

21ST ANNUAL

NATIONAL
BUSINESS
LEADERSHIP
CONFERENCE

**NAVIGATE: Your Leadership
Evolution Starts Here**

September 17-18, 2026

National Gaylord Resort & Conference Center, National Harbor, Washington, DC



CONFERENCE AGENDA

September 17 – 18, 2026

Wednesday, September 16, 2026

6:00-7:30 PM
*Pose Lounge at
The Gaylord Hotel*

Opening Reception

Thursday, September 17, 2026

7:45 – 8:45 AM
Riverview Ballroom

Breakfast

8:45 – 9:00 AM
Riverview 3

Conference Welcome & Opening Remarks

Dr. Sheila Robinson, Publisher & CEO, **Executive Woman Media**

9:00 – 9:20 AM
Riverview 3

Opening Keynote: 3 Skills You Need to Thrive During Change

Dr. Pooja Lakshmin, Psychiatrist, best-selling author, and contributor to *The New York Times*

9:25 – 9:45 AM
Riverview 3

Flash Talk Coming Soon!

9:50 – 10:45 AM
Riverview 3

Navigating Your Leadership Evolution: C-Suite Panel

No leadership journey follows a straight line. The path to the executive level is shaped by pivotal decisions, unexpected detours, moments of doubt, and hard-won breakthroughs — and for women, it is often navigated without a map. In this keynote panel, senior women executives offer an unfiltered look at the realities of leadership growth.

Melonie Johnson, President and Chief Operating Officer, **MGM National Harbor**

10:45 -11:00 AM

Networking Break

11:00AM - 12:00PM Breakout Sessions

Session I

Expanding your influence and impact

Riverview 1

Built to Last: Reigniting Passion, Purpose, and Meaning in Today's Changing Workplace

Today's leaders are navigating unprecedented complexity—and with it, a growing wave of burnout, disengagement, and workplace loneliness that silently erodes performance and potential. Research shows that more than 75% of professionals experience burnout, global engagement remains below 25%, and workplace isolation is now one of the strongest predictors of declining productivity and retention. For women leaders navigating constant change, these pressures are even more acute. This session uncovers the hidden dynamics behind “quiet cracking”—when high performers continue to deliver but feel their passion slipping—and offers evidence-based strategies to rebuild energy, clarity, and connection. Designed for ambitious women and their allies, this session equips attendees with practical tools to strengthen leadership influence, elevate team resilience, and reignite purpose in any work environment. Participants will leave inspired, recharged, and ready to lead with impact in a world that needs them more than ever.

Attendees will learn to:

- Decode the Hidden Drivers of Quiet Cracking
- Rebuild Connection, Energy, and Purpose with Evidence-Based Tools
- Lead with Clarity and Influence in Times of Change

Mika J. Cross, CEO/Founder and Workplace Transformation Strategist, **Strategy@Work, LLC**

Session II

Accelerating your career

Riverview 2

You're Not Overlooked. You're Under-Leveraged.

Many capable managers and senior leaders experience moments where advancement feels slower than their contribution warrants. Recognition gaps happen. Visibility is uneven. Access to decision-makers is not always proportional to performance.

At the same time, another pattern often limits upward mobility: under-leverage. Strong execution, reliability, and subject-matter expertise do not automatically translate into expanded influence. When your value remains confined to your current scope, function, or team, your impact stays contained, even if your performance is exceptional.

In this presentation, Nicole L. Turner explores how high-performing managers and leaders reposition their expertise for broader organizational impact. Participants will examine how to move from being known as dependable to being seen as essential to enterprise-level outcomes.

Acceleration is not only about being noticed. It is about being positioned.

Attendees will learn to:

- Distinguish between performance and strategic leverage
- Identify where their expertise may be contained rather than expanded
- Reposition their contributions to reflect broader organizational value
- Increase visibility with decision-makers without diminishing credibility
- Develop a deliberate plan to expand scope and accelerate advancement

Nicole L. Turner, Inside-Out Transformation™ Expert, Culture Strategist & Advisor, The Culture Pro®

Session III

High performing teams

Riverview 4

When Change Hits: How Leaders Communicate to Build Trust (Not Tension)

Change doesn't fail because leaders lack strategy—it often fails because people feel confused, threatened, or unheard. This interactive session equips leaders with psychologically grounded communication tools to navigate change with clarity, empathy, and credibility, drawing on principles of psychological safety, emotional intelligence, cognitive load, and threat–reward responses. Participants explore how change activates stress responses in the brain, how uncertainty shapes behavior and performance, and how leaders can regulate their own emotions to help stabilize and align their teams.

