

From Technical Expert to Trusted Leader: Bridging the Gap Between Expertise and Impact

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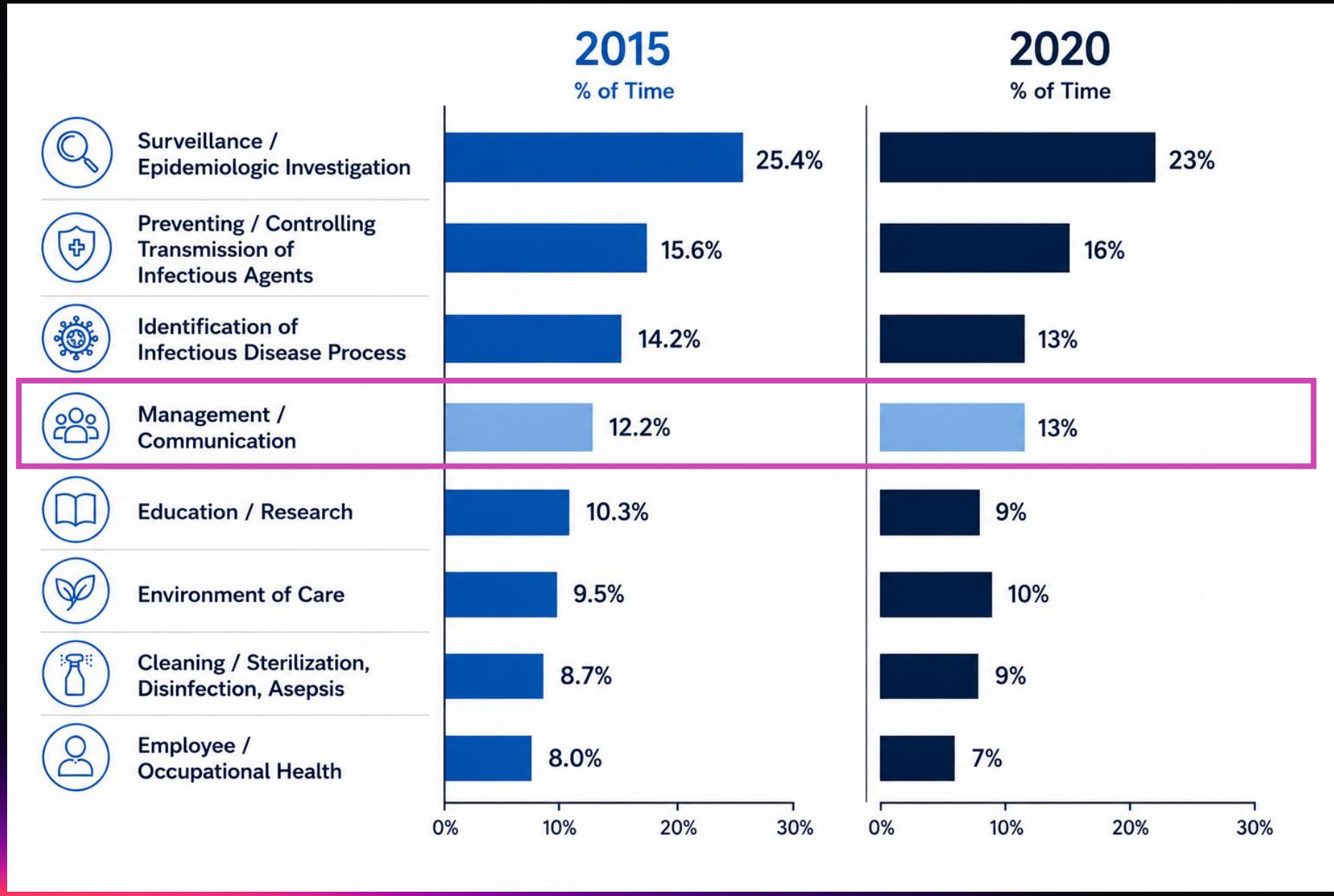
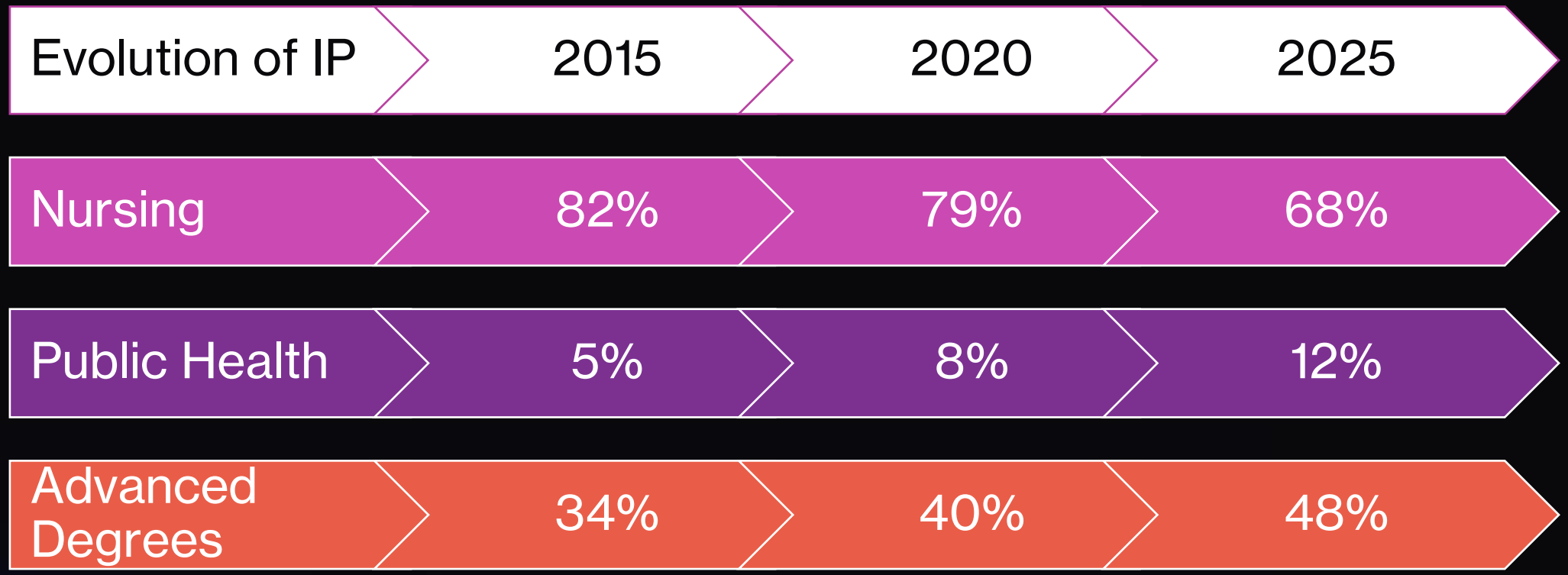
The Profession Changed

