



Big Ideas, Real Impact

TNCO's 2025 Conference program brings together voices and ideas to help you lead with heart while embracing the tools of tomorrow.

Across two days, you'll hear Cait Donovan share powerful strategies for overcoming burnout, Andrew Bartolotta explore how AI can drive smarter service, and Naomi Asher offer practical insights on leadership and communication. Along the way, panels and speakers will dive into mental health, person-centered practices, employment services, and the value of connecting across generations.

We designed this conference to be useful, energizing, and fun —So get ready to walk away with ideas that can make a real difference back home.



2025 Conference

October 28 & 29

Sheraton Music City Nashville Airport

October 28, Day 1

TIME	GENERAL SESSIONS/LUNCH ROOM HOLDS 200 ROUNDS OF 10	TRACK 1 ROOM HOLDS 75 THEATER	TRACK 2 ROOM HOLDS 75 THEATER
	GENERAL TOPICS	ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE	LEADERSHIP
8:00 AM - 5:00 PM	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors
9:00 AM - 10:30 AM	KEYNOTE: DISMANTLING BURNOUT: GUIDING LEADERS AND TEAMS TO OVERCOME BURNOUT TOGETHER CAIT DONOVAN		
10:30 AM - 10:45 AM	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors
10:45 AM - 12:00 PM	DISMANTLING BURNOUT FURTHER: ADDRESSING SPECIFIC CHALLENGES HEAD ON CAIT DONOVAN	PRACTICAL GUIDANCE & BEST PRACTICES FOR APPLYING AI IN I/DD SUPPORTS DDA'S JORDAN ALLEN AND MILTON NEUENSCHWANDER	RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING NAOMI ASHER
12:00 PM - 1:30 PM	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
1:30 PM - 2:45 PM	FUELING SUCCESS WITH FIRE CAIT DONOVAN	AI INSIGHTS FOR SOCIAL IMPACT: ENHANCING NONPROFIT OPERATIONS ANDREW BARTOLOTTA	GOAL SETTING FOR SUCCESS NAOMI ASHER
2:45 PM - 3:00 PM	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors
3:00 PM - 4:15 PM	BOUNDARIES MAKE YOU MORE GENEROUS CAIT DONOVAN	THE AI TOOLKIT FOR TOMORROW'S MISSION-DRIVEN LEADER ANDREW BARTOLOTTA	EFFECTIVE NETWORKING NAOMI ASHER
4:15 PM - 5:00 PM	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors
4:30 PM - 6:00 PM	RECEPTION		

October 29, Day 2

TIME	GENERAL SESSIONS/LUNCH ROOM HOLDS 200 ROUNDS OF 10	TRACK 1 ROOM HOLDS 75 THEATER	TRACK 2 ROOM HOLDS 75 THEATER
	GENERAL TOPICS	ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE	LEADERSHIP
8:00 AM - 4:00 PM	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors
9:00 AM - 10:30 AM	GENERAL SESSION: LEAD WITH HEART, SCALE WITH AI: A BLUEPRINT FOR SMARTER SERVICE ANDREW BARTOLOTTA		
10:30 AM - 10:45 AM	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors
10:45 AM - 12:00 PM	PERSON-CENTERED PRACTICES!!! PANEL DISCUSSION LEAD BY DONNA GOODAKER & JODI SIMMONS	IDENTIFYING THE GAPS IN YOUR MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY MIKE LERMAN	INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION NAOMI ASHER
12:00 PM - 1:30 PM	AWARDS LUNCHEON	LUNCH	LUNCH
1:30 PM - 2:45 PM	THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TNCO EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE	PRINCIPLES OF PERSUASION: THE MIDWIFE APPROACH MIKE LERMAN	EMOTIONAL POVERTY NAOMI ASHER
2:45 PM - 3:00 PM	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors	Break & Visit Exhibitors