Through practical frameworks, reflection, and real-world scenarios, leaders practice communicating during moments of tension and disruption in ways that build trust, reduce defensiveness, and strengthen engagement and cultural resilience.

Learning Outcomes:

- Explain the psychological impact of change on behavior and performance
Participants will understand how uncertainty triggers stress and threat responses, and how this influences resistance, disengagement, and emotional reactions during change.
- Apply trust-building communication strategies during high-stakes or uncertain moments
Leaders will practice using psychologically safe language and structured communication tools to deliver clear, empathetic messages that reduce tension and build credibility.
- Translate organizational change into meaningful, human-centered messages for their teams
- Participants will leave with practical language and tools to align executive-level messaging with team-level realities—bridging strategy and lived experience in a way that strengthens trust and engagement.

Dr. Sheri-ann McLean-Williams, Founder & CEO, McLean Coaching and Consulting

Session IV Sustaining your leadership

Riverview 5

Leading without Losing Yourself: Expanding Your Capacity to Navigate Complexity

Leadership evolution requires more than strategy—it demands sustainable capacity. Many mid- and senior-level leaders are navigating increasing complexity while quietly absorbing stress that erodes clarity, influence, and decision-making power. Drawing on doctoral research in leadership studies and two decades advising executives across industries, Michelle Courtney Berry reframes burnout, silence, and disengagement not as personal weaknesses but as signals of constrained leadership capacity within complex systems. In this interactive breakout session, participants will explore how psychological safety, emotional regulation, and accountability expand a leader's influence while protecting long-term sustainability. Leaders will leave with a practical framework for recognizing early warning signals in themselves and their teams—and actionable strategies to strengthen resilience, sharpen decision-making, and lead high-performing teams without sacrificing their well-being.

Participants will:

- Identify early behavioral signals that indicate constrained leadership capacity
- Apply a practical framework to strengthen influence without overextension
- Recognize how psychological safety impacts team performance and engagement
- Develop strategies to regulate stress and improve decision-making under pressure
- Create a personal sustainability action plan aligned with long-term career goals

Michelle Courtney Berry, Founder/CEO and Doctoral Scholar, LSUS, **Courtney Consulting Enterprises, LLC**

12:00-2:00 PM

Riverview 3

MOSAIC WOMAN LUNCHEON & AWARDS CELEBRATION

TRAILBLAZER



Cherie DeVaux
Thoroughbred horse
trainer & first female to
win the Kentucky Derby

LEADERSHIP



Claudia Romo Edelman
Global Brand Builder,
Entrepreneur, and Cultural
Strategist

LEGACY



Frédérique Irwin
President & CEO,
National Women's
History Museum

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT



Rolonda Watts
Emmy Award-Winning
Announcer & Promo Voice for
the *Sherri Talk Show*, Actor,
Stand Up Comedian, Talk
Show Host, Podcaster, Speaker,
Coach, Producer, and Author of
Destiny Lingers

PIONEER



Dr. YY Zhou
CEO,
Whova

2:00- 2:15 PM

Transition to Breakout Sessions

2:15 - 3:15 PM Breakout Sessions

Session I

Expanding your influence and impact

Riverview 1

The AI Advantage: Practical AI Strategies for the Modern Professional

This session demystifies how current AI tools can be integrated into daily life to improve productivity. Whether you are new to AI or already using it, you will learn AI best practices for simplifying your workday through engaging demos and real-world use cases of Googlers using AI. It is designed for both beginner and intermediate users

Session II

Accelerating your career

Riverview 2

Aim High and Bounce Back: How Women Can Rethink and Rise from Failure

Failure isn't the opposite of success; it's part of the path to it. Yet for many women, setbacks trigger shame, self-doubt, and the silent decision to play it safe next time.

In this energizing and research-backed workshop based on Deb's book "Aim High and Bounce Back: A Successful Woman's Guide to Rethinking and Rising Up from Failure" participants will discover how to reframe their relationship with failure, build the resilience to recover faster, and develop the confidence to keep aiming high, even after a stumble.

This program combines practical frameworks, real-world stories, and interactive reflection.

This workshop will help participants:

- Recognize the hidden costs of avoiding failure
- Reframe setbacks as data, not defeat
- Identify the 5 kinds of failure
- Build a personalized bounce-back strategy

Deborah Grayson Riegel, CEO, **Deborah Grayson Riegel Coaching and Consulting**

Session III

High performing teams

Riverview 4

Fact or Story

Every leader carries a "personal reality box" — unconscious stories built from past experience that shape how they interpret every meeting, every piece of feedback, every difficult conversation. The problem isn't that we tell stories. It's that we confuse them with facts.