The Role Was Built on Technical Expertise.



APIC MegaSurvey 2015, 2020

The Profession Didn't Just Grow. It Evolved.



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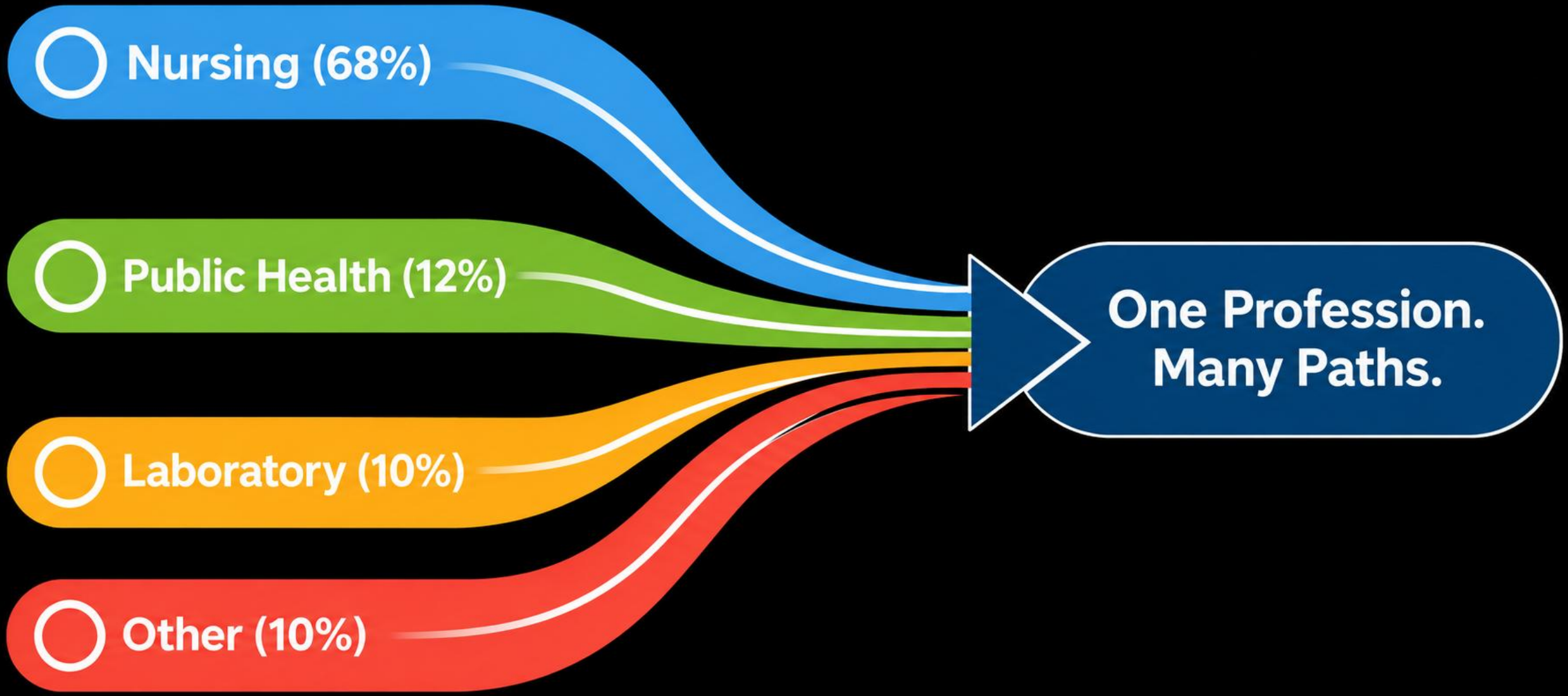
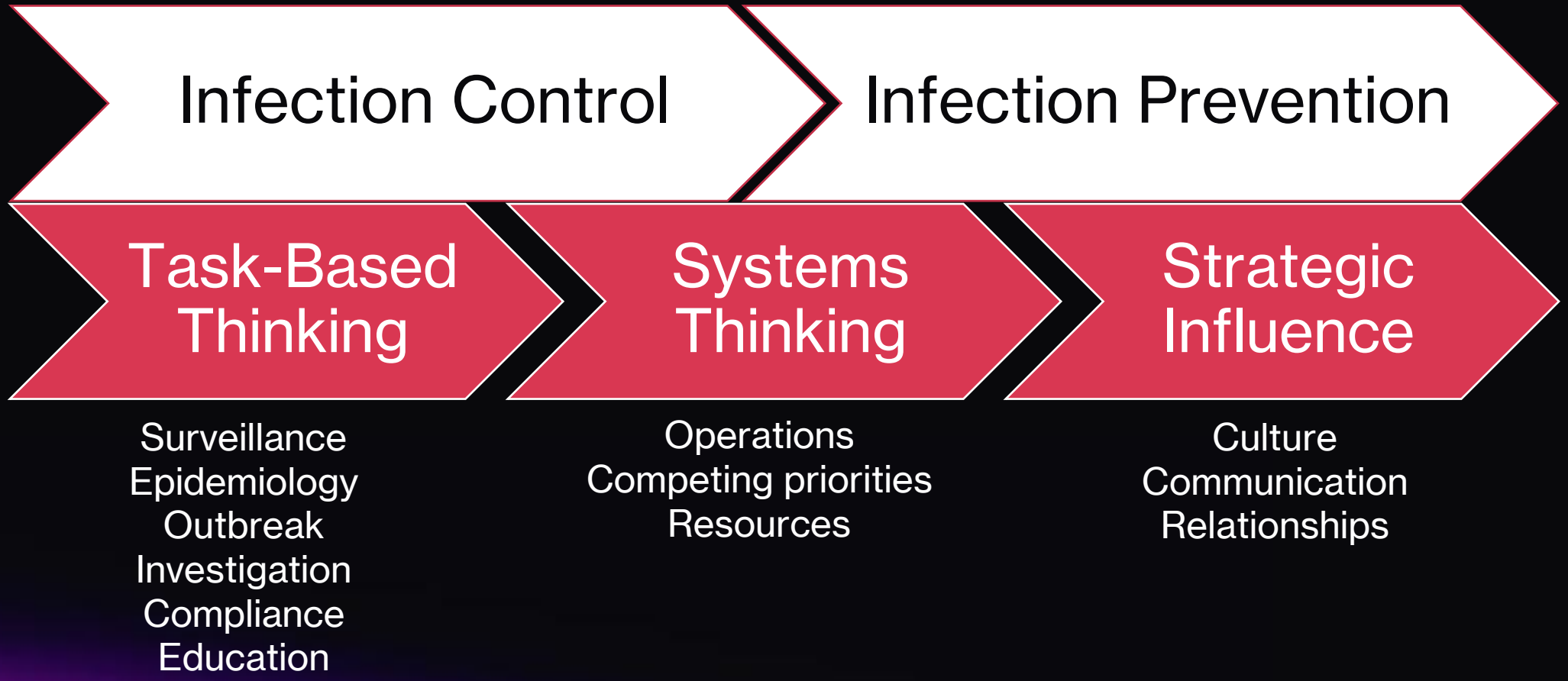




