taskforce
- ❖ SARBS Board Member
- ❖ Speaker (CWEA AC, AWWA/WEF UMC, Tri-State, Local)

Projects

- ❖ Instructional Videos & e-Courses
- ❖ Certification Prep & Course Creation w/your SMEs
- ❖ Performance & Evaluation Process
- ❖ Leadership Academy & Courses
- ❖ Career Development Maps
- ❖ Needs Analysis in Training, Workforce Development & Engagement



Leadership at All Levels Matters.

General Stanley McChrystal

Joint Special Operations Command, US Army

Challenge:

Iraq War Insurgent Network Response

Barrier:

Top-Down Approach

The Industry Faces Challenges with Leadership Skills.

Operators Become Supervisors Sooner than Ever.

- Silver Tsunami
- Frequent Career Moves
- Talent Drain

Leadership Knowledge Gaps Exist.

- Experience levels
- Age related skillsets
- Soft skills

Programs to Teach Leadership Skills are Lacking.

- New supervisors do what they saw their bosses do
- Supervisors figure it out on their own

Consequences

- Poor communication
- Lack of collaboration
- Poor decision-making capability
- Low accountability
- Lowered team morale
- Disciplinary problems
- Productivity declines
- And more...

What Does it Take to Lead?

We Asked an Agency...



What Skills Do Frontline Leaders Need?

93.62%

Ability to
explain clearly

89.13%

Leading by
example

88.37%

Offer Training
&
Development

86.36%

Problem
Solving



Similarities

Both highly desire good communication skills & flexibility in managers. Both emphasized knowledge.



Differences

Field employees emphasize having supervisors who assist with challenges, have good problem-solving skills, and ensure access to resources.

Leadership Skills Needed on the Frontlines.

Legend:

