

## Core Question

Todd Greer challenged participants to consider a difficult leadership question:

**How can organizations remain faithful to their mission while continuously adapting to a changing world?**

Drawing from his work in innovation, entrepreneurship, higher education, and organizational strategy, Greer argued that many institutions become trapped by their own success. They become highly effective at executing existing models while losing the ability to imagine new possibilities.

## Key Insight

Mission should provide stability.

Methods should provide flexibility.

Organizations that confuse the two often struggle to adapt when circumstances change.

## The Danger of Motion Without Direction

Greer began by observing that most organizations are busy.

Schools hold meetings, launch initiatives, manage programs, and respond to daily demands. Yet activity alone does not guarantee progress.

He challenged leaders to ask:

- Where are we actually headed?
- How do we know we are moving in the right direction?
- When was the last time we questioned our assumptions?

## Key Insight

Urgency often creates speed.

Speed does not necessarily create progress.

Organizations can become exceptionally efficient at moving in the wrong direction.

## Lessons from Blockbuster and Netflix

One of Greer's primary examples was Blockbuster.

At its peak, Blockbuster had:

- Thousands of locations

- Tens of millions of customers
- A highly successful business model

Yet the company failed because it could not imagine a future that looked fundamentally different from its present.

When Netflix offered itself for acquisition, Blockbuster dismissed the idea because it conflicted with existing assumptions about how customers would consume entertainment.

### **Key Insight**

Execution excellence is not enough.

Organizations must also cultivate the ability to recognize emerging opportunities and threats before they become obvious.

Greer challenged school leaders to ask:

What is the "Netflix" currently emerging in our environment?

### **Explorers and Exploiters**

A central framework of the presentation distinguished between two organizational mindsets.

#### **Explorers**

Explorers:

- Search for new opportunities
- Ask "what if?"
- Experiment with new ideas
- Challenge assumptions

#### **Exploiters**

Exploiters:

- Focus on execution
- Improve existing systems
- Maximize efficiency
- Deliver consistent results

Both are essential.

However, organizations often allow these groups to operate in opposition to one another.

### **Key Insight**

Innovation and execution are not competing priorities.

Healthy organizations create systems that connect exploration and execution rather than forcing leaders to choose between them.

### **Search to Scale**

To bridge the gap between innovation and execution, Greer introduced a framework he calls:

#### **Search to Scale.**

The framework consists of four stages:

##### **1. Search**

Organizations practice disciplined curiosity.

They ask:

- What opportunities are emerging?
- What assumptions need to be challenged?
- What problems are we trying to solve?

##### **2. Experiment**

Ideas move from discussion into testing.

Rather than debating possibilities endlessly, organizations run small experiments designed to generate learning.

##### **3. Execute**

Successful experiments become operationalized.

Resources, staffing, and processes are aligned to support reliable implementation.

##### **4. Scale**

Successful innovations are shared, replicated, and expanded to increase their impact.

### **The Importance of Experimentation**

Greer argued that many schools talk about innovation but fail to create structures that support experimentation.

Innovation is not a brainstorming session.

Innovation requires testing.

### **Key Insight**

Every organization should have permission to run experiments.

Without experimentation, schools become dependent on assumptions rather than evidence.

He challenged participants to identify:

What experiment have we been afraid to run?

### **Innovation Requires Stewardship**

Greer emphasized that experimentation must be disciplined rather than reckless.

He proposed four requirements for any organizational experiment:

#### **Budget Cap**

Determine how much financial investment is acceptable.

#### **Time Limit**

Establish a clear timeline.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

Define what the organization hopes to learn.

#### **Decision Point**

Determine in advance how success or failure will be evaluated.

### **Key Insight**

Innovation is not about spending more money.

It is about learning more effectively.

### **Lessons from Innovation History**

Throughout the presentation, Greer used examples of organizations that either embraced or resisted change.

Examples included:

#### **Kodak**

Kodak invented the digital camera but failed to embrace it because leadership viewed itself as a film company rather than an imaging company.

### **Xerox PARC**

Xerox developed many foundational computing innovations but failed to commercialize them effectively. Others recognized their value and transformed entire industries.

### **Fosbury Flop**

Dick Fosbury transformed high jumping by reimagining the technique, increasing performance beyond what experts believed possible.

### **Key Insight**

Breakthroughs often occur when someone questions assumptions that everyone else accepts as fixed.

### **Mission Is Fixed, Methods Must Flex**

One of the session's most memorable themes was the distinction between mission and method.

Greer argued that schools often confuse the two.

Mission represents purpose and identity.

Methods represent how the mission is delivered.

Using examples from higher education, technology adoption, and online learning, he demonstrated how institutions can preserve their mission while dramatically changing their approach.

### **Key Insight**

Organizations should be unwavering about why they exist.

They should be highly adaptable about how they achieve that purpose.

### **Naming Risks and Assumptions**

Greer challenged leaders to become more intentional about identifying hidden assumptions.

Organizations often focus on the risks associated with change.

They spend far less time considering the risks associated with staying the same.

### **Key Insight**

Maintaining the status quo is also a decision.

It carries risks that deserve the same level of scrutiny as proposed innovations.

Leaders should ask:

- What assumptions are we making?
- What risks accompany change?
- What risks accompany inaction?

### **The Power of Networks**

Greer argued that innovation rarely happens in isolation.

Schools benefit when they learn from:

- Peer institutions
- Professional associations
- Community partners
- Parents
- Alumni
- Frontline employees

He used Wikipedia as an example of how networks can create value at scale through collective learning and continuous improvement.

### **Key Insight**

The future belongs to organizations that learn quickly and share what they learn with others.

### **Listening to the Right Voices**

Greer noted that some of the most important innovation ideas come from people closest to daily operations.

These individuals often see emerging problems before senior leaders do.

Schools should actively seek insight from:

- Teachers
- Administrative staff
- Operations teams
- Parents
- Students
- Community stakeholders

## Key Insight

Innovation frequently begins at the edges of an organization rather than at the center.

## Questions for School Leaders

Greer concluded with three questions he believes every organization should ask regularly:

### 1. What are we overprotecting?

What traditions, programs, or assumptions have become untouchable despite changing circumstances?

### 2. What should we be searching for?

What opportunities, trends, or emerging needs deserve greater attention?

### 3. Who are we not listening to?

What voices or perspectives are missing from our conversations?

## Key Takeaway

Todd Greer's central message was that sustainable organizations balance stability and adaptability.

Mission provides clarity and continuity.

Innovation provides relevance and growth.

Schools that thrive in a changing world are those that intentionally search for new opportunities, run disciplined experiments, execute what works, and scale successful ideas.

As Greer summarized:

**The mission is fixed. The methods must flex.**