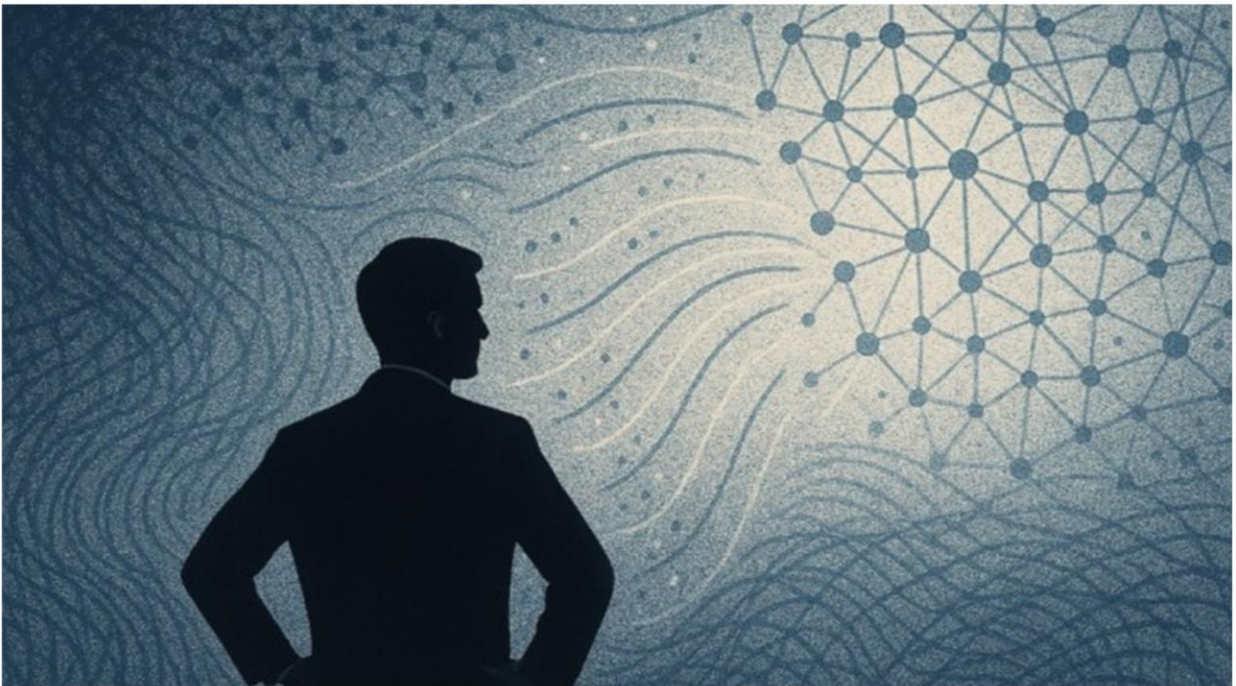




Mastering Strategy in the Age of AI: A Leadership Guide

*A practical playbook for leaders who want clarity,
confidence, and adaptability in times of transformation.*



Introduction

When I ask executives about their strategy, I often hear:

“Our strategy is our OKRs.”

“Our strategy is to be the market leader.”

“We’re focused on the product roadmap.”

All of these are important—but none of them are strategy.

Strategy is not a plan or a slogan. It’s a mindset. It’s the discipline of seeing the system you operate in, making intentional choices, and guiding your organization to adapt when the rules inevitably change.

In the era of AI, the rules that define our industries are changing faster than ever. Add economic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions, and it seems like all the playbooks that have made us successful to date are right out the window.

That’s why I teach leaders to master strategy through three simple, powerful steps: **Start with Systems, Reveal Your Choices, and Empower Adaptation.**

I wrote a **10-part LinkedIn series** that details these steps and shows how leaders can integrate the **Art and Science of Strategy**—while partnering with AI instead of just reacting to it.

This guide brings that series together into a practical playbook. My hope is that you don’t just read these pages, but use them with your team, in your leadership meetings, and in your own reflection.

Because strategy isn’t something you finish.

Strategy is something you live.