Field

Management

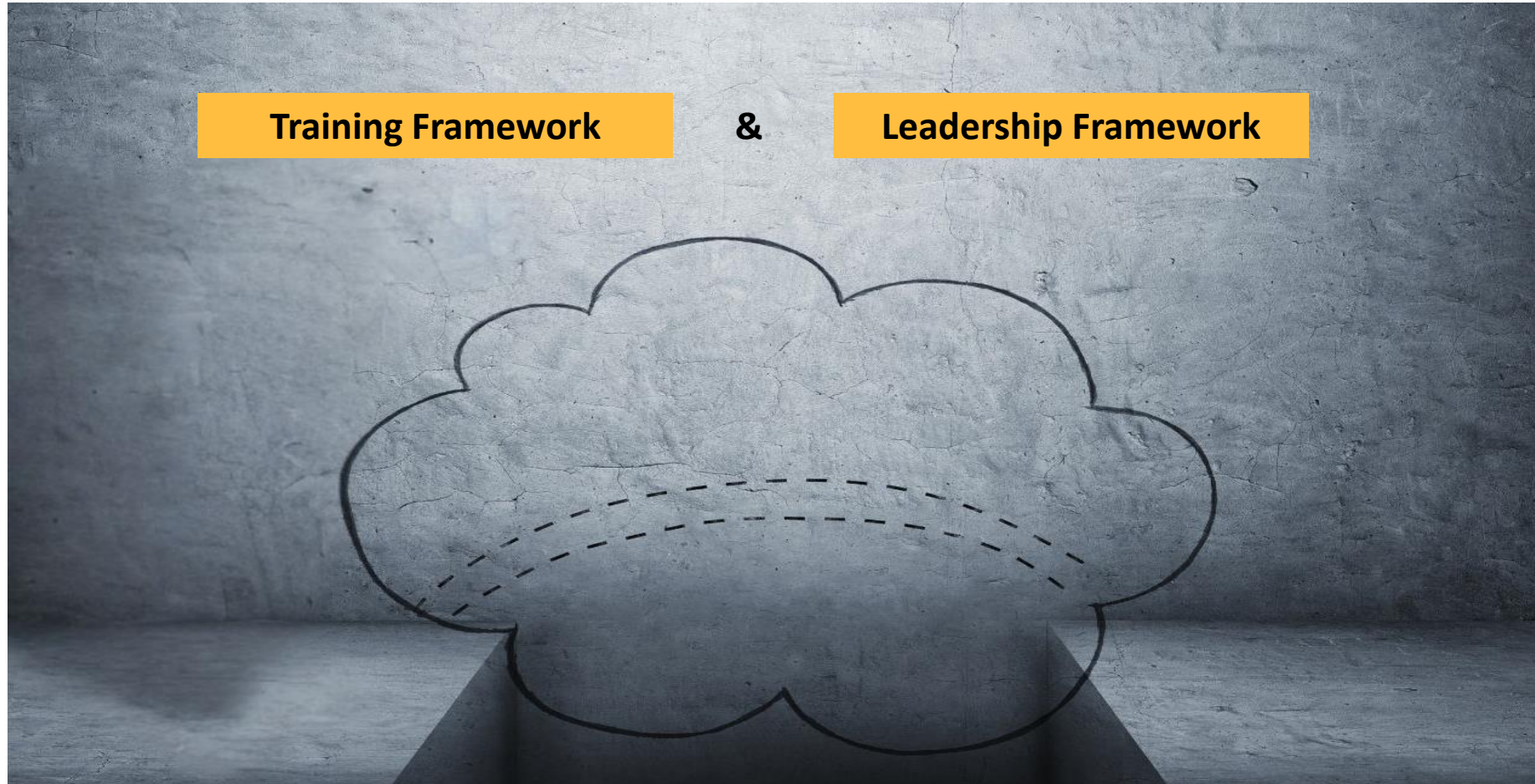
Both

Communication Skills	Traits	Support	Problem Solving	Continuous Learning
Explain or Answer Clearly	Flexibility	Assists with Problems	Decision Making Abilities	Industry Knowledge
Listening Skills	Integrity	Access to Equipment/Tools	Assist w/ Challenges	Offers Training
Coaching	Execution	Support		Operational Knowledge
Giving Feedback	Reliability			

A man in a dark suit and tie stands on the left, looking down with his hand on his forehead in a thoughtful pose. Behind him, on a textured grey concrete wall, is a large, hand-drawn thought bubble. Inside the bubble, the text "How Do You Address the Skill Gap?" is written in white. The bubble has a dashed line indicating it is three-dimensional. Two smaller thought bubbles are also drawn above the man's head. The floor is also made of concrete.

How Do You Address the Skill Gap?

Change Behavior with an Instructional Approach.



Use a Training Framework that Works.



Begin With The End In Mind.

1. Strategic & Specific



2.

**Build One
Skill at a Time,
Over Time..**



Training Must Be Applied.

**3.
Practice,
Practice,
Practice**



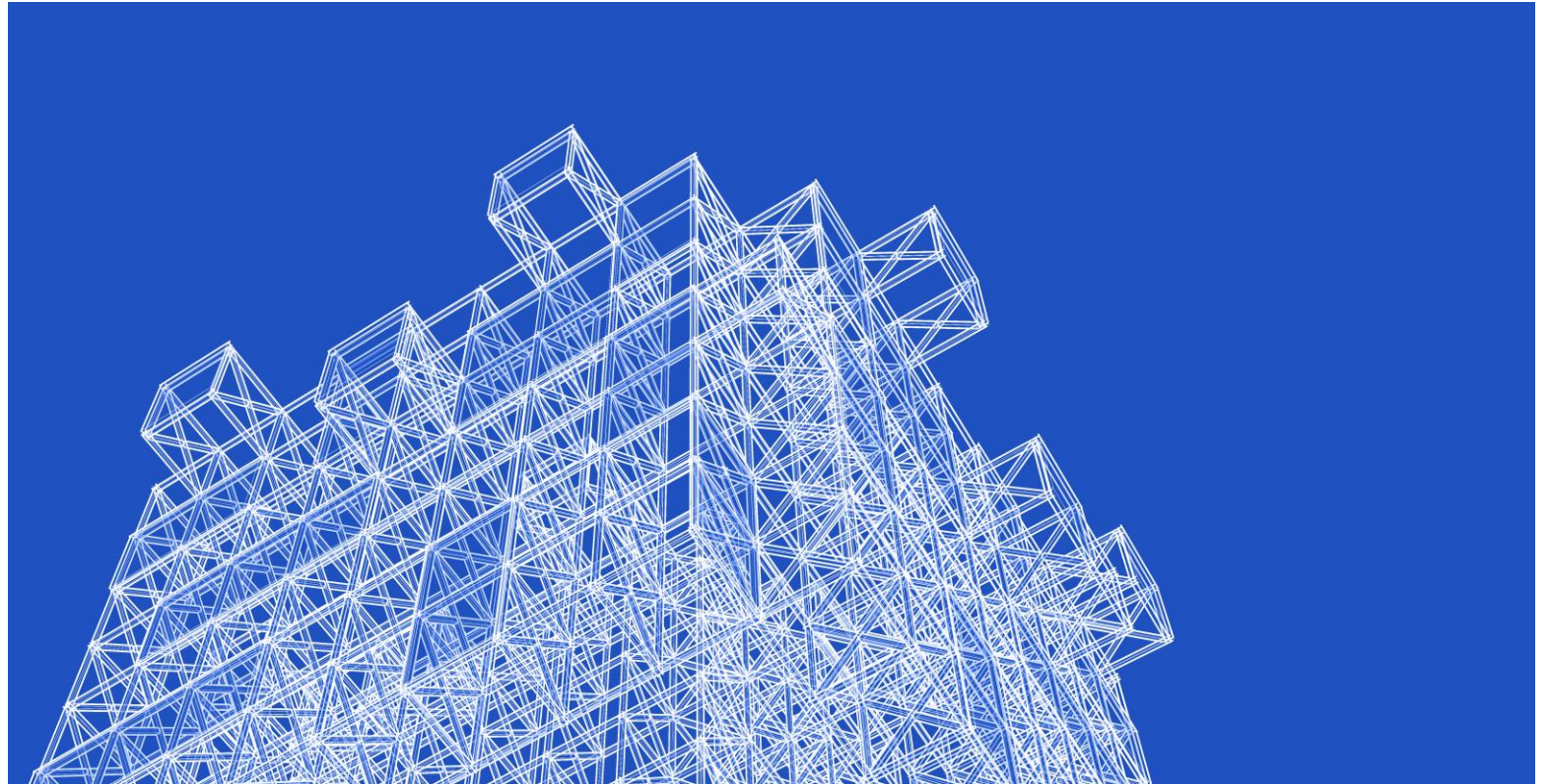
Reinforce Learning.

