



2026 Leadership Conference Program

Please note – this schedule is subject to change. All times listed are PT

All Leadership Conference activities take place at the Hilton Anaheim.

Saturday, June 13		Room
5:00 PM – 6:00 PM	Badge Pickup	4 th Floor Registration Desk
5:00 PM – 6:00 PM	Welcome Reception	California Promenade
Sunday, June 14		Room
7:30 AM – 8:30 AM	Breakfast	California C&D
8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	Welcome and Opening Remarks Melissa Mckenzie, CSP, STSC & Linda Tapp, CSP, ALCM, CPTD	California C&D
9:00 AM – 10:00 AM	<u>Keynote – Get It Right Today, Not Tomorrow</u> Mercedes Ramirez Johnson	California C&D
10:00 AM – 10:15 AM	Break	California Promenade
10:15 AM – 11:15 AM	<u>Indiana Jones and the Leadership Journey</u> Matthew Herron, M.S., M.B.A., PE, CSP, CPE	California A
	<u>Nailed It, Failed It, Fixed It: Four Leaders on their ASSP Journey</u> Pam Walaski, CSP, FASSP, Fay Feeney, CSP, ARM, FASSP, Rixio Medina, CSP, CPP, FASSP, Russell Duren, CSP	California B
	<u>Getting the Sand Out of Your Leadership Shorts: Staying Composed When Frustration Builds</u> Abby Holovach, M.S., CHMM, CSP, REM	Pacific A
	<u>In the Key of Safety: Developing Leadership Harmony through Emotional Intelligence</u> Gabe Encarnacion & Allison Short, M.S., CSP, CIT	Pacific B
	<u>Leading in All Directions: What Happens When Leadership Isn't Defined by the Org Chart</u> Joshua Russell, CSP & Lauren Carmona	El Capitan A&B
11:15 AM – 12:30 PM	Lunch Networking Roundtables Open 11:15-11:45	California C&D
12:30 PM – 1:30 PM	<u>The ASSP Upskill – Leveraging ASSP Volunteer Opportunities for Continued Professional Growth</u> Wyatt Bradbury, M.Eng., CSP, CHST, CIT & Maddie Demo, CSP	California A
	<u>Advocacy Through the GAC Lens: What Leaders Need to Know Now</u> Monique Parker, CSP & Dawn Glossa	California B
	<u>Difficult Times, Difficult Conversations</u> Chris Ross, CSP, CPTD	Pacific A
	<u>Behind the Scenes of a Mentor–Mentee Relationship: How Both Sides Win</u> Thomas Kramer, PE, CSP & Russell Duren, CSP	Pacific B
	<u>The Playbook: Strategies for Impact and Success for Volunteer Leaders</u> Randy Milliron, SMP, EMR	El Capitan A&B

Sunday, June 14	Title	Room
1:30 PM – 1:45 PM	Break	California Promenade
1:45 PM – 2:45 PM	<u>Leading Through Real Moments: Applying CLEAR Values in Action</u> Maribeth Anderson, M.P.A., CSP	California A
	<u>From Candidate to Leader: Navigating the ASSP Nomination and Election Process</u> Chet Brandon, M.S., CSP, CHMM & Dallas Tomlin, M.B.A.	California B
	<u>The Power of a Story: A Leader's Guide to Safety Storytelling</u> Sam Rivers	Pacific A
	<u>Beyond Boomer to Zoomer: The Real Story Behind Workplace Safety Conflict</u> Tim Page-Bottorff, CSP, CIT, FASSP & Ciro Page-Bottorff	Pacific B
	<u>Essentialism for Leaders: Do Less. Lead Better. Achieve More.</u> Carrie Kolodji, ARM, AIDA, AINS, AIS	El Capitan A&B
3:00 PM – 3:30 PM	Conference Closing Leadership Conference Planning Committee	California Promenade

Keynote Details

Mercedes Ramirez Johnson

In 1995, Mercedes Ramirez Johnson narrowly survived a commercial airplane crash that killed 160 people, including her parents. As one of only four survivors of this tragedy, she vowed that she would make her second chance at life count and that she has - not only for herself, but also for the tens of thousands of people who have heard her story and her message. Transformational, passionate, inspiring and genuine.