TNCO 2025 Conference Session Descriptions

Jordan Allen & Milton Neuenschwander, TN Department of Disability & Aging

Oct. 28 | 10:45am

Practical Guidance & Best Practices for Applying AI In I/DD Support

Join the State of TN DDA for an engaging and informative webinar that explains the rapidly expanding field of Artificial Intelligence into clear, actionable guidance for anyone exploring AI-based supports for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). Instead of showcasing cutting-edge gadgets, we focus on *how* to investigate, select, pilot, and scale AI solutions responsibly—across three interconnected levels:

- **Individuals & Families** – Choosing person-centered AI tools that strengthen communication, daily living, and self-advocacy while safeguarding privacy and autonomy.
- **Provider Agencies** – Embedding AI into service workflows (staff scheduling, documentation, outcome tracking, event reporting) through ethical data practices, inclusive co-design, and robust change-management plans.
- **State Government** – Crafting policy frameworks, procurement standards, and data-sharing agreements that encourage innovation, uphold civil rights, and use predictive insights to streamline service delivery.

Jordan Allen serves as the Deputy Commissioner of Program Operations for the Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging. He has career experience spanning nearly 25 years, within multiple state service delivery systems, supporting persons with intellectual and development disabilities as well as persons with behavioral health diagnosis. These experiences include direct supports, development and implementation of quality assurance, and improvement strategies across multiple service systems, executive leadership within the private sector, and senior and executive leadership within State Government. Deputy Commissioner Allen has been a champion of community integration strategies, vocational training, integrated employment supports, and enabling technology for persons with disabilities.

Milton Neuenschwander is the State of TN Department of Disability & Aging (DDA) Director of Enabling Technology as part of the Division of Program Innovation. He received his education at Wabash College with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Religion and Science. He has 21 years of experience in the areas of intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and mental health services with a proven understanding of the concepts of Person-Centered Practices, Employment First, and Technology. His knowledge and expertise have allowed him to lead the development of an Enabling Technology program for the State of TN DDA and become a national leader in promoting advancements in access to technology solutions for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Naomi Asher, The Maven

Oct. 28 | 10:45am

Running an Effective Meeting

We all want efficient, focused, and productive meetings! Learn key strategies for setting clear objectives, creating actionable agendas, managing time effectively, and engaging participants.

Oct. 28 | 1:30pm

Goal Setting for Success

Develop the skills needed to set and achieve meaningful goals. Learn how to create SMART goals, develop action plans, and stay motivated throughout the process. The session also includes strategies for overcoming obstacles and maintaining focus to ensure long-term success.

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CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

Oct. 28 | 3:15pm

Effective Networking

It doesn't have to be scary! Learn skills needed for building meaningful relationships. Learn how to initiate conversations, follow up and leverage existing connections.

Oct. 29 | 10:45am

Intergenerational Communication

Strategies for overcoming generational barriers, fostering mutual respect, and enhancing collaboration across age groups. Different generations perceive communication differently, learn to navigate these dynamics more effectively and work together to achieve common goals.

Oct. 29 | 1:30pm

Emotional Poverty

Many individuals have a lack of emotional resources and an inability to manage feelings of anger, fear, and sadness. This training focuses on understanding the emotional challenges faced by these individuals and how these issues can impact personal and professional growth. Learn how to create emotionally safe environments and provide the emotional support needed to foster resilience and self-efficacy.