The Environment Changed Faster Than Many Of Us Had Time To Process.

A Shift Was Necessary.



The Workforce Changed

The Workforce Challenge Is Bigger Than Burnout.

Leadership

Mentorship

Professional Development

Reese et al., 2025; Doran et al., 2025; Encinger et al., 2026; Reese et al., 2026

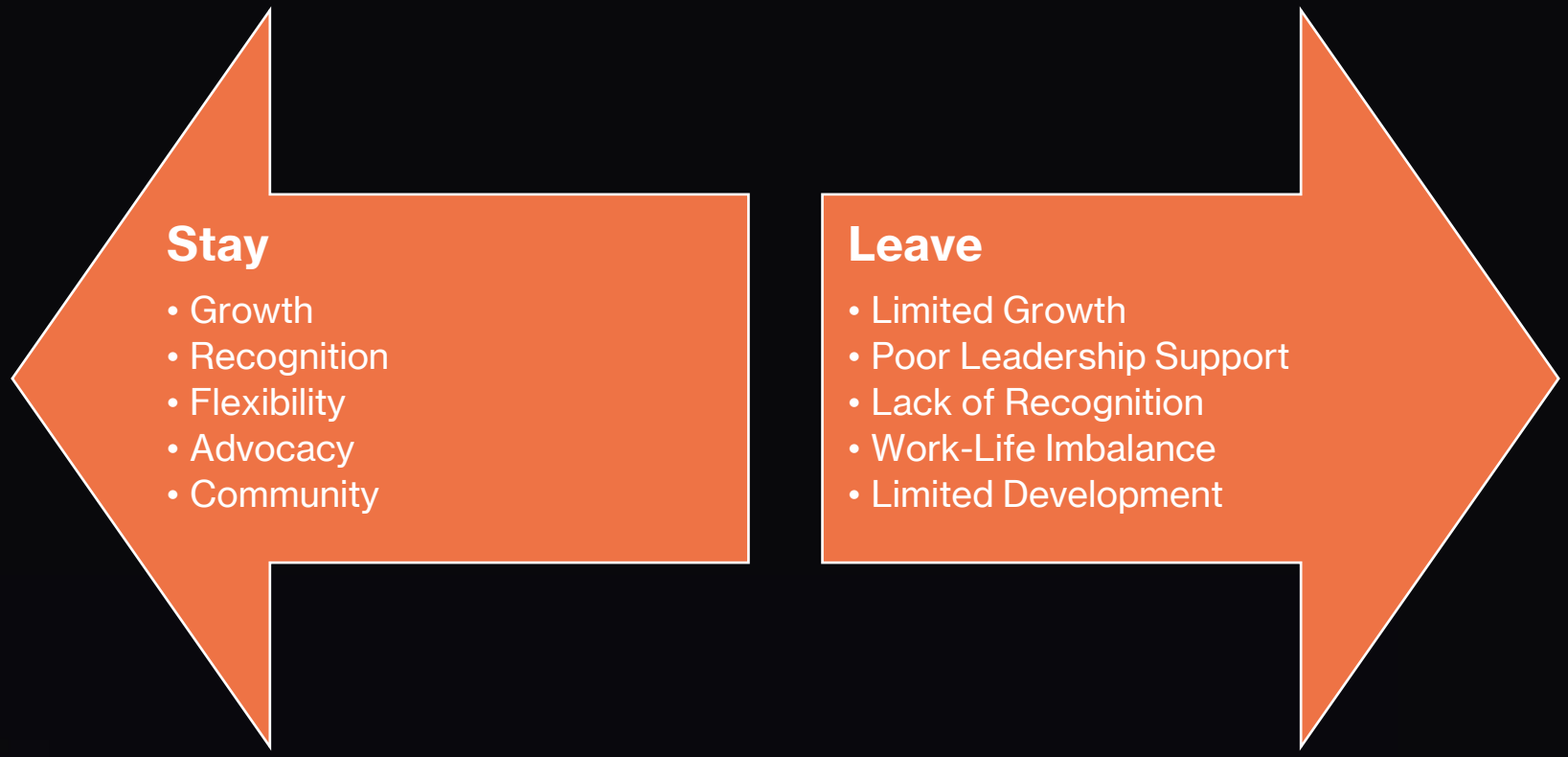
The Workforce Is Stretched and Hungry For Development.

