



I attended the Southeastern Field Training Officers Association's (SEFTOA) fourth annual conference last week. It's consistently one of the best conferences I attend—and somehow, it just keeps getting better.

As I reflect on the experience, one thing comes to mind: *this is what leadership in action looks like.*

We often turn to books or the internet in search of real leadership examples. But sometimes, all it takes is observing how people interact at a conference or in a classroom.

Leadership is influence and action. It's not exclusively reserved for those with a title or formal

authority. Everyone has the power to lead by the way they engage, influence, and impact others.

Over the course of this two-and-a-half-day event, I listened to passionate speakers who brought their best to every presentation. But the most powerful leadership moments happened during the breaks and social events.

Attendees from across the country gathered in Chattanooga—not just to sit through sessions, but to connect. I overheard discussions about training successes and failures. I watched people trade contact information and genuinely engage with vendors. One attendee told me that a single point made during a session completely changed the way he approaches training.

You might be thinking, *Okay, you enjoyed the conference—what does that have to do with leadership?*

My short answer: everything.

The presenters weren't just giving talks—they were giving back. Sharing their knowledge. And that's what true leaders do. We each carry a wealth of experience and insights, yet too often, that knowledge goes unshared with the next generation of correctional and law enforcement professionals.

Leaders are curious. They want to know what's worked, what hasn't, and how to improve. That spirit of curiosity and reflection was everywhere at SEFTOA.

Leadership means learning—not just from your own mistakes, but from the experiences of others. It means keeping an open mind, listening with intention, and constantly challenging the mindset of, "because that's the way we've always done it."

Leadership in Action

As trainers and leaders, we must always be growing—so we can help others grow.

This only scratches the surface of what SEFTOA offers. If you're not familiar with the organization, I encourage you to check it out. What makes SEFTOA special is its focus on developing “*you*”—the individual trainer. Whether you're in law enforcement or corrections, you'll walk away with tools and insights you can immediately use.

Leadership is all around us. It's in the small, good deeds we do because we care. It's in helping others succeed without expecting something in return. It's truly listening when someone speaks.

That's what leadership looks like.

If you have questions about SEFTOA, don't hesitate to reach out. The 2026 conference will be in Gulf Shores, Alabama. I hope to see you there.

Wayne South-SEFTOA Board Member