



THE AMERICAN ACADEMY FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Grades 6–12 • Birmingham, Alabama

STUDENT PRE-ORIENTATION ACADEMIC & LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Strategize for Success

The Blueprint

Seven Biblical Principles for Strategic Thinking, School Success & Leadership

Monday, August 24, 2026 • 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM • Virtual, via Zoom

STUDENT NAME: _____

Welcome to The Blueprint

Almost every student says they want to be successful. That was never the hard part. Wanting it is easy — building it takes a plan.

Success is not an accident, and it is not just a feeling. It requires a definite decision, diligence, focus, and commitment. This guide gives you a framework — The Blueprint — for what strategic thinking and strategic living actually look like, built from the true story of one of the most effective leaders in Scripture: Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer, not a builder. He had no construction experience and no team when he started. But he rebuilt the walls of an entire city in 52 days — because he followed a clear, repeatable process. That process is The Blueprint, and it works the same way for a school year as it did for a city wall.

How to Use This Guide

Each of the seven principles includes a plain-language definition, key terms, the Nehemiah connection, three supporting Scriptures, what the principle looks like in real student life, and a short prompt for you to complete during today's training.

At the end, you will complete My Blueprint — a one-page commitment you write, sign, and keep. Bring a pen.

Today's Training

Monday, August 24, 2026 • 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM • Virtual, via Zoom

Professional attire is required for this session, even though it is online.

A Note on Scripture

Scripture passages throughout this guide are presented in expanded, plain-language wording — in the spirit of the Amplified Bible's approach of unpacking key words for clarity — so the meaning is immediately clear rather than requiring translation as you read.

NOTES

The Blueprint at a Glance

Seven principles. One logical build: See it → Study it → Decide it → Organize it → Work it → Guard it → Finish it.

#	Principle	The Question It Answers
1	Vision	<i>What am I building?</i>
2	Assessment	<i>What is the real situation I'm working with?</i>
3	Decision	<i>Am I actually committing to this?</i>
4	Counsel & Organization	<i>Who do I need, and how do we divide the work?</i>
5	Diligence	<i>Will I keep working when it's hard?</i>
6	Focus	<i>Will I stay on target when I'm pulled away?</i>
7	Commitment to Completion	<i>Will I finish?</i>

NOTES

Principle 1: Vision

Every leader starts with a clear picture of what they're building.

Key Terms

Vision: A clear, specific picture of a goal before it exists.

Foresight: The ability to think ahead and plan for what comes next.

The Nehemiah Connection

Nehemiah heard that Jerusalem's wall was broken down and its gates burned — and before he ever picked up a tool, that news gave him a clear picture of what needed to be rebuilt. Vision comes before action, every time.

Three Scriptures

They told me, "Those who survived the exile are back in the province, but they are in serious trouble and disgrace — Jerusalem's wall still lies broken, and its gates still lie burned." When I heard this, I sat down and wept. For days I mourned, fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven. — Nehemiah 1:3-4

Where there is no vision — no clear picture of where God is leading — people lose direction and restraint; but the one who holds on to God's guidance and lives by it is truly blessed. — Proverbs 29:18

The LORD answered me: Write the vision down. Make it clear and plain — spell it out in large, legible letters — so that anyone who reads it can run with the message without stumbling. — Habakkuk 2:2

What This Looks Like for You

Naming a specific goal — a GPA, a college, a role you want on a team — instead of a vague "I want to do better."

Write ONE specific goal for this school year. Not "do better" — a real number, name, or outcome.

NOTES

Principle 2: Assessment

Before you commit, you look honestly at where you actually stand.

Key Terms

Assessment: An honest, accurate look at the real situation.

Discernment: The ability to see a situation clearly, without excuses.

The Nehemiah Connection

Before Nehemiah told anyone his plan, he got up at night and went out with only a few men, examining the broken wall and burned gates for himself. He told no one — not the officials, the priests, or the nobles — what he had seen, until he had the full picture (Nehemiah 2:12–16).