Drawing on neuroscience, mindfulness, and 15+ years of leadership experience at Google and L'Oréal, Barbara Boselli reveals how self-made narratives and the labels we place on ourselves quietly sabotage effectiveness and limit growth.

Attendees will learn to distinguish facts from the stories they trigger, recognize how self-labels create invisible glass ceilings, and apply a practical three-step framework called ASK: Access Awareness, Sort Fact from Story, Kindle Curiosity. This gives leaders a way to interrupt unhelpful patterns in real time. Leave with actionable tools to lead from clarity instead of assumption, build authentic connections, and unlock the adaptability sustainable leadership requires.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the unconscious narratives and self-labels that undermine leadership effectiveness and team dynamics
- Distinguish facts from the stories we assign to them in high-stakes situations like feedback, conflict, and performance conversations
- Recognize how unexamined assumptions create invisible barriers to trust and psychological safety on teams
- Apply the ASK framework (Access Awareness, Sort Fact from Story, Kindle Curiosity) to interrupt unhelpful patterns in real time
- Lead from clarity rather than assumption to build more authentic, resilient, and high-performing teams

Barbara Boselli, Founder, **bnov Consulting**

Session IV Sustaining your leadership <i>Riverview 5</i>	From Invisible to Undeniable™: 5 Strategic Visibility Moves That Turn Great Work Into Recognition and Compensation You deliver exceptional results. Your work is solid. So why does great work alone keep you stuck? This session reveals the exact framework Andrea has used to help hundreds of high-performers move from invisible to undeniable. You'll walk through the 5 strategic visibility moves that get you noticed by leadership - without resorting to self-promotion or political maneuvering. You'll leave with a clear framework, a Monday morning action plan, and the confidence to position your value authentically. This is how you move from invisible to undeniable - one strategic move at a time. By the end of this session, attendees will be able to: • Understand why great work alone keeps high-performers stuck and what changes the equation • Master the 5 strategic visibility moves that get you noticed by leadership • Position your value authentically without self-promotion or political maneuvering • Leave with a concrete Monday morning action to start building undeniable visibility Andrea Grant, Founder & Fractional COO, Grant Consulting Group
3:15 - 3:35 PM	Transition to Ballroom
3:30 - 4:45 PM <i>Riverview Ballroom</i>	Charting Together - Peer Mentoring Session This facilitated peer mentoring session invites participants to draw on the collective experience in the room. Through structured table conversations, attendees will exchange professional insights, explore current challenges, and leave with a concrete commitment to apply in their leadership practice. Learning objectives: • Reflect on a defining leadership experience and articulate the lessons it produced • Foster human connection and engage in reciprocal peer coaching around a current professional challenge • Identify one meaningful action to take within the next 90 days and establish peer accountability Erica Colonero, Partner & Co-Founder, VisionSpring, Inc. Robin Pedrelli, Partner & Co-Founder, VisionSpring, Inc.
4:45 - 5:00 PM <i>Riverview Ballroom</i>	Closing Remarks: Dr. Sheila Robinson , Publisher & CEO, Executive Woman Media

Friday, September 18, 2026

7:30 - 8:30 AM <i>Riverview Ballroom</i>	Breakfast
8:30 - 8:40 AM <i>Riverview Ballroom</i>	Welcome! Dr. Sheila Robinson , Publisher & CEO, Executive Woman Media
8:40 - 9:10 AM <i>Riverview Ballroom</i>	Opening Keynote
9:15 - 10:05 AM <i>Riverview Ballroom</i>	PANEL: Navigating Your Health - Merck

