



**NEXTUp** Leaders  
2026 Program Details by Session

## Session 1: Effective Communication & Emotional Intelligence

Expert Lab Learning Session: Wednesday, February 11 | 3:45 to 6pm

Deep Dive Integration Session: Wednesday, February 18 | 8:00 to 11am

Speaker: *Brittania Wright, Organizational Development Consultant and Accelerating Leaders Program Administrator, St. Charles Health System*

### Session Overview

This session explores how emotional intelligence (EQ) and communication intersect to create trust, connection, and collaboration in teams. Participants will learn to recognize emotional cues—their own and others’—and apply techniques to communicate clearly, empathetically, and effectively in high-pressure environments. The session blends self-awareness with practical communication tools to enhance leadership impact in every interaction.

### Key Topics

- Four pillars of Emotional Intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management
- Active listening and empathy in conversation
- Nonverbal communication and tone awareness
- Handling difficult conversations with composure

### Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the four pillars of emotional intelligence and their connection to workplace communication.
2. Differentiate between reactive and responsive communication behaviors.
3. Apply emotional regulation and empathy strategies in challenging conversations.
4. Develop a personal action plan to strengthen EQ and communication in daily leadership practice.

### High-Level 90-Minute Outline

0–10 min: Welcome and framing the link between EQ and communication

10–25 min: Self-awareness and self-management mini-activity (emotion triggers reflection)

25–45 min: Social awareness and relationship management (listening, empathy, tone)

45–65 min: Social awareness exercise

65–80 min: Relationship Management & Effective communication

80–90 min: Application activity, action plan and closing reflection



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## Session 2: Strategic Thinking & Innovation

Expert Lab Learning Session: Wednesday, March 11 | 3:45 to 6pm

Deep Dive Integration Session: Wednesday, March 18 | 8:00 to 11am

Speaker: *Su Embree, Founder of Sauté, Co-Founder of The Script and former CEO/Owner of DHM Research*

### Session Overview

Strategic thinking is about seeing beyond the day-to-day—anticipating what's next, making sense of complexity, and aligning decisions to long-term goals. This session helps leaders strengthen their ability to connect vision with execution, prioritize what matters most, and think critically about where to focus time, talent, and resources.

### Key Topics

- Strategic vs. tactical thinking
- Vision, values, and goal alignment
- SWOT/SOAR analysis and identifying opportunities
- The Priority Star exercise
- Setting metrics and accountability systems
- Connecting strategic ideas to practical execution

### Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Define strategic thinking and distinguish it from tactical execution.
2. Analyze internal and external factors using SWOT or SOAR frameworks.
3. Prioritize initiatives aligned with organizational values and long-term goals.
4. Design measurable goals with accountability metrics.
5. Evaluate strategies using the Priority Star framework to guide decision-making.

### High-Level 90-Minute Outline

0–10 min: Welcome and framing—strategy vs. tactics

10–25 min: Why strategic thinking matters—group discussion

25–45 min: SWOT/SOAR or case-based group analysis

45–70 min: Priority Star or North Star exercise (hands-on)

70–85 min: Debrief—linking insights to real-world roles

85–90 min: Reflection and close



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## Session 3: Leading Change & Building Resilience

Expert Lab Learning Session: Wednesday, April 8 | 3:45 to 6pm

Deep Dive Integration Session: Wednesday, April 15 | 8:00 to 11am

Speaker: *Kristi Runberg, RN, BS, BSN, MSN | Leadership Development Consultant*

### Session Overview

Change is inevitable—but how leaders guide their teams through it determines whether they emerge stronger or struggle. This session helps leaders understand the emotional and practical sides of change, introducing frameworks like ADKAR and strategies for building team resilience. Participants explore how to communicate, coach, and lead others through uncertainty with confidence and empathy.