***Naomi Asher** is a long-time resident of East Tennessee and has 17 years of nonprofit executive work experience. She holds a double major in Music and Theology from Johnson University, an MBA in Marketing from King University and is a current PhD Candidate at Carolina University. She has served as the Executive Director for CASA of the Tennessee Heartland where she served on the Tennessee CASA Board and as a Regional Coordinator giving her the opportunity to win and administer grants for the East Region as well as create regional marketing campaigns. After CASA, she was hired as the Executive Director of the United Way of Anderson, Campbell, Morgan and Scott Counties where she served as the Program Chair, Advocacy Chair, Vice Chair and Board Chair for the United Ways of Tennessee state association. She is currently a full-time consultant. Naomi is a graduate of the Consortium for Social Enterprise Effectiveness through the University of Tennessee, Leadership Oak Ridge, Leadership Anderson County, and East Tennessee Regional Leadership Association. She is the Chair of Explore Oak Ridge, Past-President of the Rotary Club of Oak Ridge, Past-President of the Altrusa Club of Oak Ridge, a board member of the Oak Ridge Center for Leadership & Community Development and the City of Oak Ridge Land Bank. She lives and plays in Oak Ridge with her husband Ryan, dog Winnie, and 3 cats Jerome, Miley and Rhaenyra. They are a foster family with a heart for teenagers.*

Andrew Bartolotta, cityCurrent

Oct. 28 | 1:30pm

AI Insights for Social Impact: Enhancing Non-Profit Operations

AI Insights for Social Impact: Enhancing Nonprofit Operations is an interactive virtual workshop designed specifically for those in the social impact sector seeking to leverage artificial intelligence for innovative solutions. This session will delve into how AI can be strategically applied to enhance various facets of nonprofit operations—from improving data analysis and donor interactions to crafting compelling content. The workshop will provide nonprofit professionals and board members with actionable insights and tools to effectively integrate AI technologies.

Oct. 28 | 3:00pm

The AI Toolkit for Tomorrow's Mission-Driven Leader

This session is all about equipping leaders with a hands-on, approachable toolbox of AI-powered solutions that solve everyday nonprofit pain points. We'll explore practical, ready-to-use tools that can automate admin work, accelerate content creation, assist with grant writing, and streamline repetitive tasks—freeing up time and energy for deeper mission work. Think of this as your AI starter kit: no jargon, just clear examples and time-saving tricks

that align with your values. Whether you're a one-person comms team or juggling multiple hats, you'll leave with a suite of resources to immediately boost productivity and creativity.

Oct. 29 | 9:00am

GENERAL SESSION: Lead with Heart, Scale with AI: A Blueprint for Smarter Service

In this high-impact, workshop-style general session, we'll shift from tools to transformation—mapping out how to embed AI meaningfully across your entire organization. You'll see how mission-driven leaders are using AI to predict needs, personalize services, and expand reach while staying grounded in empathy, equity, and ethics. Through case studies, real-time prompts, and an interactive blueprint-building activity, we'll explore how to create systems where AI and humanity work hand-in-hand. This session is designed to empower directors and front-line leaders alike with a strategic vision for how AI can help you scale smart—without losing the heart of your mission.

***Andrew Bartolotta** is a seasoned digital media expert and an influential speaker who has been channeling passion into purpose with the aid of technology for over a decade. As the Director of Digital Media for cityCURRENT and host of the cityCURRENT Show, Andrew has been instrumental in developing and managing various events and media initiatives, shaping the corporate activation landscape and guiding digital media resources to augment cityCURRENT Partners and the community's digital media engagement for their CSR initiatives. With a keen eye for design and a strategic marketing approach, Andrew has harnessed the power of his extensive network to drive change through digital media. He has dedicated countless hours to local small businesses and nonprofits, helping them enhance their visual communications, an effort that earned him the Mississippi Governor's Initiative for Volunteer Excellence (GIVE) Award for Outstanding Service in 2020. An AI enthusiast, Andrew has successfully integrated AI tools such as Canva, ChatGPT, CapCut, and OpusPro into his work, enabling brands to maximize their online engagement and work more efficiently. In 2014, Andrew had the honor of being invited to the White House twice as a digital media innovator by the Office of Digital Strategy. This recognition underscores his prowess in the field and his ability to broaden existing content to new digital platforms. Andrew is a regular speaker at various organizations and conferences, where he shares his knowledge to strengthen the use of digital media for social good.*

Cait Donovan, Burn Bold

Oct. 28 | 9:00am

KEYNOTE: Dismantling burnout: Guiding Leaders and Teams to Overcome Burnout Together

Burnout isn't just an individual issue—it's a systemic challenge that affects both leadership and teams. This talk breaks down the shared responsibilities of leaders and employees in creating a work culture that fights burnout from all angles. By addressing burnout collectively, we'll explore actionable strategies for reducing burnout culture and building workplaces where everyone thrives.