Three Scriptures

Nehemiah surveys the broken wall of Jerusalem at night, alone, before telling anyone his plan to rebuild. — Nehemiah 2:12–16

Which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost — to see whether you actually have enough to finish it? Otherwise, once you've laid the foundation and can't complete it, everyone who sees it will mock you: "This person started to build and couldn't finish." — Luke 14:28–30

A house is built through wisdom and becomes strong and lasting through understanding; and through careful, informed knowledge its rooms are filled with every rare and valuable treasure. — Proverbs 24:3–4

What This Looks Like for You

Actually checking your grade in the class before it's too late, being honest about how you spend your time after school, knowing your real transcript instead of guessing.

Name ONE area of school or life where you need to stop guessing and look at the real numbers.

NOTES

Principle 3: Decision

This is the line between wanting it and getting it.

Key Terms

Definiteness of Purpose: A decision that is final, not a maybe.

Resolve: Firm determination to follow through.

The Nehemiah Connection

When Nehemiah brought his plan to the people, they didn't say "we'll think about it." They said, "Let us rise up and build." A decision, not a maybe. This is the principle most people skip — which is exactly why most goals don't happen.

Three Scriptures

*Then I said to them, "You can see the trouble we're in — Jerusalem lies in ruins, its gates burned. Come, let's rebuild the wall, so we are no longer a disgrace." I told them how God's hand had been good to me, and what the king had said. They answered, "Then let's get up and build!" And they put their hands to the good work with fresh resolve. — **Nehemiah 2:17-18***

*But Daniel made up his mind — a firm, settled resolve in his heart — that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food or his wine; so he asked the chief official for permission not to compromise himself this way. — **Daniel 1:8***

*If it seems wrong in your eyes to serve the LORD, then choose for yourselves this very day whom you will serve — but as for me and my household, our decision is made: we will serve the LORD. — **Joshua 24:15***

What This Looks Like for You

Deciding — before Friday night, not during it — that the assignment gets done. A real decision closes off the backup plan that quietly pulls you toward less effort.

Write a decision statement: "I have decided that ..." Make it definite. No "I'll try."

NOTES

Principle 4: Counsel & Organization

No one succeeds alone, and knowing who to ask is a leadership skill.

Key Terms

Counsel: Wise advice sought from others before acting.

Delegation: Assigning the right parts of the work to the right people.

The Nehemiah Connection

Nehemiah assigned specific sections of the broken wall to specific families and groups, so that one massive task became a shared one, divided into pieces each group could actually carry (Nehemiah 3). Earlier, Moses learned the same lesson from his father-in-law Jethro, who taught him to stop trying to judge every dispute alone.

Three Scriptures

Nehemiah assigns each family and group a specific section of the wall to rebuild, dividing one massive task into manageable pieces. — Nehemiah 3

Select capable, trustworthy people from among everyone — people who respect God, are honest, and refuse to be bought — and put them in charge over groups of a thousand, a hundred, fifty, and ten. Let them handle the smaller matters themselves, and bring only the major decisions to you. That way the load will be lighter for you, and they will carry it together with you. — Exodus 18:21-22

Plans fall apart without good counsel and wise input; but with many able advisers, those same plans succeed and hold firm. — Proverbs 15:22

What This Looks Like for You

Using the tutor, the study group, the teacher's office hours, the mentor. Knowing when to ask for help isn't weakness — it's strategy.

Name ONE person you will ask for help this year, and on what.

NOTES

Principle 5: Diligence

This is what you do on the day you don't feel like it.

Key Terms

Diligence: Steady, careful effort continued over time.

Consistency: Doing the work the same way, day after day, not just when it's easy.

The Nehemiah Connection

When the work got hard and threats surrounded the workers, the people kept building anyway — with their whole heart set on the work (Nehemiah 4:6). They built with one hand while holding a weapon in the other, refusing to stop just because it had gotten difficult.

