



Briefing Note – CEO Professional Development

Conference Details

Conference Topic/Title	Berkeley Changemaker Program
Event Organiser	BerkeleyExecEd
Dates	6-8 May 2026
Location	Haas School of Business, San Francisco, United States of America

Conference Overview

At its core, the program reframes leadership as changemaking — not positional authority but the ability to lead impact “with and through others.”

Change begins with an individual mindset, but its success depends on collective effort—working with and through others to create impact. Effective leadership is less about controlling outcomes and more about creating the conditions that enable teams to succeed, adapt, and solve problems together. High-impact leaders embody this by consistently challenging assumptions, building collaboration across diverse perspectives, and taking action even in the face of uncertainty.

A ‘changemaker’ is someone who leads positive change from where they are.

Benefit to the City

Attendance at the Berkeley Changemaker Program has strengthened my leadership capability by reinforcing that effective leadership is inherently relational, with impact achieved through working with and through others rather than relying on individual authority.

It has challenged the traditional approach to feedback by positioning it as a critical leadership skill that builds trust, inclusion, and performance across teams. The program has also highlighted the importance of employee wellbeing, demonstrating that happiness is not just an outcome but a strategic driver of engagement, decision-making, and organisational performance. Importantly, it has deepened my understanding of courageous leadership, equipping leaders to challenge the status quo, embracing uncertainty, and driving meaningful change. It has further reinforced that collaboration, while often complex and at times uncomfortable, is essential for innovation and better decision-making.

Key Learnings from the Berkeley Changemaker Program

1. Giving Feedback (Leading Inclusively & Courageously)

Feedback builds trust, not just performance
Effective feedback is relational and inclusive, rather than transactional.

What effective feedback requires:

- Treat others with respect and recognise intent does not equal impact
- Take responsibility for unintended consequences
- Use of “I” statements and avoid generalisations and assumptions

- Making space for all voices - Inclusive leadership amplifies participation
- Ask open questions (what, how, why) to understand perspective Loaded or leading questions
- Focus on learning, not being “right”
- Be open to being wrong and avoid performative “goodness”

Feedback is most effective when it strengthens relationships, trust, and shared understanding, not just delivers critique. The City has a very robust performance plan process for our people, and feedback is critical to ensuring our employees grow to be the best they can.

2. The Science of Happiness (Leadership Effectiveness & Performance)

Happiness drives leadership effectiveness and change capability. It is a strategic leadership capability, not a personal luxury.

Why happiness matters for leaders:

- Happier people are more likely to take action and drive change
- Less distracted by anxiety or fear

The impact higher wellbeing has on organisations:

- Better collaboration and teamwork
- Increased creativity and innovation
- Stronger performance and engagement

What drives happiness at work:

- Meaningful work and purpose
- Social connection and belonging
- Growth, progress and achievement
- Psychological safety and autonomy-

Happiness is not just an outcome — it is a driver of leadership effectiveness, decision-making, and sustained impact. Our people’s experience at the City is one of my three focus areas for 2026, and creating a positive work environment is a focus for me.

3. Courage in Leadership (Leading Change)

Courage is choosing growth over comfort and is essential to changemaking — particularly when navigating ambiguity and resistance.

What courageous leadership looks like:

- Questioning the status quo
- Choosing growth over fear
- Embracing experimentation and failure
- Speaking up and sharing perspective even when it feels uncomfortable

Leading change through others:

- Change fails when leaders assume they need to have all the answers
- Change succeeds when leaders create conditions for collaboration and problem-solving

Managing conflict (as an act of courage):

- Use integrative (win–win) negotiation approaches
 - Prioritise long-term relationships and joint value creation
- Understand:
 - Different perceptions of fairness (equity, equality, need)

Courage in leadership is less about bold individual action, and more about creating environments where others feel safe to contribute, challenge, and innovate.

4. High-Impact Teams (Bringing It All Together)

Across all themes, a consistent message emerges:

High-performing teams require:

- Reciprocal interdependence - sharing knowledge and solving problems collectively
- Psychological safety to disagree - diverse perspectives only add value when people feel safe to voice them

The reality of collaboration:

- Collaboration creates friction, ambiguity, and time costs
- However, these are not problems to eliminate, but signals of innovation and complexity

Effective leadership is about balancing discomfort and progress — enabling productive tension rather than avoiding it.

Conclusion

Attendance at the Berkeley Changemaker Program has reinforced that impactful leadership within the City of Stirling is fundamentally relational; driven by the ability to influence and achieve outcomes through others, rather than through control alone.

It has strengthened my capability in using feedback as a deliberate leadership tool to build trust, inclusion, and performance, while highlighting that employee wellbeing is a genuine strategic advantage that underpins resilience, engagement, and organisational success.

The program also emphasised that courage is essential to real change, equipping leaders to challenge established norms and act with confidence in uncertain environments. Importantly, it reframed collaboration as inherently complex yet critical; recognising that friction and differing perspectives are not barriers, but the foundation of more innovative and well-informed decision-making.

The opportunity to engage with a diverse cohort and gain insight into how these themes are being applied across other organisations was particularly valuable, reinforcing that diverse thinking consistently enhances outcomes and providing practical, real-world perspectives that can now be applied to strengthen leadership and performance across the City.

I am grateful for the opportunity to attend a world class program like Berkeley Changemaker, and am looking forward to sharing my learnings with the Executive and broader Leadership Team.

The opportunity to undertake the program with the Mayor was also very beneficial, as we were able to learn together and reflect on how both of our roles can better serve our organisation and our community.

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