10:10 - 11:00 AM <i>Riverview Ballroom</i>	PANEL: Navigating Advocacy & Support: A Conversation with Allies and Executive Sponsors Progress toward gender equity in leadership does not happen by accident. It happens when those with organizational power choose to act by opening doors, amplifying voices, advocating in rooms where others are not present, and making sponsorship a consistent leadership practice rather than an occasional gesture. In this keynote panel, senior executives reflect on the moments that defined their approach to allyship: the women they championed, the systemic barriers they encountered, and the ways they chose to use their influence to drive change. Their perspectives offer a rare look inside the decisions and commitments that shape an organization's culture and a direct invitation to the leaders in this room to expect, model, and demand the same. Learning objectives • Distinguish between allyship and sponsorship and understand the distinct role each plays in advancing women's leadership • Identify concrete behaviors and commitments that senior leaders can adopt to create more equitable pathways for women in their organizations • Gain insight into the systemic barriers that persist at the executive level and how organizational culture can be shaped to address them Steven Johnson, Senior Director, Culture, Diversity & Community Engagement, Lowe's Companies Shareen Luze, Head, Business Administration, RBC Wealth Management–U.S., RBC Wealth Management
11:00-11:15 AM	Transition to Breakout Sessions
11:15 AM - 12:15 PM Breakout Sessions	
Session I Expanding your influence and impact <i>Riverview 1</i>	The Courage To Ask and the Mindset To Believe You Deserve it The evolution of a leader does not begin with a title, it begins the moment a leader stops waiting for permission and starts communicating with intention. Many capable leaders hesitate at critical moments: asking for resources, setting boundaries, challenging decisions, or advocating for their team. The barrier is rarely skill; it's the internal negotiation happening before the conversation begins. This session introduces the Negotiator's Mindset™, a leadership discipline that aligns belief, language, and presence. Participants will examine how assumptions shape executive presence, influence credibility, and determine whether leaders reinforce or unintentionally limit their authority. Attendees will learn to communicate expectations clearly, advocate without over-explaining, separate disagreement from relationship risk, and operate from value rather than proving value. Leadership evolution starts when the conversation inside the leader changes and the conversations around them will also change. Attendees will: • Understand why performance is necessary, but only one part of leadership advancement • Gain practical language to advocate for clarity, visibility, and support • Implementation of how leaders can best advocate for visibility, engage sponsorship, and stop leaving opportunity to chance • Practice one leadership-level "ask" tied to exposure, scope, or opportunity Ranieka Weston, Founder, Your Next Thought

Session II Accelerating your career <i>Riverview 2</i>	The AI Advantage Gap: How Mid-Career Women Can Close the Productivity Divide and Accelerate Advancement Women are adopting AI at the same rate as men, but they're getting half the results. Here's the gap nobody's talking about: while 73% of women using AI report productivity gains, only 41% feel it substantially boosts their work compared to 61% of men. The reason? Women receive far less support, encouragement, and training to use AI strategically. This is a career velocity problem. Mid-career is when momentum matters most. It's when 93% of women say their career is important, yet only 82% want promotion because they don't see a clear path forward. When you're stuck in execution mode, doing excellent work that keeps you indispensable in your current role but invisible for the next level, AI becomes either your biggest threat or your greatest leverage point. In this session, you'll learn how to close the AI advantage gap and use it as the career accelerator it should be. You'll discover: • The support gap costing you career momentum: Why only 21% of women get manager encouragement to use AI (vs. 33% of men), and what to do when you're not getting that support • From task automation to strategic advantage: The five high-impact ways to use AI that reclaim time for visibility, influence, and the work that gets you promoted • The productivity multiplier framework: How to move from 41% productivity gains to 60%+ by using AI as a thought partner for stakeholder communications, presentations, and narrative prep • Demonstrating edge and initiative: How integrating AI naturally into your workflow signals leadership readiness, even in organizations slow to adopt • Your 30-day AI acceleration plan: Specific tools, prompts, and use cases you can implement immediately to shift from execution mode to executive presence This session is for mid-career women who are done waiting for permission and ready to take ownership of their trajectory. You'll leave with a tactical playbook to leverage AI not just for efficiency, but for the strategic work, visibility, and influence that accelerate advancement. Monica Marquez, Co-Founder, Flipwork, Inc.
Session III High performing teams <i>Riverview 4</i>	Coming soon!
Session IV Sustaining your leadership <i>Riverview 5</i>	Upskilling in the Era of AI
12:15 - 2:00PM <i>Riverview Ballroom</i>	Star Awards Luncheon
2:15 - 2:15 PM <i>Riverview Ballroom</i>	Closing Remarks Dr. Sheila Robinson , Publisher & CEO, Executive Woman Media

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Mika J. Cross
CEO/Founder and
Workplace Transformation
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Melonie Johnson
President and Chief
Operating Officer, MGM
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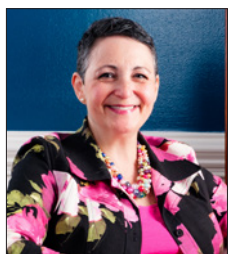
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The Culture Pro®,
Culture Strategist &
Advisor | Inside-Out
Transformation™ Expert



Ranieka Weston
Your Next Thought,
Founder



Dr. Sheila Robinson
Publisher & CEO,
Executive Woman Media



Erica Colonero
VisionSpring, Inc., Partner
& Co-Founder



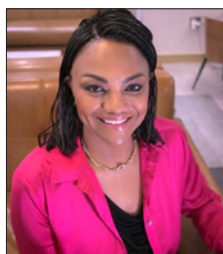
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VisionSpring, Inc., Partner
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bnow Consulting,
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McLean Coaching and
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