Three Scriptures

So we kept building the wall until it was joined together up to half its height — because the people had their whole heart set on the work. — Nehemiah 4:6

Those who carried building materials worked with one hand and held a weapon with the other; every builder kept his sword strapped to his side, even while he worked. — Nehemiah 4:17-18

A lazy, careless hand leads to poverty, but the hand of the diligent — the one who works with steady purpose — brings wealth. — Proverbs 10:4

What This Looks Like for You

The boring Tuesday-night homework, not just the exciting first day of the project. Grades are built in the unglamorous middle, not the motivated start.

Name ONE task you tend to put off. When exactly will you do it this week?

NOTES

Principle 6: Focus

Every goal has distractions circling it, and leaders learn to say “not now.”

Key Terms

Focus: Deliberate attention kept on what matters most.

Distraction: Anything that pulls attention away from the goal.

The Nehemiah Connection

When Nehemiah’s enemies tried four separate times to lure him away from the wall for a meeting, his answer never changed: he was doing important work and would not come down. He knew that leaving — even briefly — was the whole plan working against him.

Three Scriptures

*Sanballat and Geshem sent word, “Come, let’s meet together” — but they intended to harm me. So I sent messengers back: “I am doing important work, and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it to come meet with you?” — **Nehemiah 6:2-3***

*Friends, I don’t consider that I have already reached the goal. But here is the one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward with everything I have toward what lies ahead, I press on toward the finish line, toward the prize of God’s high calling in Christ Jesus. — **Philippians 3:13-14***

*Since we are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses cheering us on, let us strip off every weight that slows us down and every sin that so easily entangles our feet, and let us run with patient endurance the race God has laid out before us — keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who endured the cross for the joy set before Him and now sits at the right hand of God’s throne. — **Hebrews 12:1-2***

What This Looks Like for You

The phone during homework, the friend group pulling you toward a shortcut, the drama that isn’t yours to carry. Focus means protecting the goal from the noise.

Name your biggest distraction. What will you say “not now” to this year?

NOTES

Principle 7: Commitment to Completion

Starting is common. Finishing is rare — and it's the real difference-maker.

Key Terms

Commitment: A promise to see something through to the end.

Completion: Finishing what was started, not just beginning it.

The Nehemiah Connection

The wall was finished in fifty-two days — completed, not just started. Even Nehemiah's enemies had to admit the work had been done, because they could see it had been accomplished by God (Nehemiah 6:15–16).

Three Scriptures

The wall was finished — completed in just fifty-two days, on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul. When all our enemies heard of it and every surrounding nation saw it, their confidence collapsed; they realized this work had been accomplished by our God. — Nehemiah 6:15–16

I have fought the good fight to the very end. I have finished the race. I have kept and guarded the faith. — 2 Timothy 4:7

So let us not grow tired or lose heart in doing what is good, for at just the right time we will reap a harvest — if we don't give up along the way. — Galatians 6:9

What This Looks Like for You

Finishing the season, the semester, the project you got tired of in week three. This is what shows up on a transcript and a résumé — not how you started, but whether you finished.

Name ONE thing you started and did not finish. What would it take to finish it now?

NOTES

My Blueprint

Your commitment, in your own words. Fill this out, sign it, and keep it.

1. VISION	My goal this year is: _____
2. ASSESSMENT	The honest truth about where I stand right now: _____
3. DECISION	I have decided that: _____
4. COUNSEL & ORGANIZATION	The person I will ask for help is: _____
5. DILIGENCE	The task I will stop putting off is: _____
6. FOCUS	The distraction I will say “not now” to is: _____
7. COMMITMENT	I will finish this by (date): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

“So we kept building the wall... the people had their whole heart set on the work... and the wall was finished.” — Nehemiah 4:6, 6:15