



(LEADER GUIDE)

BUILDERS OR BLAMERS?

The 18-Month Window and What It Really Means for Your Leadership

LEADER CORE Guide: Builders or Blamers

When Strategic Planning Becomes Strategic Stalling

Duration: 30 Minutes

Purpose:

To facilitate a meaningful dialogue about transitioning from defensive strategic planning to proactive transformation building, helping team members explore the four critical shifts required to lead through disruption rather than react to it.

Pre-Session Preparation

- Send the article to participants 24-48 hours before the session
- Request that they bring their current strategic plan or one strategic initiative they're leading
- Set up a comfortable meeting space that encourages honest dialogue
- Prepare materials for the Four Shifts exercise
- Consider your own honest assessment of where you fall on the Coaster-Climber-Dreamer-Builder spectrum

Session Flow with CORE Process

Opening (5 minutes)

- Welcome participants
- Briefly explain the CORE process (Call It, Own It, Response, Execute)
- Share a personal example of when you recognized you were planning instead of building—and what shifted
- Establish relevance: “Today we’re exploring whether our strategic planning is protecting us or insulating us from the transformation our students need”

C: Call It - Questions of Clarity (7 minutes)

Group Discussion:

- “Based on the article, what’s the fundamental difference between strategic planning and strategic building?”
- “What are the four types of leaders Dr. Hill identifies, and which one do you see most commonly in education?”
- “What are the four strategic shifts the October roundtable leaders are navigating?”

Facilitation Notes:

- Capture key insights on shared space
- Clarify any misconceptions about builders versus other leadership types
- Reference key concepts from the article: “Students didn’t drop out. They opted out.”

- Note the 18-month window without creating panic—create urgency

O: Own It - Questions of Meaning (7 minutes)

Individual Reflection:

- “Which of the four leadership types (Coaster, Climber, Dreamer, Builder) do you see yourself leaning toward in your current role, and why?”
- “Which of the four strategic shifts feels most threatening to your current approach?”
- “What strategic initiative are you currently planning that you know deep down needs to be built instead?”

Paired Discussion:

- Have participants share their reflections with a partner
- Partners ask: “What would it cost you personally to shift from planning to building here?”

R: Response - Options for Practice (8 minutes)

Application Exercise:

Working individually, then in small groups:

1. Select one strategic initiative currently in planning phase
2. Apply the Builder’s Framework:
 - **Identity Shift Required:** What educator identity must evolve for this to work?
 - **Employer Reality:** What does the end user (employer, next level institution) actually need?
 - **Immediate Value:** What could students gain while learning, not just after graduating?
 - **Ecosystem Partner:** Who’s your “competitor” who could become your most valuable partner?
3. Partners provide feedback using the prompt: “What would shift if you started building this next week instead of planning it next year?”

Group Sharing:

- Invite 2-3 volunteers to share their builder approach
- Facilitate peer feedback on what would make this irresistible to students

E: Execute - Commitment to Practice (5 minutes)

Individual Commitment:

Each participant completes the following:

1. “In the next 24 hours, I will take one builder action by...”
2. “The one ‘competitor’ I will reach out to as a potential ecosystem partner is...”
3. “I will protect 20% strategic thinking time by...”

Accountability Structure:

- Each person names an accountability partner who will check in within one week
- Partners exchange one specific question: “Did you build or did you plan?”

Closing (3 minutes)

- Round-robin: Each person shares one word describing their shift from this session
- Remind participants of the article’s challenge question: “Is your strategic plan designed to defend what you have, or to build what students need?”
- Leader closes with commitment to model builder behavior in upcoming leadership decisions

Key Concepts for Reference

- “Students didn’t drop out. They opted out.”
- The four leadership types: Coasters, Climbers, Dreamers, Builders
- “The real disruption isn’t technology replacing teachers—it’s technology redefining what teaching means”
- The four strategic shifts: Design Backwards, Create Immediate Value, Navigate AI Tension, Build Ecosystems
- “When you plan alone, you optimize your institution. When you build together, you transform the entire educational ecosystem.”
- The 18-month proactive transformation window
- 20% strategic thinking time as non-negotiable

Facilitation Tips for Difficult Moments

If someone says: “But we need a plan before we can build...”

Respond with: “What if planning has become the sophisticated way we avoid building? What’s one thing you could build this week while the plan is forming?”

If someone says: “Our board/faculty/community won’t support this kind of change...”

Respond with: “The leaders in the October roundtable faced the same resistance. What they discovered is that people resist plans but join builds. What could you invite people to build with you?”

If someone says: “We don’t have 18 months—we have immediate fires to fight...”

Respond with: “That’s exactly the point. You’re already in survival mode. The question is whether you’re building your way out or managing your way down.”

Remember: Your role is to facilitate discovery, not direct conclusions. Model the very principle you’re discussing by creating space for honest assessment and building action together. The builders in your room are waiting for permission to stop perfecting plans and start transforming systems.