### Key Topics

- What change leadership is (vs. change management)
- ADKAR and the Change Leadership Framework
- Common human reactions to change
- Team formation and resilience stages
- Trauma-informed leadership approaches
- Leading through resistance and uncertainty

### Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the core components of the Change Leadership Framework.
2. Recognize common emotional and behavioral responses to change.
3. Apply strategies to strengthen team resilience through each phase of change.
4. Analyze challenges and barriers using the ADKAR model.
5. Develop communication approaches that build trust and adaptability during transitions.

### High-Level 90-Minute Outline (Leading Change)

0–10 min: Welcome and introduction—why change is hard but necessary

10–25 min: Concept of change leadership vs. management

25–45 min: ADKAR model overview and individual reflection

45–70 min: Group or pair activity—applying ADKAR to a real scenario in groups, then share out

70–85 min: Building resilience and leading through resistance discussion

85–90 min: Wrap-up—key takeaways and personal next steps



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## Session 4: Forming, Leading, and Being a Member of High-Performing Teams

Expert Lab Learning Session: Thursday, May 14 | 3:45 to 6pm

Deep Dive Integration Session: Wednesday, May 20 | 8:00 to 11am

Speaker: *Lisa X. Walden, Co-Founder, Good Company Consulting*

### Session Overview

High-performing teams don't happen by chance — they're intentionally built through trust, clarity, accountability, and shared purpose. In this interactive session, participants will explore what makes great teams thrive and how to contribute to them as both leaders and members. Through reflection, discussion, and practical tools, we'll examine the stages of team development, the mindsets and behaviors that foster collaboration, and strategies to sustain performance over time. Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of their own team strengths and one actionable commitment to enhance their impact in any team environment.

- Defining High-Performing Teams – What sets them apart, common traits and pitfalls
- Stages of Team Development – How teams evolve and how to lead through each phase
- Psychological Safety and Trust – The foundation for honest dialogue and innovation
- Leading High-Performing Teams – Coaching, feedback, and clarity of purpose
- Being an Effective Team Member – Self-awareness, communication, accountability
- Sustaining Team Health and Performance – Feedback loops, celebration, and resilience
- Personal Action and Reflection – Commitments to individual growth and contribution

### Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

1. Identify the key characteristics of high-performing teams.
2. Understand the stages of team development and how to navigate them.
3. Apply effective behaviors for leading and contributing to team success.
4. Commit to one personal action to enhance their team's performance.



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## Session 5: Leadership & Teambuilding in a Digital World

Expert Lab Learning Session: Wednesday, June 10 | 3:45 to 6pm

Deep Dive Integration Session: Wednesday, June 17 | 8:00 to 11am

Speaker: *Sean Minard, Global Learning and Development Strategy at Chewy | Founder of Bend Leadership Academy & RuckTalks*

### Session Overview

As technology reshapes how we work, the best leaders blend human connection with digital fluency. This session helps leaders adopt a “tech-ready” mindset—people-first, tool-supported—while developing communication habits and collaboration strategies suited for hybrid and AI-enabled workplaces. Participants explore real tools, discuss modern leadership challenges, and walk away with a plan to lead confidently in the digital age.

### Key Topics

- What it means to be a digital leader today
- The digital mindset: adaptability, curiosity, empowerment
- Adopt / Adapt / Avoid activity for tech tools
- Communicating clearly and empathetically in virtual settings
- Using AI (e.g., ChatGPT) as an assistant, not a replacement
- Building team trust and accountability remotely

### Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Explain the core traits of effective digital leaders.
2. Assess emerging technologies and decide whether to adopt, adapt, or avoid them.
3. Apply communication strategies that enhance clarity and empathy online.
4. Demonstrate curiosity and empowerment in leading hybrid teams.
5. Create a personal action plan to build digital confidence and lead transformation.

### High-Level 90-Minute Outline

0–10 min: Welcome and framing—why digital leadership matters now

10–25 min: Traits of a digital leader and “Then vs. Now” mindset shift

25–45 min: Adopt / Adapt / Avoid tool triage activity

45–65 min: Communicating clearly in digital settings—discussion and examples

65–80 min: Using AI as an assistant—short demo and reflection

80–90 min: Personal action planning and share-out