That is how clients and audiences describe Mercedes and her programs. Many speakers who have overcome great adversity are deeply inspiring, but rarely offer their audiences more than momentary motivation. Content-driven presenters provide practical advice, but are often short on inspiration. Mercedes offers both. Weaving workable solutions throughout an emotionally compelling story, she touches people's hearts and minds. Her proprietary Second Chance Living concept, an innovative mindset and approach with a proven track record, offers participants a blueprint for change along with specific tools they can use immediately in their professional and personal endeavors. In addition, her message that experience is no guarantee is having a tangible and powerful impact on safety initiatives and programs across the country. Mercedes presents to companies, associations, faith-based organizations, government agencies and higher education institutions across the U.S. and Canada. Her clients include some of America's most respected organizations, such as General Electric, Verizon, PricewaterhouseCoopers, NASA,

ExxonMobil, Chevron, and numerous higher education institutions and faith based organizations. Before becoming a speaker, Mercedes spent nearly a decade in high-level sales in the pharmaceutical and medical software industries. A record-breaking, multimillion-dollar producer, she became the youngest female and sole Latino account executive at Cerner Corporation. As a result, she understands the challenges and opportunities today's professionals face and has both the capability and the credibility to cross professional, generational, gender and ethnic gaps to connect with people from all backgrounds and levels. Mercedes and her story have been the subject of considerable national and international media coverage. Her extensive media experience includes appearances on ABC's PrimeTime, The BBC, National Geographic Channel, Discovery Health Channel and as a recurring guest on nationally syndicated daytime television talk shows. In addition, numerous national magazines and major-market newspapers have run cover stories and special-interest pieces about her. Mercedes has received national awards for her work, influence and dedication to improving the lives of others. She was recognized as one of the country's top young Hispanic up-and-comers by People Magazine's Spanish edition, People en Espanol. INROADS, Inc., an international organization dedicated to developing talented minority youth, voted her Alumni of the Year. In addition, she was honored as Volunteer of the Year for Christ Haven for Children, a home for neglected children in Texas. In memory of her parents, she established a scholarship for minority students at Northwest Missouri State University, where she actively served as an Executive Member of the university's Foundation Board. Mercedes and her children reside in the Dallas, Texas and are dedicated to philanthropic support for the National MPS Society -- an organization that provides research grants and support to families living with terminally ill children. She also hosts numerous fundraisers for Make-A-Wish North Texas and has proudly served on their regional leadership council for years.

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Session Details

Advocacy Through the GAC Lens: What Leaders Need to Know Now

12:30 PM – 1:30 PM | California B

This interactive, leadership-focused GAC-led session will equip ASSP community leaders with the clarity and tools needed to represent ASSP's advocacy priorities confidently and consistently. Through the lens of the Government Affairs Committee (GAC), presenters will share current federal and regulatory priorities, recent advocacy wins and trends, and will reinforce alignment by offering practical guidance for leading peers and volunteers while maintaining organizational consistency.

Participants will leave with a stronger understanding of where ASSP advocacy efforts stand, how to translate those priorities into clear communication within their communities, and how to engage responsibly and effectively in alignment with ASSP position statements and organizational guardrails.

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Behind the Scenes of a Mentor–Mentee Relationship: How Both Sides Win

12:30 PM – 1:30 PM | Pacific B

ASSP makes important investments in promoting and facilitating mentorship among its members. Short of signing up for a cohort and learning as they go, many safety professionals lack a clear understanding of how to start, what to expect, or how to make the relationship rewarding for both parties. This session provides an honest, behind-the-scenes look at a real mentor–mentee relationship between two ASSP leaders at different career stages.

Complementing ASSP's focus on facilitated mentorship programs, the speakers share their journey of building trust, evolving expectations and navigating difficult conversations. Topics include balancing technical guidance with personal and volunteer development, making the first ask and learning how to ask for help when challenges arise.

Attendees will gain practical insight into mentorship as a two-way partnership that benefits both mentor and mentee. The session highlights how authentic mentorship strengthens leadership skills, builds confidence and supports long-term engagement in the safety profession.

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Beyond Boomer to Zoomer: The Real Story Behind Workplace Safety Conflict

1:45 PM – 2:45 PM | Pacific B

Ready to move beyond generational stereotypes and address the real sources of workplace friction? This engaging keynote challenges conventional thinking about generational differences and their impact on human and organizational performance. The reality is that common assumptions about "disengaged millennials," "change-resistant boomers," and "demanding Gen Z employees" are misconceptions that limit team effectiveness. This presentation examines widespread generational myths that may be hindering organizational success and provides practical strategies for building genuine workplace connections across all age groups.

Participants will gain research-based insights into what truly drives workplace dynamics and learn actionable approaches to foster collaboration, reduce friction, and maximize team potential regardless of generational makeup. In the session, we'll roleplay HUMANN in a live scenario to get a practical understanding of these steps so you can apply it. Warning: This session may cause sudden outbreaks of workplace harmony and uncontrollable urges to actually talk to people from different generations!