Sole IPs	Average Weekly Hours Worked	Planning to Remain In Profession	No Protected Development Time	Difficulty Accessing Education
48%	43.6	84%	59%	62%

Rated Onboarding Highly Effective	Requested Mentorship Frameworks	Leadership and Communication Among Top Training Priorities	Interested In Change Management Resources
14%	56%	68%	66%

Doran et al., 2025; Encinger et al., 2026; Reese et al., 2026

People Are More Likely to Stay Where They Feel Valued, Supported, and Able to Grow.



Reese et al., AJIC, 2025a; Reese et al., AJIC, 2025b

Leadership Had To Change

The Hardest Problems Are Rarely Only Technical.

Technical Problems	
Guidelines	Evidence Based Practice

Adaptive Problems	
Behavioral Science	Implementation Science



Leadership Without Authority Relies on Influence.

Assigned Leadership

- Title
- Position
- Authority
- Role



Emergent Leadership

- Trust
- Credibility
- Influence
- Relationships



Transformational Leadership Drives Culture Change.

Transactional Leadership

- Manage Tasks
- Maintain Compliance
- Direct Behavior
- Solve Today's Problem



Transformational Leadership

- Shape Culture
- Create Commitment
- Influence Behavior
- Build Tomorrow's Capacity



2019 set the direction.
2026 sharpened what leadership requires of the IP.

