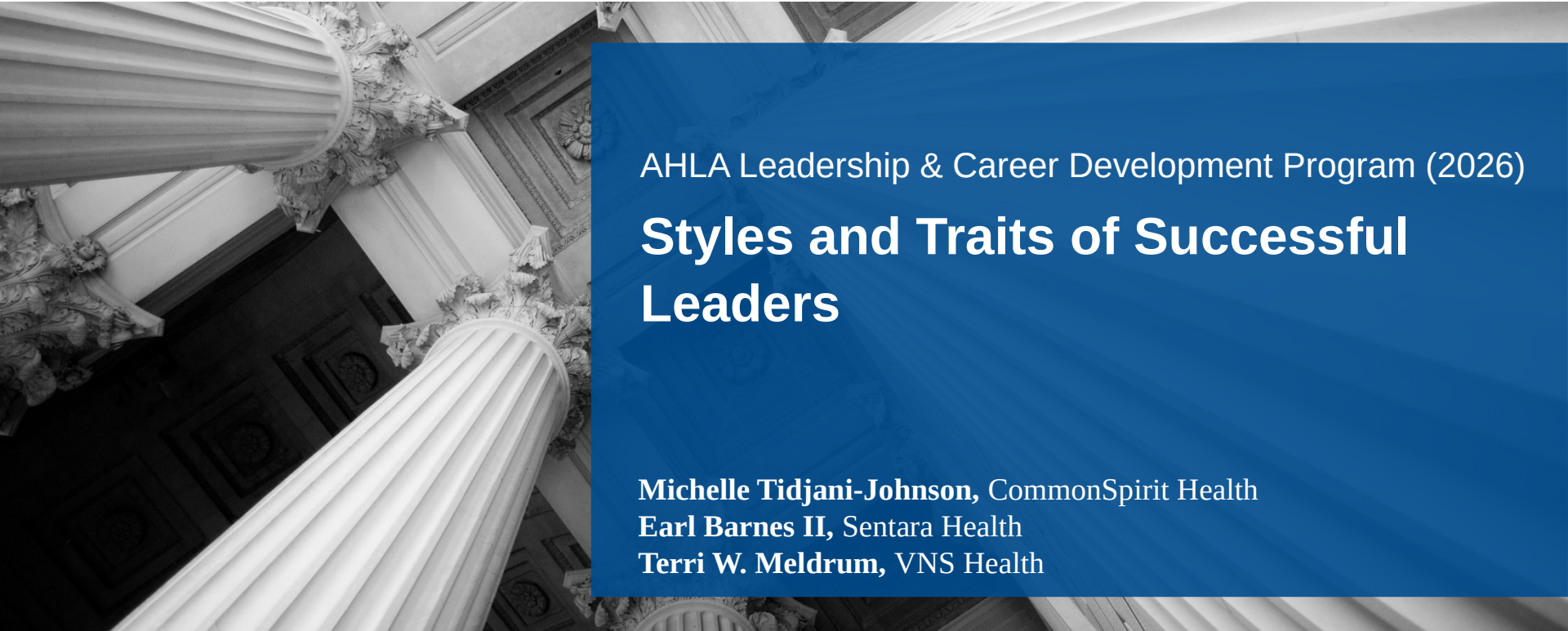




AHLA Leadership & Career Development Program (2026)

Styles and Traits of Successful Leaders

Michelle Tidjani-Johnson, CommonSpirit Health
Earl Barnes II, Sentara Health
Terri W. Meldrum, VNS Health

Panelist Introductions



Michelle Tidjani-Johnson,
JD, MBA
Senior Executive VP,
Chief Administrative
Officer
CommonSpirit Health



Earl Barnes II, JD
Executive VP, Chief Legal
Officer
Sentara Health



Terri W. Meldrum, JD
Executive VP, Chief
Legal and Risk Officer
VNS Health

Leadership Evolution

Many lawyers advance because they are excellent technicians, but leadership requires something different.

What capabilities or mindset shifts were important in your own transition from high-performing lawyer to organizational leader?

What did that transition look like and did anything about it surprise you?

Navigating Complexity & Influence

In complex organizations, where influence often matters as much as authority, how have you learned to build and exercise influence across stakeholders with competing priorities?

Leadership Realities

As leaders become more senior, the role can become increasingly isolating.

How have you maintained perspective, authenticity, and trusted relationships while operating at the executive level?

Leading Through Challenge / Imperfect Systems

How do you continue to lead constructively and maintain credibility in environments where other leaders are ineffective or even destructive?

How do you protect your team from organizational dynamics that are damaging (a culture, a decision, a leadership failure)?

Influence of External Roles

What has board or community service taught you about leadership, governance, or organizational dynamics that has changed how you show up in your primary role?

Has external board or community engagement ever complicated your professional identity, your standing, or your priorities, and how did you navigate that?

Career Inflection Points

How do you know when it's time to move on from a role, organization, or career chapter?
What signals do you trust?

What would you say if you were advising someone in this room who is at a genuine crossroads – highly accomplished, plenty of options, but uncertain about what they want from the next chapter?

Q & A



Bonus Questions (Time Permitting)

- ❖ When you think about leaders you've crossed paths with who truly stand out, what differentiates them? Does it look different across practice settings (government, firm, in-house)?
- ❖ What does your decision-making process look like under genuine pressure, when information is incomplete, conditions are shifting, or the organizational risk is significant?
- ❖ What practices, habits, or forms of self-reflection have helped you continue developing as a leader rather than becoming stagnant or overly comfortable in your approach?

Recommended Reading for Leaders

- One Piece of Paper, by Mike Figliuolo
- Find a Way, by Diana Nyad



Educating and Connecting the Health Law Community

americanhealthlaw.org



© 2026 is published by the American Health Law Association. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form except by prior written permission from the publisher. Printed in the United States of America.

Any views or advice offered in this publication are those of its authors and should not be construed as the position of the American Health Law Association.

“This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is provided with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional services. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought” —from a declaration of the American Bar Association.