Takeaways:

- Understand both the organizational and personal risk factors for burnout
- Recognize the red flag signs and symptoms in self and others
- Leave with action items to implement in situations where burnout is present

Oct. 28 | 10:45am

Dismantling Burnout Further: Addressing Specific Challenges Head On

This is an open Q&A for those who attended the keynote and need more either for themselves personally or for their teams. It is an opportunity to really hone in on what will actually work and make customized adjustments to suggestions from the keynote that will be implementable immediately.

Takeaways:

- Provide a psychologically safe place for deeper discussions and real implementable change to begin
- Choose and discuss the exact strategies that specific teams need
- Answer pressing questions

HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

Oct. 28 | 1:30pm

Fueling Success with Fire: Using Negative Emotions to Fuel Positive Success

In this transformative session, leaders will learn how to harness the energy of 'negative' emotions to create stronger boundaries, build more resilient teams, and lead with greater clarity and conviction. Difficult emotions are a leadership superpower—they foster authentic relationships and drive real results.

Takeaways:

- Recognize tough emotions as signals for necessary change and boundary-setting
- Improve relationships in the workplace by gaining the courage and skill to face conflict
- Utilize the WHIM framework for positive emotional transformation
- Manage your own energy and prevent burnout in leadership roles

Oct. 28 | 3:15pm

Boundaries Make You More Generous

Do you avoid setting boundaries because you're worried about disappointing people and then feeling guilty? What if I told you that I could flip the script on your entire view of boundaries within an hour and teach you how to create boundaries that make you a MORE generous person in all the ways you actually WANT to be generous? Sounds too good to be true? Give it a whirl! :)

Takeaways:

- View boundaries through a lens of kindness and generosity
- Understand the difference between inner and outer boundaries
- Use the B.R.A.T. framework to implement boundaries that are clear, kind, and concise

Cait Donovan, host of "FRIED. The Burnout Podcast" and author of "The Bouncebackability Factor," is an expert in emotional intelligence and burnout prevention. With a Bachelor's in Biobehavioral Sciences and a Master's in Chinese Medicine, she uniquely combines scientific research with Eastern healing to holistically address burnout. Cait's compelling keynotes at major conferences and Fortune 500 companies provide actionable insights, empowering professionals to reclaim balance and energy in their lives and companies to end the turnover, loss of productivity and lack of engagement that accompanies burnout.

Find out [more about Cait at this link](#).

Donna Goodaker & Jodi Simmons, Progress Inc., Nashville

Oct. 29 | 10:45am

Person-Centered Practices!!!

Want to be considered a preferred provider? Ramp up your person centered practices! Working on accreditation? Help your staff be excellent with person centered practices! Striving for a better survey result or next level accreditation? Person Centered Practices!!! Join this session to participate as both PCP leaders and learners as Donna Goodaker and Jodi Simmons facilitate a discussion about what's already working and how to get past those stubborn challenges. Bring your "we figured this one out!" and your "we can't get some staff to stop overprotecting people" examples. Every attendee of this session should leave with a least a few ideas to move forward in your person centered practice journey.

Donna Goodaker has been the CEO at Progress since 1998. She leads a team committed to the principles of person centered practice. Following person centered practice philosophy sounds so easy, but it isn't! Let's talk!

Jodi Simmons, the Director of Accreditation and Continuous Improvement at Progress, has led our accreditation journey. A huge part of this has been elevating our collective mindset and practice through a person centered lens. A fierce advocate for people who have ID/DD, she continues to help light the path forward.