See you on the journey,

Brandon

Brandon Barnett

CEO & Co-Founder, Trigate Coaching

How to Use This Guide

Each section is short and actionable, structured to make strategy practical:

- **Core Idea** – the big insight to remember
 - **Why It Matters** – why this idea is urgent for leaders now
 - **Questions to Ask** – prompts you can use to spark conversation with your team
 - **Practical Moves** – steps you can apply today to sharpen your strategy
 - **AI Partner Tip** – how to use AI to support (not replace) your strategic thinking
 - **Article Link** – access the LinkedIn article to go deeper on the topic
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1. Strategy in the Age of AI – Why Everything Is Changing

Core Idea

Artificial Intelligence reshapes business through three progressive waves: **Efficiency, New Capabilities, and Rule Rewrites**. In the first wave, AI automates tasks and lowers costs. In the second, it enables what was once impossible, such as hyper-personalization or real-time analytics. In the third, it redefines entire industries and rewrites competitive rules.

Why It Matters

Most organizations overestimate wave one and underestimate waves two and three. Treating AI as merely a cost-saving tool blinds leaders to deeper transformation. A robust strategy recognizes AI's role as both disruptor and enabler and positions the organization to adapt across all three waves.

Questions to Ask

- Which AI wave is our industry currently in?
- How resilient is our strategy to the shifts of waves two and three?
- Which of our assumptions about value creation or competition could AI overturn?

Practical Moves

- Map your organization's exposure to each wave.
- Build optionality into your strategy by preparing multiple pathways based on testable beliefs.
- Identify capabilities your organization will need to remain relevant as AI reshapes value.

AI Partner Tip

Use AI not just for productivity but for **scenario modeling**. Prompt it with questions like: *How could AI alter our customer expectations?* Or *what new entrants might emerge if AI rewrites industry rules?* This helps you pressure-test your strategy against different futures.

Article Link: [Link to full post](#)

2. Step 1: Start with Systems

Core Idea

Strategy begins not with products or goals, but with systems. Every industry is an interconnected network of players, power dynamics, regulations, and shifting technologies. Understanding the system reveals how value is created, delivered, and captured, as well as where the rules are stable versus unstable.

Why It Matters

Without system awareness, organizations mistake local optimization for strategy. They may innovate within a narrow scope while missing larger shifts. AI amplifies complexity, making system mapping essential. Strategy rooted in systems gives leaders foresight and prevents blind spots.

Questions to Ask

- Who are the rule-makers shaping our industry?
- Which dynamics in our ecosystem are stable, and which are shifting?
- How is AI changing the rules of value creation?

Practical Moves

- Map your ecosystem's key players, regulators, and technologies.
- Identify where feedback loops or network effects create power concentrations.
- Reassess regularly as AI accelerates system shifts.

AI Partner Tip

AI can analyze patterns across industries, highlight emerging players, and visualize networks. Use it to expand your perspective, but remember: only leaders can interpret the significance of system shifts.

Article Link: [Link to full post](#)

3. Your Role in the System Is Your Real Strategic Advantage

Core Idea

True competitive advantage lies in your role within a system—not in features or branding. Roles such as orchestrator, platform, bridge, or trusted gatekeeper create asymmetric influence. The stronger and more central your role, the more resilient your organization becomes.

Why It Matters

Roles define your organization's relevance. A peripheral role risks obsolescence as the system evolves. A central role allows you to shape industry rules and gain resilience. Strategy is about intentionally choosing and reinforcing the role you want to play.

Questions to Ask

- What role do we currently play in our system?
- Are we central to influence and value flow—or reactive at the edges?
- What role would make us more essential and less replaceable?

Practical Moves

- Define your current role clearly and measure its centrality.
- Explore roles that increase your influence on system rules.
- Align investments and partnerships to reinforce your chosen role.

AI Partner Tip

Use AI-driven network analysis to map influence patterns. This reveals whether you are central or peripheral and where opportunities exist to shift your role.

Article Link: [Link to full post](#)

4. Step 2: Reveal Your Choices

Core Idea

Plans often mask choices. Strategy requires surfacing real options and testing the beliefs that underpin them. Each option carries assumptions about the environment, industry, and your organization. Making these explicit prevents bias and improves decision quality.

