



## The Adaptive Executive: Leading Through Uncertainty by Leveraging Your Resources by Dr. Tony Robinson | Nonprofit Summit | May 14, 2026

Nonprofit executives are navigating unprecedented complexity - from staff burnout and talent turnover to technological change and funding uncertainty. Traditional leadership models that rely on the leader doing or directing everything are no longer sustainable. This session explores how nonprofit executives can thrive in unpredictable times by rethinking how they use their most valuable resources - their time, their people, their boards, and their technology. Rather than doing more with less, leaders will learn how to do *better* with what they already have.

### 1. Redefining the Role of the Executive

Main Idea: Move from “chief doer” to “chief multiplier.”

- Traditional leadership = control, oversight, personal output
- Adaptive leadership = leverage, enablement, systems thinking
- Your value is no longer in what *you do*, but in what you *unlock in others*

Key Shift: From *execution-focused leader* → *capacity-building leader*

### 2. Leveraging Your Time: Focus on What Only You Can Do

Main Idea: Your time is your most constrained and misused resource.

- Identify “only I can do” vs. “someone else can own” work
- Eliminate, automate, or delegate low-value tasks
- Protect time for strategy, relationships, and vision

Core Tool: Time audit + “Stop Doing” list

### 3. Leveraging Your People: Build, Trust, and Let Go

Main Idea: Teams don’t grow if leaders don’t release control.

- Delegation is not task assignment - it’s ownership transfer
- Clarity (outcomes, roles, expectations) reduces the need to micromanage
- Psychological safety and trust drive performance

Key Tension: Letting go of control vs. maintaining accountability

### 4. Leveraging Your Board: From Oversight to Strategic Asset

Main Idea: Most boards are underutilized sources of influence, expertise, and access.

- Shift mindset: board members as partners, not just governors
- Identify and activate board strengths (networks, skills, influence)
- Make clear, specific, and actionable “asks”

Practical Reframe: Every board meeting should generate *value*, not just review information



## 5. Leveraging Technology (Especially AI): Expanding Capacity

Main Idea: Technology is a force multiplier, not a replacement for people.

- AI can streamline communications, reporting, fundraising, and admin tasks
- Start small: focus on high-frequency, low-complexity tasks
- Ethical use: transparency, accuracy, and mission alignment

Key Opportunity: Free up human capacity for relationship-building and strategy.

## 6. Leading Through Uncertainty: The Adaptive Mindset

Main Idea: You don't need all the answers - you need the ability to respond effectively.

- Embrace iteration over perfection.
- Communicate clearly even when direction evolves.
- Build organizational resilience through shared leadership.

Core Traits of Adaptive Executives:

- Self-awareness
- Flexibility
- Decisiveness under ambiguity
- Willingness to let go

## 7. Integration Point - Resource Leverage Framework

“Most of us were trained to solve problems by putting in more effort. But adaptive executives solve **problems by pulling the right levers (i.e. time, people, board, or technology). The goal isn't to do more. It's to leverage better.**”

## 8. Adaptive Executive Mindset & Framework Shift

When faced with a challenge (e.g. launching a new program, fixing a funding gap, or managing team overload), an adaptive executive uses the framework to shift their mindset.

### ***Instead of:***

“I need to figure this out.”

### ***Consider this:***

- Do I need to refocus my time?
- Can I empower someone on my team?
- Should I activate a board member?
- Is there a tool or AI that can support this?



## 9. Adaptive Executive Mindset & Framework Shift cont.

Most nonprofit leaders default to:  
Effort as the primary strategy

This framework shifts them to:  
Leverage as the primary strategy

## 10. The Resource Leverage Framework

Main Idea: Sustainable leadership comes from aligning and maximizing all resources.

- Time → Focus
- People → Ownership
- Board → Influence
- Technology → Efficiency

Simple Model: *Leverage > Effort*

*Impact comes from how well resources are used, not how hard leaders work.*

## 11. Activating the Four The Four Levers of the Resource Leverage Framework

### 1. Time → Focus

- Am I spending time where I add the most value?
- Should this even be on my plate?

### 2. People → Ownership

- Who can own this instead of me?
- Have I truly delegated outcomes, not just tasks?

### 3. Board → Influence

- Is there someone on my board who can accelerate this?
- Am I underutilizing their networks, expertise, or credibility?

### 4. Technology → Efficiency

- Can this be automated, streamlined, or supported by AI/tools?
- Am I doing manual work that doesn't require human creativity?

## 12. From Insight to Action

Main Idea: Change only happens with intentional follow-through.

- Identify three things to stop doing.
- Identify three resources to better leverage immediately.
- Describe your transition strategy.
- Commit to a 30-day action.

Closing Principle: Small shifts in leverage create exponential impact over time.