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NEW BOOK LEADERSHIP.INSIGHTS SHARES LEADERSHIP WISDOM FROM 28 TRAILBLAZERS SHAPING COMMUNITIES

Joy Wilkins brings together more than a decade of conversations with economic development leaders through a framework of becoming, connecting, and transforming

ATLANTA, GA — October 20, 2026 — What does it take to lead communities through change, build trust across boundaries, and create an impact that lasts?

In her new book, *Leadership.Insights;From.the.Trailblazers.Shaping.the.Communities.Around.Us*, Joy Wilkins explores those questions through the experiences of 28 leaders who have helped shape the economic development profession and the communities it serves.

Published by Palmetto Publishing, *Leadership.Insights* brings together more than a decade of conversations with leaders representing different communities, career paths, and perspectives. Their stories offer practical and personal lessons about integrity, purpose, relationships, resilience, collaboration, service, and leading through change.

“This book grew from a simple question: Why aren’t we talking more intentionally about leadership in economic development?” said Wilkins. “Over the years, I had the privilege of talking with extraordinary leaders who were willing to share not only what they accomplished, but what they learned along the way. My hope is that their collective wisdom will encourage leaders at every stage of their journey.”

The book traces its origins to a 2011 conversation between Wilkins and the late Denny Coleman, then chair of the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and a longtime economic development executive in St. Louis. Their conversation about leadership inspired Wilkins to begin writing about the topic for IEDC’s member publication, *Economic.Development.Now*. In 2014, that work evolved into the *Leadership.Insights* interview series that ultimately became the foundation for the book.

The 28 conversations are organized around three interconnected dimensions of leadership: **Become. Connect. Transform.**

Become explores the inner work of leadership—developing the integrity, purpose, stewardship, adaptability, and character that shape how leaders show up. **Connect** focuses on building trust, strengthening relationships, and bringing people together around shared goals. **Transform** explores how leaders translate character and connection into lasting impact by developing people, strengthening institutions, aligning systems, and helping communities thrive.

Together, they create what Wilkins describes as a continuing rhythm of leadership: **Become. Connect. Transform. And then begin again.**

The book features insights from Coleman, Jeff Finkle, Edward A. Nelson Jr., Nathan Ohle, Dyan Brasington, Robin Roberts Krieger, Kurt Chilcott, Jonathan Morgan, Ioanna Morfessis, Ronnie Bryant, SeonAh Kendall, Judie Scalise, Tracye McDaniel, Christopher Chung, Mary Ann Moon, Gord Knowles, Josh Mejia, Mike Neal, Jim Collard, JoAnn Crary, Dave Kolzow, Joe Marinucci, Rick Weddle, Diane Lupke, Steve Budd, Rodrick Miller, Tom Kucharski, and the Honorable Hazel McCallion.

Across the 28 voices, Wilkins identifies 12 recurring leadership pillars, including people-first leadership, integrity and authenticity, trust and relationships, strong teams, mentorship, listening, clear communication, political fluency without partisanship, collaboration, adaptability, systems thinking, and inclusive prosperity.

The book includes forewords by Finkle, former president and CEO of IEDC, and Ohle, IEDC's president and CEO. Their perspectives place the book within the evolution of a profession increasingly called upon to connect people, organizations, and systems while navigating complex economic and community challenges.

“At the heart of these 28 voices is a shared belief that our work should ultimately improve people’s lives,” Wilkins said. “Leadership is not simply about what we accomplish. It is about who we become, the relationships we build, and whether the people, organizations, and communities we serve are stronger because we were there.”

Leadership.Insights,From.the.Trailblazers.Shaping.the.Communities.Around.Us is published by Palmetto Publishing and is available in hardcover, paperback, and eBook formats.

ABOUT JOY WILKINS

Joy Wilkins is a nationally recognized leader in community, economic, leadership, and workforce development whose career has centered on bringing people and organizations together to strengthen communities and expand opportunity. Throughout her career, Wilkins has worked across organizational and sector boundaries to advance economic and community development, strengthen leadership, and foster collaborative approaches to complex challenges. Her long-running Leadership.Insights conversations with economic development leaders provided the foundation for Leadership.Insights¿From.the.Trailblazers. Shaping.the.Communities.Around.Us.