

# Texas Judicial Leadership Convening: Agenda & Session Descriptions

## Day 1: Wednesday June 3, 2026

6:00 PM Dinner

### 7:00 – 8:00 PM | The Hidden Cost of Administering Justice: Building Resilience and Psychological Safety

We open the convening by examining the "toxic load" of judicial work. Just as coal miners require physical protection and medical professionals require PPE to enter hazardous environments, judges require emotional and cognitive "PPE" to navigate the daily exposure to human suffering. This session reframes compassion not as a "soft skill," but as a critical professional competency. We will establish the rules of engagement for the convening, focusing on psychological safety, and introduce the foundational shift from asking "What is wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?"

---

## Day 2: Thursday June 4, 2026

8:00 – 9:00 AM | Breakfast

### 9:00 – 9:15 AM | Cognitive Capacity & Deep Listening: Managing Judicial Bandwidth

Judicial decision-making requires immense cognitive load. This brief morning session introduces "Emptying the Cup", a practice designed to clear mental bandwidth. Participants will practice deep listening techniques to identify the internal distractions that impede their ability to be fully present in the courtroom.

### 9:15 – 10:30 AM | The Dual Self: Reconciling Professional Identity with Personal Humanity

Judges often feel pressure to maintain a stoic, expert persona ("The Judge") while suppressing the human burdens they carry ("The Person"). This session explores the dissonance between how judges are seen by the public versus the invisible weights they carry. Through deep reflection and guided mapping, participants will identify the systemic factors that exacerbate isolation and learn how acknowledging their own humanity is a prerequisite for effective leadership.

10:30 – 11:00 AM | Optional Walk

### 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Compassion from the Bench

Burnout often stems from "empathic distress"- absorbing the pain of others. This session distinguishes *empathy* (jumping over the net to join the suffering) from *compassion* (staying on your side of the net to offer resources). Using this framework and case studies, we will explore how judges can remain relationally connected and procedurally just without compromising their own emotional stability.

12:00 – 1:00 PM | Lunch

**1:00 – 2:00 PM | The Science of Attention: Overcoming Barriers to Judicial Awareness**

Research shows that time pressure and hurry are the enemies of compassion. This session examines the cognitive barriers to "noticing," including the impact of digital distractions and procedural exhaustion. Participants will diagnose the structural impediments in their own courtrooms that block them from seeing the full humanity of the litigants before them.

**2:00 – 2:15 PM | Directed Attention Exercise**

A practical application of the previous session, this silent exercise challenges participants to retrain their "noticing" muscles in a low-stakes environment, observing details often missed in the rush of daily life.

**2:15 – 2:30 PM | Break****2:30 – 3:45 PM | Internal Jurisprudence: Reshaping the Inner Critic Through Self-Compassion**

Judges are often their own harshest critics. This session applies Dr. Kristin Neff's research on self-compassion (Mindfulness, Common Humanity, Kindness) to the judicial context. Participants will analyze their internal narratives regarding professional errors and fears—contrasting how they speak to themselves versus how they would address a colleague—to develop a more resilient internal voice.

**3:45 – 4:00 PM | Synthesis & Review** - A guided review of the day's core concepts.

**6:00 – 7:00 PM | Dinner**

---

**Day 3: Friday June 5, 2026****8:00 – 9:00 AM | Breakfast**

**9:00 – 9:15 AM | Peer Connection & Insights** - A structured dialogue to share emerging insights and reinforce peer support networks.

**9:15 – 10:45 AM | Advanced Compassion: Managing Triggers and Complexifying the Narrative**

Compassion is most difficult when dealing with heinous acts or difficult litigants. This session dives into the neuroscience of the "Amygdala Hijack" and how moral judgment affects risk tolerance. Participants will engage in a case study to practice moving beyond binary judgments to understand root causes, exploring how "proximity" to those who cause harm can transform judicial decision-making.

**10:45 – 11:00 AM | Break****11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Operationalizing Compassion: Strategies for Implementation**

The convening concludes by translating concepts into practice. Participants will identify specific "micro-practices" to implement in their courtrooms and complete the "Shine" exercise to affirm the strengths of their cohort. We will define individual success metrics for well-being and commit to specific tools for sustaining compassion upon returning to the bench.

**12:00 – 1:00 PM | Lunch and Departure**