2019 Leadership:

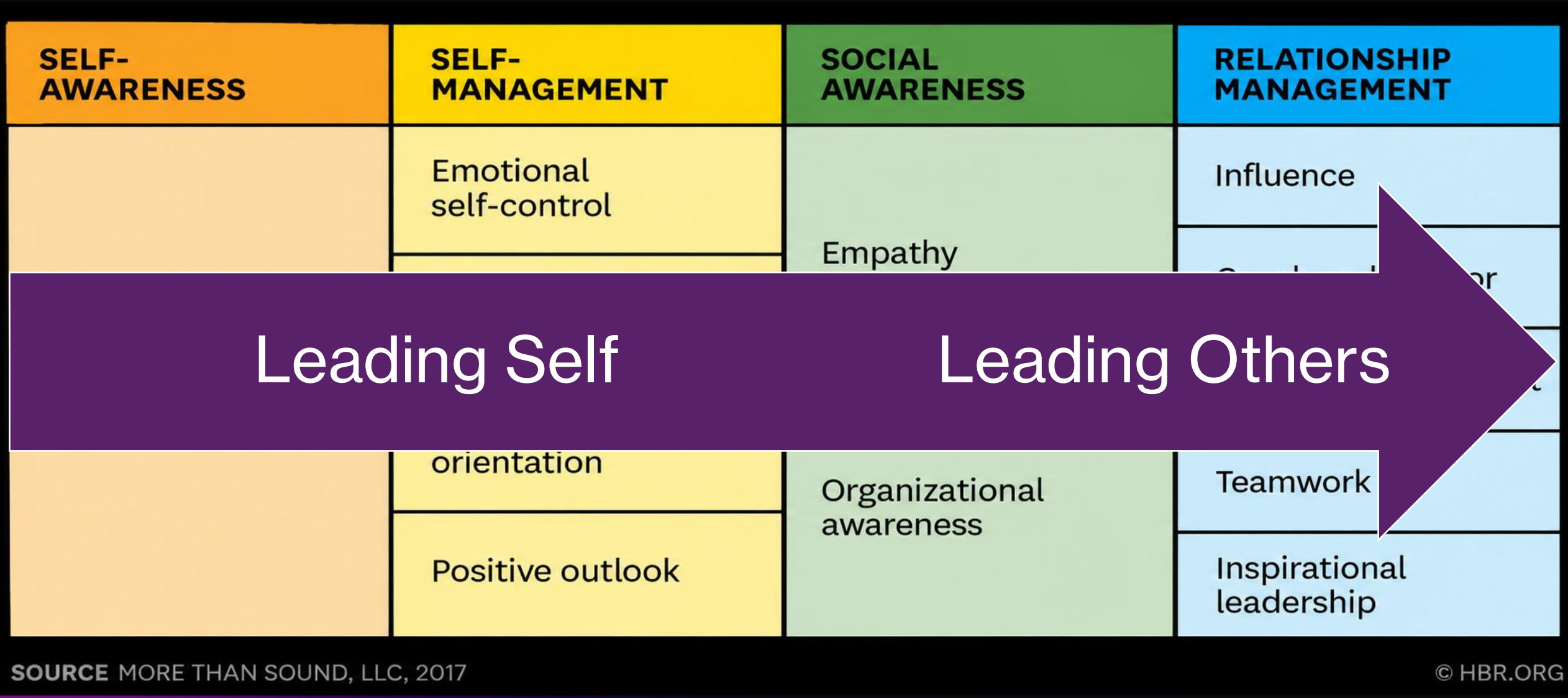
- Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Collaboration
- Behavioral Science
- Program Management
- Mentorship

2026 Leadership:

- Interdisciplinary Partnerships
- Organizational Strategy and Change Navigation
- People Leadership and High-Performing Teams
- Accountability and Long-Term Impact
- Business Acumen and Resource Stewardship

Billings et al., 2019; APIC Professional Development Committee, 2026.

Emotional Intelligence Creates Influence.



SOURCE MORE THAN SOUND, LLC, 2017

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Preventing Hospital Infections: Real-World Problems, Realistic Solutions, Sanjay Saint, Sarah Krein, and Robert Stock: Oxford University Press, USA, 2014

Leadership Requires Translation.



The Future Will Be Highly Technological and Deeply Human.

Technology can Accelerate...

- Data
- Surveillance
- Pattern Recognition
- Summarization
- Automation



IPs Still Lead...