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Difficult Times, Difficult Conversations

12:30 PM – 1:30 PM | Pacific A

Even in the best of times having difficult conversations and managing conflict can be difficult. Just consider confronting an employee who does not follow the rules, talking to a colleague who bad-mouths you, confronting poor performance or poor decisions. It can be even more challenging to address issues with volunteer members. Just a few ineffective strategies for handling these situations include: delaying the conversation, a rush to judgement, putting others on the defensive, and skirting the real issue. Having difficult conversations is a skill that can be learned and practiced. If handled correctly, the problem is resolved and it builds the relationship between parties, enhance creativity, build engagement, develop organizational learning loops and increase performance.

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Essentialism for Leaders: Do Less. Lead Better. Achieve More.

1:45 PM – 2:45 PM | El Capitan A&B

Presentation Description This interactive session leverages Essentialism to help leaders focus on what truly matters, eliminate distractions, and protect high-impact initiatives. The session opens with a 15-minute explanation of the three Es: Explore, Eliminate, Execute. Participants then engage in a 5-minute networking exercise to share tasks or initiatives they would like to eliminate. The core of the session is a 20-minute breakout—the Essentialist Trade-Off Summit—where small groups prioritize safety initiatives, allocate resources, and identify essential actions using a structured worksheet. A 15-minute discussion follows, where groups present their decisions, share insights, and explore challenges in making trade-offs. The session concludes with a 5-minute reflection and a challenge to immediately apply Essentialist principles. Leaders often juggle multiple priorities and limited time. This session equips them to focus on high-impact initiatives, make strategic trade-offs, and lead their teams more effectively, ensuring their actions drive meaningful results.

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From Candidate to Leader: Navigating the ASSP Nomination and Election Process

1:45 PM – 2:45 PM | California B

Serving in elected leadership is one of the most impactful ways to shape the future of ASSP and the safety profession, yet many members are unsure how the Nominations & Elections (N&E) process works or whether they are qualified to run. This session demystifies both. In the first segment, Dallas Tomlin provides a clear, practical overview of the N&E process—how it works and what to expect. In the second segment, Chet Brandon, CSP, CHMM, focuses on why members should consider stepping into elected leadership roles at the community, regional, and Society levels. By the end of the session, attendees will understand both the how and the why of pursuing elected leadership, recognize the importance of diverse voices, and feel empowered to consider running for office themselves.

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Getting the Sand Out of Your Leadership Shorts: Staying Composed When Frustration Builds

10:15 AM – 11:15 AM | Pacific A

Leadership isn't usually derailed by one major crisis - it's worn down by the small, constant irritations. The repeated conversations. The difficult personalities. The volunteer who won't follow through. The team member who challenges you publicly. The email that tests your patience. Like sand in your shorts, it's not catastrophic - it's uncomfortable, distracting, and eventually disruptive. This session explores how leaders can recognize their emotional triggers, regulate reactions under pressure, and maintain credibility when frustration builds. Through practical tools grounded in emotional intelligence and real-world leadership dynamics, participants will learn how to respond strategically instead of reacting impulsively, whether in the workplace or within volunteer organizations.

Because strong leadership isn't about never getting irritated. It's about not letting irritation lead!

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In the Key of Safety: Developing Leadership Harmony through Emotional Intelligence

10:15 AM – 11:15 AM | *Pacific B*

Effective leadership requires a high degree of emotional intelligence, specifically a deep understanding of self and of others. Decades of leadership and organizational research, along with widely used frameworks such as Emotional Intelligence 2.0, validate the role emotional intelligence plays in team performance. This interactive session uses the metaphor of a jazz ensemble to show how leaders can encourage individual strengths, adaptability, and creativity as they perform as part of the ensemble. Participants will explore how self-awareness, emotional regulation, and active listening influence workplace relationships and results. Through brief facilitated exercises and group discussion, attendees will practice evidence-based tools they can apply when they return to work to strengthen collaboration and engagement under pressure.

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Indiana Jones and the Leadership Journey

10:15 AM – 11:15 AM | *California A*

"Indiana Jones and the Leadership Journey" explores timeless leadership lessons inspired by the challenges faced in "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade." Using memorable moments from the film, this session draws parallels between Indy's quest for the Holy Grail and the modern leader's journey. Participants will explore four key leadership challenges: embracing humility to build trust, communicating with clarity and purpose, building bridges over the pitfalls so that others may safely cross, and making wise, value-driven decisions to lead by example. Through storytelling, discussion, and reflection, attendees will uncover how leadership is not just about achieving goals but also about serving others and leaving a lasting impact. Join us for an adventurous and meaningful exploration of what it takes to navigate the trials of leadership and empower those who follow. This session is ideal for leaders at all levels who want to lead with authenticity, courage, and purpose.