Mike Lerman, Call A Doctor Plus

Oct. 29 | 10:45am

Identifying the Gaps In Your Mental Health Strategy

Remember when “going postal” was a workplace joke? Nobody’s laughing anymore. The need for comprehensive mental health resources for employees has never been greater. Even if you have a plan, where are the gaps? The mental health of everyone working in your facilities is important. Might you have employees that either don’t have or never have accessed the mental health resources available? What about coverage for your medical plan opt-outs, part-timers, or contract labor? Is there any type of coverage for the family members of your employees that only take single coverage? How much must those with high deductible plans spend before they have access to care? Have we shifted focus to treatment of those with issues at the expense of helping people stay healthy? What types of wellness / wellbeing/ preventative / life / financial coaching is available for employees? After exploring the various areas that encompass mental health, we will then explore efficacy and utilization of those plans. How effective is the communication and engagement in your current EAP and mental health part of your medical plan? Would you be surprised if a survey revealed that :

- 82% of employers said their workforce has more access to mental health resources than in previous years, while only 50% of workers say the same.
- 80% of employers said workers have flexibility in their schedule to get the mental health help they need, compared to only 53% of workers who say they do.
- 79% of employers said mental health had improved thanks to the company’s resources, compared to just 35% of workers saying the same thing.

Oct. 29 | 1:30pm

Principles of Persuasion - The Midwife Approach

Everyone is in sales. Everyone desires more influence in helping sway the decisions of others. Whether recruiting new talent or seeking approval of ideas, funding, or staffing from boards or other stakeholders, certain skills can be learned to best position our arguments and succeed in obtaining our goals. Midwives provide a unique and memorable model for us to examine. Ten simple and practical principles of persuasion will be presented. Goal: To acquire the knowledge needed to become more influential and persuasive in obtaining needed resources. Join Mike as he brings a fresh and humorous perspective to sharing his *Principles of Persuasion*. His totally original “Midwife Approach” breaks down the persuasion process that includes caring, partnering, and coaching through the “birth” of a new idea. Mike’s style is light-hearted, yet packed with practical information. His rhyming format of ten simple principles makes the entire process easy to remember.

Mike Lerman received a B.S. in Biochemistry from California Polytechnic State University in 1975 and a Master’s of Healthcare Administration from Central Michigan in 1987. He served as an Army Officer for 20 years in hospital laboratory management. As a licensed Nursing Home Administrator he then managed two skilled nursing facilities. He was later hired by Anthem of Ohio to oversee all implementation and management of the TRICARE Service Centers at Ft. Campbell and Fort Knox, KY. He has been a consultant for various healthcare insurance brokers and organizations for the last 27 years. Mike is the President of the Middle Tennessee Employee Benefits Council. He enjoys travel with his lovely bride of 48 years, along with music, writing, and spending time with the four greatest grandchildren on earth.

Lauren Middleberg, ANCOR Membership Director

Oct. 28 | 12:15pm

Lunch Presentation: Your ANCOR Membership Through TNCO

Learn about your ANCOR membership — you know the new benefit provided to all its members by TNCO

As the Membership Director, Lauren’s job is to make sure ANCOR is giving members the best possible experience, meeting their needs, and exceeding their expectations. She looks for new and innovative ways to increase

HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

member engagement, bring in new members, and keep the current ones happy! Lauren graduated from Montgomery College with a degree in Hotel & Restaurant Management. She spent over 15 years working for Marriott International, where she worked on a variety of innovative projects, including the greening of Marriott's supply chain, as well as the use of bulk bath amenities. ANCOR is Lauren's first entry into the nonprofit world. She also loves to cook (and eat!), sing, and throw family dance parties in her kitchen.

TNCO Employment Committee

Oct. 29 | 1:30pm

Importance of Employment Services, a panel discussion

- Outline of VR/ECF/MAPS programs
- Panel Discussion of services in both rural and urban locations across the state
- Employment Success Videos