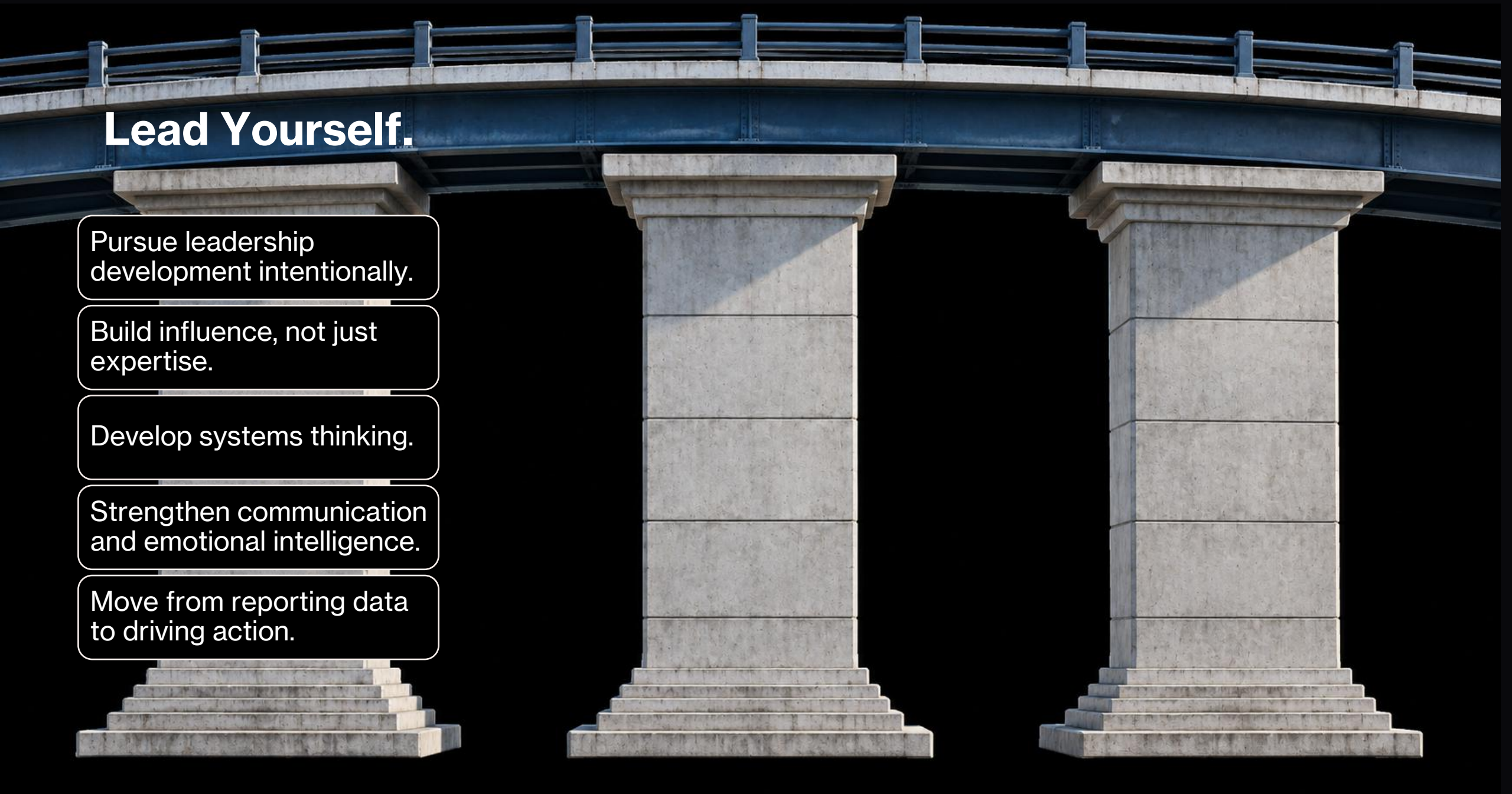
- Judgment
- Meaning
- Influence
- Relationships
- Trust
- Change
- Action



Kon et al., AJIC, 2026.

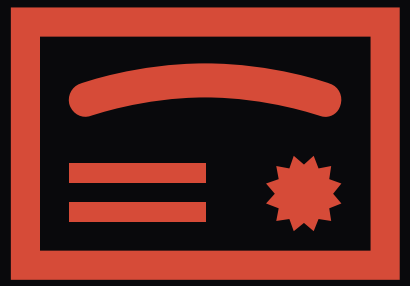
Our Actions Must Change

Lead Yourself.



- Pursue leadership development intentionally.
- Build influence, not just expertise.
- Develop systems thinking.
- Strengthen communication and emotional intelligence.
- Move from reporting data to driving action.

Growth Expands Opportunity.



Certification

17-35% Higher Compensation



Education

10K$-50K$ More Annually



Experience

Continued Salary Growth Across Career


Lead Yourself.
Pursue leadership development intentionally.
Build influence, not just expertise.
Develop systems thinking.
Strengthen communication and emotional intelligence.
Move from reporting data to driving action.
Lead Others.
Mentor someone who is learning.
Sponsor someone whose work deserves visibility.
Create psychological ownership.
Build trust before you need influence.
Help others become more capable.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Create psychological ownership.
Build trust before you need influence.
Help others become more capable.
Lead Change.
Build relationships before you need them.
Understand stakeholder priorities.
Identify barriers, not just noncompliance.
Co-create solutions.
Build shared ownership.
Design for sustainability.

The Future Workforce Won't Build Itself.