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Leading in All Directions: What Happens When Leadership Isn't Defined by the Org Chart

10:15 AM – 11:15 AM | *El Capitan A&B*

Leadership isn't a title - it's a set of behaviors and hinges entirely on the relationships we build. In this interactive session, we will demonstrate what happens when leadership flows in all directions: down, up, and across. Although the speakers occupy different positions within the organizational structure, leadership between them is mutual - at times one leads, at times the other, and often they lead together - demonstrating that trust, credibility, and connection matter more than hierarchy. Drawing from their lived experience, they reveal how mutual leadership builds engagement, strengthens collaboration, and drives better outcomes, including a safer, more effective workplace. Attendees will explore practical strategies to cultivate influence without authority, create psychological safety, and foster shared ownership across teams. Through candid examples, dual perspectives, and actionable takeaways, participants will leave ready to lead in any direction, build stronger relationships, and transform how leadership happens in their organizations.

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Leading Through Real Moments: Applying CLEAR Values in Action

1:45 PM – 2:45 PM | *California A*

As ASSP leaders, you set the tone for how our community communicates, problem-solves, supports one another, and upholds the integrity of the profession. This session brings those responsibilities to life through an interactive, scenario-driven experience focused on practicing real leadership moments rather than reviewing policies. You will explore real situations drawn from volunteer leader experiences through a mock case and role-play scenarios that place you on both sides of challenging interactions—moments of exclusion, conflict, misalignment, or misunderstanding. Throughout the session, you will practice applying CLEAR values and the Code of Professional Conduct to guide your responses. This approach turns values into action: instead of talking about professionalism, we model it; instead of reviewing expectations, we apply them. Grounded in authentic leadership moments, the session strengthens clarity, confidence, and shared

language for navigating complex situations, reinforcing the trust, inclusivity, and professionalism that define ASSP.

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Nailed It, Failed It, Fixed It: Four Leaders on their ASSP Journey

10:15 AM – 11:15 AM | California B

Back by popular demand from the 2025 Safety Leadership Conference, this engaging panel session features some of ASSP's most experienced leaders, including Past Presidents and Fellows with extensive global expertise. Building on the success of last year's discussion, panelists will share personal insights, career successes, and lessons learned to help attendees navigate their own professional journeys in occupational safety and health. The session will begin with a moderated panel discussion, followed by interactive small-group breakouts that allow for deeper, personalized conversations with each leader. Attendees will reconvene to share key takeaways before closing with final recommendations from the panel. Participants will leave with a clearer understanding of multiple paths to professional success and practical ways to engage as a volunteer leader within ASSP.

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The ASSP Upskill – Leveraging ASSP Volunteer Opportunities for Continued Professional Growth

12:30 PM – 1:30 PM | California A

Safety professionals at every career stage can get stuck. We are constantly learning and growing, but are not always presented with opportunities to expand or level-up at work. This session explores upskilling and re-skilling through ASSP Volunteer Leadership to build business acumen and drive the professional growth YOU desire, whether you are an emerging professional finding your footing, a mid-career leader seeking new challenges, or a senior professional pivoting into new responsibilities. Through facilitator stories, peer leader conversations, and the crafting of a personalized upskilling plan, participants will walk away with new ideas and refined focus on how ASSP Volunteer opportunities can lead to clear, direct professional growth at any career stage.

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The Playbook: Strategies for Impact and Success for Volunteer Leaders

12:30 PM – 1:30 PM | El Capitan A&B

This highly interactive session engages participants in collaborative discussions focused on building and leading effective volunteer teams. Attendees will break into small groups to explore key topics such as engaging and empowering volunteers, delegation and motivation, and developing future leaders. Through guided questions and shared experiences, participants will contribute practical ideas and strategies that will be captured and compiled into a post-session "Volunteer Playbook." Designed to be participatory and solution-focused, this session equips attendees with actionable approaches to strengthen volunteer engagement and leadership within their ASSP communities.

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The Power of a Story: A Leader's Guide to Safety Storytelling

1:45 PM – 2:45 PM | Pacific A

As safety leaders, we know that policies and procedures alone rarely inspire lasting commitment. To truly influence behavior, we must connect with people in meaningful ways. One of the most powerful tools for doing that is storytelling. This practical and engaging session equips leaders with techniques to transform routine safety messaging into compelling narratives that resonate and drive action. Participants will learn why stories are uniquely effective in shaping beliefs and behaviors, how to craft authentic safety stories, and where storytelling fits into everyday leadership moments—from safety meetings to town halls. Drawing on real-world examples and proven practices from her time as a safety storyteller in Nutrien, Sam will provide leaders with immediately usable tools to strengthen engagement, build trust, and create a culture where safety messages stick. Attendees will leave ready to communicate in ways that move both hearts and minds.

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