4. Recognition, Feedback & Support

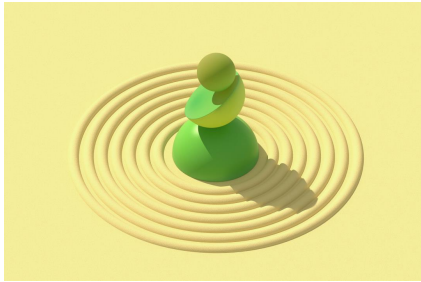


Use a **Leadership Framework** that Works.

- **Goal Aligned**
- **Organized & Structured**
- **Standardized Model**
- **Leveled Training**
- **Individualized**
- **Rooted in Core Values**



Find a Framework for Addressing the Skills to Lead.



Centeredness



Receptiveness



Expressiveness



Systems Thinking

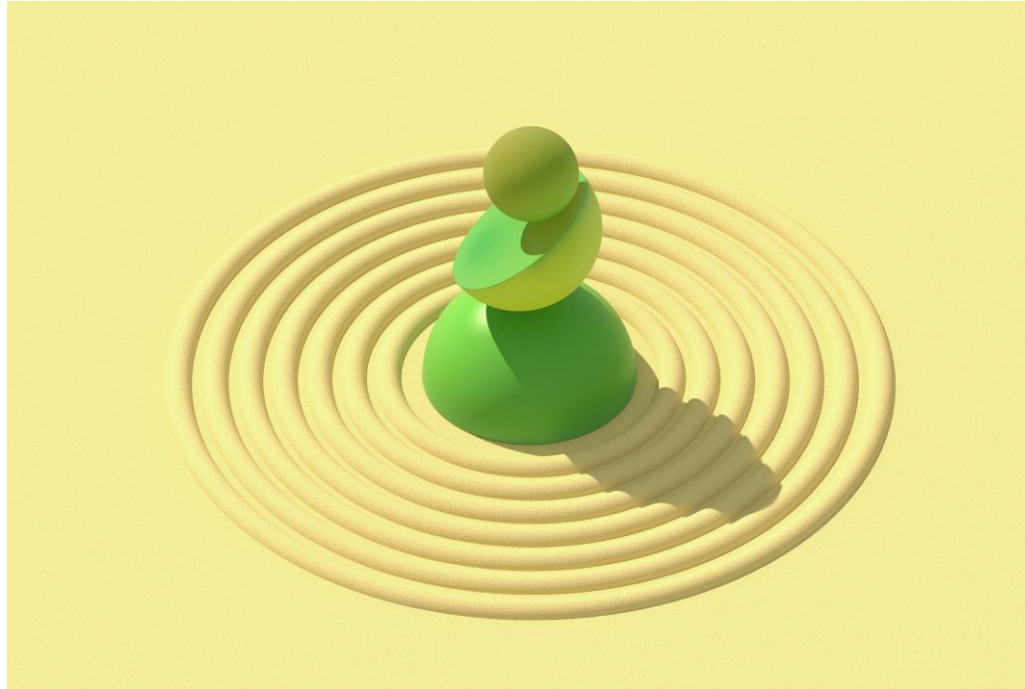


Transformative-ness



Accountability

How Do You Lead with Purpose?