Why It Matters

Most failed strategies collapse not because of poor execution, but because leaders never clarified their real choices. By revealing options and surfacing beliefs, leaders can align decisions with reality and adapt as conditions shift.

Questions to Ask

- What are our real options—including doing nothing?
- What would we have to believe for each option to succeed?
- Which beliefs are testable now, and which must be monitored over time?

Practical Moves

- List all possible pathways, including unconventional ones.
- Identify the key beliefs underpinning each option.
- Establish a process for testing and monitoring those beliefs.

AI Partner Tip

Ask AI to generate alternative strategic options and highlight the assumptions behind them. Use it to broaden your choices, but remember: leaders must decide which beliefs to commit to.

Article Link: [Link to full post](#)

5. Step 3: Empower Strategic Adaptation

Core Idea

Strategy is not a fixed plan—it is an adaptive cycle. Empowering your organization to adapt requires clarity of logic, transparency of triggers, and distributed participation. Adaptation is most effective when people closest to change can contribute signals.

Why It Matters

Markets shift at the edges first. Without empowering those at the edges to influence strategy, leaders miss early signals. A living strategy incorporates feedback loops, enabling organizations to pivot quickly without losing coherence.

Questions to Ask

- What triggers should cause us to revisit our strategy?
- How do we empower employees to contribute signals without fear?
- How do we communicate the logic behind our choices so adaptation feels coherent?

Practical Moves

- Share the rationale and triggers for reevaluation across the organization.
- Encourage employees to surface weak signals and insights.
- Build structured feedback loops for ongoing learning.

AI Partner Tip

AI can detect anomalies and early signals before they are obvious. Use it to feed your adaptation process, but let humans contextualize and decide when to pivot.

Article Link: [Link to full post](#)

6. Strategy Is a Conversation – Not a Command

Core Idea

Strategy thrives as a dialogue, not a decree. It must be co-created, explained, and continuously discussed. Conversations ensure alignment, uncover hidden assumptions, and engage the wisdom of the entire organization.

Why It Matters

Top-down mandates often fail due to tacit resistance or lack of clarity. When strategy lives as a conversation, it builds shared ownership and resilience. Leaders shift from announcing strategy to facilitating dialogue around it.

Questions to Ask

- Do our teams understand the “why” behind our choices or only the “what”?
- Where can we turn one-way communication into two-way conversation?
- How do we keep the strategy conversation alive, not one-off?

Practical Moves

- Facilitate strategy discussions at multiple levels.
- Create space for dissent and alternative perspectives.
- Regularly revisit choices and beliefs in open dialogue.

AI Partner Tip

AI can synthesize organizational feedback and detect misalignment in perception. Use it to spot blind spots, but leaders must build trust through open and honest conversation.

Article Link: [Link to full post](#)

7. The Hidden Power of “What Would We Have to Believe?”

Core Idea

The question “*What would we have to believe to be true for this to work?*” shifts strategy from opinion-driven debate to belief-driven clarity. It makes hidden assumptions explicit and testable.

Why It Matters

Unstated assumptions are the biggest risk in strategy. Making beliefs explicit transforms subjective debate into structured inquiry. This framework also lowers barriers to participation, inviting more diverse voices into the strategy process.

Questions to Ask

- What beliefs about global conditions must hold true for our strategy to succeed?
- What beliefs about our industry dynamics underpin our choices?
- What beliefs about our own organization are we assuming?

Practical Moves

- Categorize beliefs into global, industry, and organizational layers.
- Document these beliefs clearly.
- Design processes for testing and monitoring them over time.

AI Partner Tip

AI can surface implicit assumptions and generate scenarios based on alternative beliefs. Use it to challenge your thinking, but leaders must decide which beliefs matter most.

Article Link: [Link to full post](#)

8. Grove & Burgelman Were Right: Let Chaos Reign, Then Rein It In

Core Idea

Stable markets allow optimization. Unstable markets demand exploration. Strategy in nonlinear environments requires alternating between openness to chaos and disciplined coherence.