The IP of the Future Will Need to...



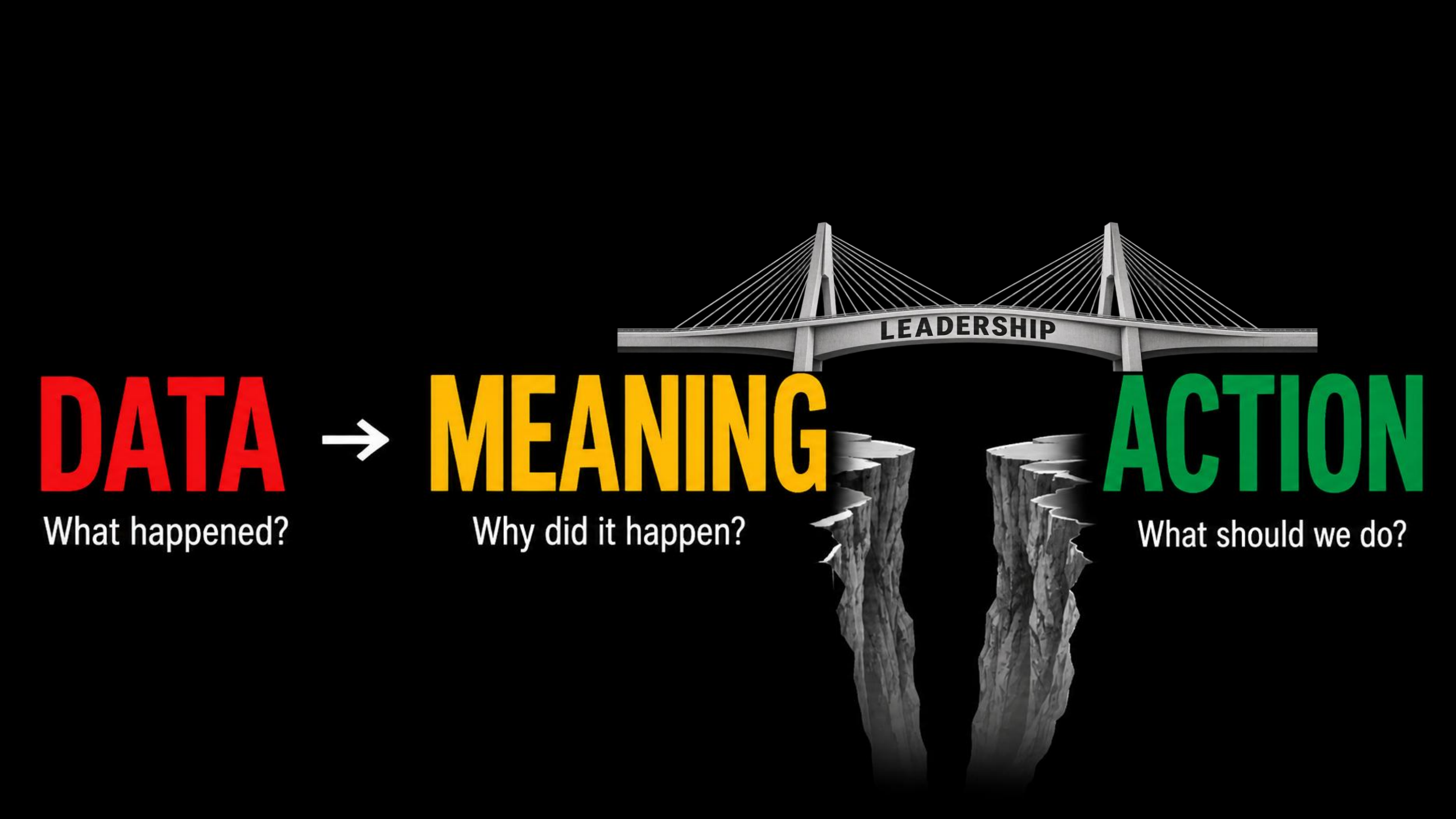
As Stewards Of The Profession We Are...

Accountable for something larger than ourselves.

Entrusted with the future of the profession.

Responsible for turning intention into action.




LEADERSHIP
DATA
MEANING
ACTION
What happened?
Why did it happen?
What should we do?


Leadership is the bridge
between knowing and
doing.