

# CITY OF MADISON

## December 10, 2025– Leadership Gathering Results

### 2025 Theme

Leading with Humanity: Building a Culture of Care



### Purpose

The gathering aims to foster a collaborative environment where leaders from across TeamCity can:

- **Share insights** and **learn** from each other.
- **Build relationships** in a way that **breaks departmental silos** and **strengthens the City's collective efforts**.
- Identify actionable strategies for **enhancing leadership practices** while **ensuring care and accountability**.

### Attendees

- 115 total attendees. This is a **47% increase in attendance** from the 2023 Leadership Gathering and an **8% increase in attendance** from the 2024 Leadership Gathering
- 29 out of 32 agencies were represented. This is **90% of all city agencies**.

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## Keynote – Leading with Humanity: Building a Culture of Care by Paul Wesselman, The Ripples Guy

76% response rate, (n=87)

- **98%** of respondents rated the keynote as valuable
- **98%** of respondents report that they can apply what they learned from the keynote

### Biggest Takeaways from the Keynote – per Attendees:

After completing a thematic analysis of the open-ended feedback from 79% of respondents (n=69/87) please find the results below.

### High-Level Synthesis:






Overall, the feedback reflects a **strongly internalized learning experience** centered on *growth through discomfort*, *relational leadership*, and *shared learning space*. Participants repeatedly reference the **comfort-challenge framework** and the **comfort-growth continuum** as both a personal reflective tool and a practical leadership framework. The data suggests the experience functioned less as content-heavy training and more as a **catalyst for mindset shifts, normalization of discomfort, strengthened self-awareness**, and reinforced the importance of **relational connection across the organization for growth**. Leaders are seeking opportunities to **translate these insights into practical applications** – particularly in supervisory transitions, team development, and performance conversations—while maintaining balance and psychological safety for themselves and their teams. There is also a clear signal that leaders value **protected time and space to reflect, connect, and recalibrate**, particularly during transitions or periods of stagnation.

## Leadership Gathering Evaluation

### Overall Gathering:

	<b>95%</b> of respondents rated the gathering <b>overall as excellent or good</b>
	<b>95%</b> of respondents rated <b>the food and drink as good or excellent.</b>
	<b>98%</b> of respondents rated <b>the venue as good or excellent.</b>

### Goals of the Gathering:

	<b>99%</b> of respondents rated the gathering <b>successful in promoting cross-departmental collaboration among participants.</b>		<b>99%</b> of respondents rated the gathering <b>successful in strengthening collective efforts.</b>
	<b>100%</b> of respondents rated the gathering <b>successful in promoting a sense of unity among leaders across different departments.</b>		<b>100%</b> of respondents rated the gathering <b>successful in promoting breaking down silos</b>
	<b>97%</b> of respondents rated the gathering <b>provided them with ideas to address their department's needs</b>		

## Thematic analysis:

### Top 3 Patterns Identified in Thematic Analysis:

1. **Mindset Shift: Discomfort Is Reframed from Threat → Signals**  
Participants consistently reposition discomfort as *informational* rather than *dangerous*.
2. **Growth Is Relational, Not Solitary**  
Even highly personal insights are framed through connection with others.
3. **Leaders Are Seeking Calibration, Not Acceleration**  
Themes of balance, pacing, scaffolding, and not pushing into panic suggest a desire for **sustainable leadership**, not heroic overextension.

### Theme 1: Personal Growth & Self-Awareness

**Definition:** Individual reflection related to presence, mindset, emotional regulation, and self-care as foundational to leadership effectiveness.

#### Key Subthemes:

Theme	Details
<b>Presence &amp; Mindfulness (“Here / Now”)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repeated verbatim references (“Here now” appears over 15 times)</li> </ul>
<b>Emotional Awareness &amp; Self-Regulation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizing boredom as normal</li> <li>Acknowledging panic vs. fear vs. growth</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Compassion &amp; Acceptance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Normalizing discomfort, stagnation, and/or regression</li> <li>“It’s okay to be in panic—just don’t stay there”</li> </ul>

### Theme 2: Comfort Zone Management (Discomfort as a Growth Mechanism)

**Definition:** Understanding and intentionally navigating the continuum from comfort → fear → panic → learning → growth.

#### Key Subthemes:

Theme	Details
<b>Normalization of Fear</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fear as necessary and productive (“embrace it rather than avoid it”)</li> </ul>
<b>Boundary Management (Fear vs. Panic)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong distinction between <i>productive discomfort</i> and <i>overwhelm/panic</i></li> </ul>
<b>Intentional Stretching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choosing discomfort rather than drifting into panic</li> </ul>
<b>Individual Variability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One person’s comfort = another’s panic</li> </ul>

### Theme 3: Leadership Development & Application

**Definition:** Translation of concepts into leadership behaviors, systems, and relational practices.

#### Key Subthemes:

Theme	Details
<b>Leading Through Transitions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New supervisors moving from peer → leader</li> <li>Loss of relational readiness and role clarity</li> </ul>
<b>Coaching &amp; Developmental Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scaffolding growth</li> <li>Supporting staff without overprotecting</li> </ul>
<b>Systems Integration</b>	Applying frameworks to:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance evaluations</li> <li>• Personnel conversations</li> <li>• Change management</li> </ul>
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### Theme 4: Relational Leadership & Human Connection (*Emergent, Strong*)

**Definition:** Leadership as a relational, social, and community-based process rather than an individual endeavor.

#### Key Subthemes:

Theme	Details
<b>Relationship-Building Across the Organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting new people</li> <li>• Learning from those outside one's immediate circle</li> </ul>
<b>Shared Experience &amp; Psychological Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Encouraged by the people here"</li> <li>• "It takes a village"</li> </ul>
<b>Dedicated Space for Connection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders value protected time together</li> </ul>

### Theme 5: Learning Process & Pedagogy (*Meta-Learning*)

**Definition:** Reflections on *how* learning occurred, not just *what* was learned.

#### Key Subthemes:

Theme	Details
<b>Visual &amp; Metaphorical Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zones diagram</li> <li>• Frogs</li> <li>• Ripples</li> </ul>
<b>Embodied &amp; Experiential Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movement between tables</li> <li>• Real-time reflection</li> </ul>

Looking for more details on the Leadership Gathering?

Reach out to [OrganizationalDevelopment@cityofmadison.com](mailto:OrganizationalDevelopment@cityofmadison.com) to get in touch with our Leadership Development Specialist.