

Lessons in Leadership: Decision Making Under Pressure

October 20, 2026
Apella
New York, NY

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Tuesday, October 20, 2026

8:00 AM – 8:45 AM

Registration and Networking Breakfast

8:45 AM – 8:55 AM

Opening Remarks

Senior leaders today face decisions of greater consequence — and greater complexity — than any prior generation. We will kick off by framing the day's central challenge: building the judgment, credibility, and composure to lead well when the stakes are highest.

SCENARIO 1: CRISIS, GOVERNANCE & INVESTOR PRESSURE

8:55 AM – 9:15 AM

What Would You Do?

Participants receive the first scenario brief and work in small groups to develop an initial leadership response before the simulation begins.

9:15 AM – 9:55 AM

PART 1: Crisis Decision-Making: Authority, Sequencing, and Board Communication

This session examines how senior leaders triage competing priorities simultaneously, establish decision-making authority under conditions of incomplete information, and communicate with their boards in the critical first hours of an enterprise crisis.

9:55 AM – 10:35 AM

PART 2: Disclosure, Investor Relations, and Regulatory Response: Managing Multi-Front Pressure

When a crisis becomes multi-front, the leadership challenge shifts from response to institutional positioning. This session examines how leaders navigate competing counsel, manage disclosure decisions under enforcement pressure, and maintain board confidence when the full picture has yet to emerge.

10:35 AM – 11:00AM

Meet, Connect and Networking Break

SCENARIO 2: OPPORTUNITY, PRESSURE & LEADERSHIP LEGACY

11:05 AM – 11:25 AM

What Would You Do?

Participants receive the second scenario brief and work in small groups to develop an initial response before the simulation begins.

11:25 AM – 12:05 PM

PART 1: Leading Through Transformational News

Not all high-stakes leadership moments are crises. Some arrive as breakthroughs — unexpected, consequential, and just as difficult to manage well. This session examines what it takes to lead through a transformational event: sequencing disclosure decisions across scientific, regulatory, and financial stakeholders; managing a board that wants to move faster than the institution is ready; and protecting credibility when global attention arrives before the organization is prepared.

Sally Susman, Former Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, **Pfizer**

12:05PM – 12:45 PM

PART 2: From Defining Moment to Durable Position

A transformational moment creates as much risk as it does opportunity. This session examines how leaders translate a singular event into lasting strategic advantage — navigating regulatory timelines, investor expectations, and competitive response without allowing urgency to override institutional integrity. Participants leave with a sharper framework for leading through events that have no precedent inside their organizations.

12:50 PM – 1:50 PM

Lunch

SCENARIO 3: CULTURE, REPUTATION & LEADERSHIP CREDIBILITY

1:55 PM – 2:15 PM

What Would You Do?

Participants receive the third scenario brief and work in small groups to develop an initial plan before the simulation begins.

2:15 PM – 2:55 PM

PART 1: Leadership Credibility Under Public Scrutiny

When an organization's stated values are challenged publicly, the response reveals far more than any communications strategy. This session examines how leaders align a divided C-suite, sequence internal and external communications under time pressure, and sustain credibility with boards and markets when the institution's character (not just its operations) is the subject of scrutiny.

2:55 PM – 3:35 PM

PART 2: Reputational Recovery: Strategic Options and Board-Ready Decision Making

Recovery from a reputational crisis is a strategic decision, not a communications one. This session examines the trade-offs between stabilization, acknowledgment, and full reset and what each path signals to employees, investors, and the public. Participants build and defend a board-ready case under conditions of incomplete information and competing stakeholder demands.

3:35 PM – 3:50 PM

Meet, Connect and Networking Break

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

3:55 PM – 4:20 PM

What the Data Revealed: Decision Patterns and Leadership Blind Spots

Drawing on responses collected across all three simulations, researchers present a data-driven portrait of how this group made decisions under pressure — where leaders defaulted to caution, where they moved too fast, and where the instincts of the room diverged from one another. This is not a debrief of the scenarios. It is a portrait of how this room leads.

Andrew Jones, PhD, Principal Researcher, Governance & Sustainability Center, **The Conference Board**

4:20 PM – 5:00 PM

Leadership Judgment Under Pressure

Four to five participants are invited to connect the day's experience to decisions they are carrying in their own organizations. What tested their judgment? What would they do differently? What do they wish they had practiced before they were in the chair? No prepared remarks. A candid peer conversation to close the day.

George Barrett, Founder, **The Overtone Group**, Former Chairman and CEO, **Cardinal Health**

5:00 PM – 5:05 PM

Closing Remarks and Adjourn

5:05 PM – 6:05 PM

Networking Reception