Why It Matters

AI is accelerating instability. Leaders who cling to linear tools risk falling behind. Embracing exploration during uncertainty and reining in choices once clarity emerges allows organizations to thrive amid nonlinear change.

Questions to Ask

- Is our market currently stable or unstable?
- What signals tell us to explore, and what signals tell us to commit?
- How do we balance exploration with coherence?

Practical Moves

- Diagnose your industry's current state.
- Allow diverse teams to explore multiple pathways during instability.
- Rein in choices once sufficient clarity is available.

AI Partner Tip

AI can model nonlinear dynamics and highlight emerging inflection points. Use it to sense instability earlier—but leaders must determine when to open up exploration and when to crystallize strategy.

Article Link: [Link to full post](#)

Learn More: *Let Chaos Reign, Then Rein In Chaos – Repeatedly: Managing Strategic Dynamics For Corporate Longevity* By [Robert A. Burgelman](#) and Andrew Grove [Link to paper](#)

9. Why Listening Is the New Strategic Superpower

Core Idea

Listening—deep, disciplined, pattern-detecting listening—is a critical strategic capability. It involves sensing weak signals, uncovering unspoken assumptions, and recognizing patterns that precede disruption.

Why It Matters

Most organizations prioritize telling over listening. Yet adaptation depends on recognizing signals early. Listening is the gateway to both understanding systems and empowering adaptation. Leaders who listen strategically can act before shifts become obvious.

Questions to Ask

- What signals are we ignoring because they feel inconvenient?
- Who at the edge of our organization holds insights we haven't heard?
- How can we institutionalize listening as a strategic discipline?

Practical Moves

- Build mechanisms to capture frontline and edge insights.
- Train leaders to recognize unspoken assumptions during dialogue.
- Treat listening outputs as critical data in your strategy process.

AI Partner Tip

AI can amplify listening by analyzing unstructured data, detecting anomalies, and clustering weak signals. Leaders must still choose which whispers to act upon.

Article Link: [Link to full post](#)

10. AI Is Your Challenge. Strategy Is Your Solution. AI Is Your Partner.

Core Idea

AI is simultaneously the most significant business challenge and the most powerful strategic partner of our time. Leaders cannot treat it as a tool alone. Thriving in the Age of AI requires rethinking value creation, competitive rules, and organizational adaptability.

Why It Matters

Treating AI as a technology adoption plan leaves organizations vulnerable. Only strategy—anchored in choices, beliefs, and adaptation—positions organizations to benefit from AI while shaping its impact.

Questions to Ask

- How is AI reshaping our value chain today?
- Which wave of AI transformation are we in, and are we ready for the next one?
- How can we treat AI as a co-strategist, not just a tool?

Practical Moves

- Map your strategy against the three waves of AI.
- Anchor your choices in explicit beliefs about AI's role.
- Design adaptation processes that integrate AI insights without ceding leadership judgment.

AI Partner Tip

Use AI to model future scenarios, stress-test your beliefs, and surface blind spots. Let it expand your perspective—but keep accountability and choice firmly with human leaders.

Article Link: [Link to full post](#)

One Final Thought

The leaders who thrive in the Age of AI won't be the ones with the slickest PowerPoints or the most detailed plans. They'll be the ones who:

- **Start with systems** to understand the dynamics that shape their world
- **Reveal their choices** and the beliefs required to make them real
- **Empower strategic adaptation** so the organization learns and pivots together
- **Lead conversations, not commands**, inviting voices from the edges
- **Listen deeply** to signals others ignore
- **Partner with AI** as a powerful amplifier, while staying grounded in human judgment and vision

AI may be your challenge.

Strategy is your solution.

And AI—if you lead with clarity and courage—can be your partner.

The future doesn't need perfect plans. It needs curious, systems-savvy leaders willing to make bold choices, test their beliefs, and adapt in real time. Leaders who can blend the **science of frameworks** with the **art of human leadership**.

That's the work of a strategist in the Age of AI.

At **Trigate Coaching**, we empower leaders and teams to master the art and science of strategy.

If you're ready to elevate your organization's strategic clarity and confidence, connect with us. Together, we'll transform AI from a source of disruption into a partner for growth.