Centeredness

What's Your Mindset?



Receptiveness

How Do You Communicate?



Expressiveness

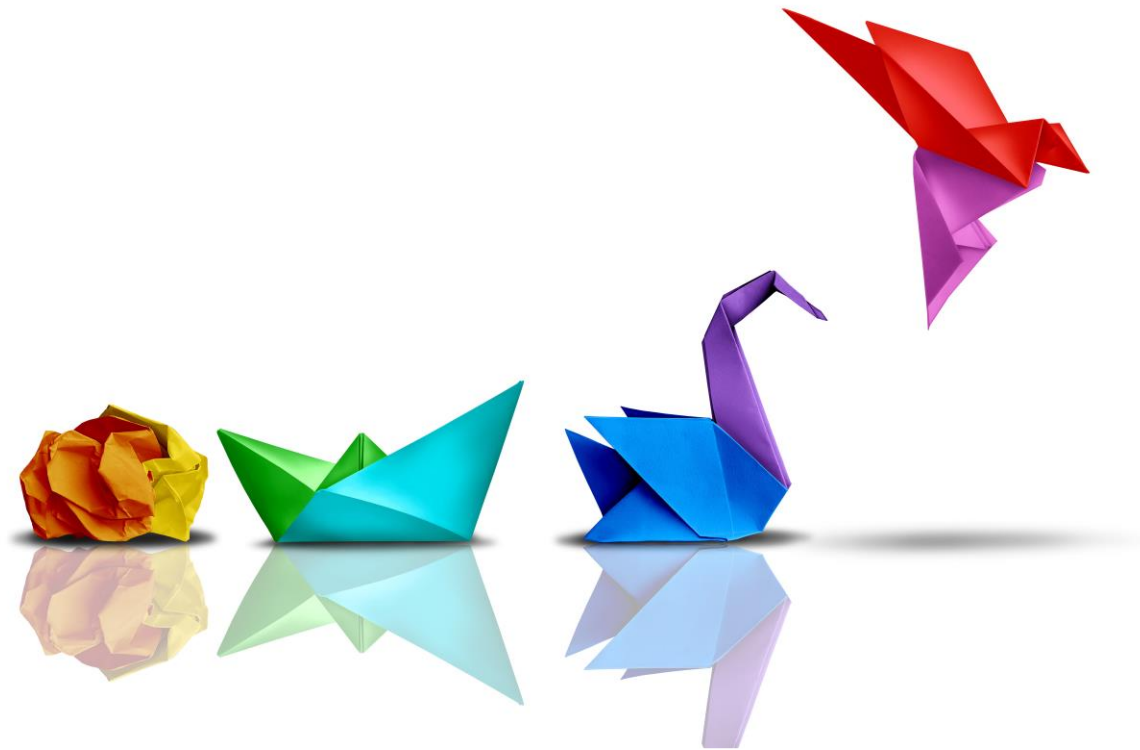
What Is the Big Picture?



Please stand up.

Systems Thinking

How Do We Inspire & Motivate Change?



Transformative-ness

How Do I Own the Results?



Accountability

Putting it Together

Use the right training and leadership frameworks.



Start with the Training Framework

- Needs Based (Aligned to Dept/Unit/Org)
- 1 Leadership Skill per Session
- Continuous (Multiple sessions)
- Practical & Applicable
- Include Practice Exercises
- Cohort Based
- Management Supported
- Celebration

Build with a Leadership Framework

- Goal Aligned (Assess Total Leadership Needs)
- Levelled Leadership Skills
- Organized & Structured
- Incorporate Individualized Approach
- Standardized Model of Leadership: (ie., CRESTA Model)
- Core Values

THANK YOU.

Michele Rodriguez-Flores
People Development Consultant
Ridgecresta

O: 657.366.9936

E: michele@ridgecresta.com

W: www.Ridgecresta.com

Training Framework + Leadership Framework = Success

From Senior Leadership

“They are applying what they do at work, and we can see a difference.”

“Teams that have never collaborated before are holding meetings to discuss issues that have plagued both for a long time.”

“They are bringing a more invigorated approach to their work each day.”

From the Supervisors

“My team is communicating with one another more effectively.”

“My team understands why we are doing things now.”

“I have scheduled one on ones with my team, so I can coach them to achieve their goals.”

From the Frontlines to their Supervisor...

“When the training is over, does it come with a warranty? We like this new you.”