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The 4 Disciplines of Business Execution

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I recently had the pleasure of speaking to Sean Covey, Jim Huling and Chris McChesney about their new book, [The 4 Disciplines of Execution: Achieving Your Wildly Important Goals](#). Sean is the Executive Vice President of Global Solutions and Partnerships for Franklin Covey and also serves as the Leader for Franklin Covey's [Education](#) Practice, which is transforming education throughout the world by developing teachers and students as principle-centered leaders (See [theleaderinme.org](#)). He is the author of bestselling books, including *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* and *The 7 Habits of Happy Kids*. Jim is the [Managing](#) Consultant for FranklinCovey's 4 Disciplines of Execution. He's responsible for the on-going development of the methods and practices, as well as training new consultants. Finally, Chris is the National Execution Practice Leader for FranklinCovey. In this interview, they review the 4 disciplines of execution, why it's hard for entrepreneurs to execute, how to best prioritize your time so you can execute, and more.

What are the 4 disciplines of execution and which one is the most important to get right?

The 4 Disciplines of Execution are precise rules for translating strategy into action at all levels of an organization. When applied, the 4 Disciplines produce extraordinary results by tapping the desire to win that exists in every individual.

Here's a brief summary:

1. *Discipline 1* – The discipline of focus. Extraordinary results can only be achieved when you are clear about what matters most. As simple as this principle may sound, few leaders ever master it. 4DX teaches why focus is so critical and how to overcome your biggest source of resistance.
2. *Discipline 2* – The discipline of leverage. With unlimited time and resources, you could accomplish anything. Unfortunately, your challenge is usually the opposite: accomplish more with less. 4DX shows leaders where they can find real leverage and how to use it to produce extraordinary results.
Discipline 3 – The discipline of engagement. You have the authority to make things happen, but you want more than that – you want the performance that only passion and engagement can produce. 4DX enables leaders to rise from authority-driven compliance to passion-driven commitment in themselves and the people they lead.
3. *Discipline 4* - The discipline of accountability. No matter how brilliant your plan or how important your goal, nothing will happen until you follow through with consistent action. 4DX brings the practices that drive accountability and follow through, despite a whirlwind of competing priorities.

Ultimately, Discipline 4 is the most crucial, since it's the discipline where the actual "game" is played. But remember, Discipline 4 can only happen because Disciplines 1 through 3 set up a winnable game.

So many entrepreneurs focus on the idea but don't end up executing. Why do you think this happens?

There are two fundamental reasons that execution is so difficult. The first is that it requires people to change their behavior. Simply put, if you want to achieve goals you've never achieved

before, you have to do things you've never done before. Changing human behavior is never easy, but it's even harder because of the second challenge: implementing these changes in an environment that's already swirling with urgent priorities – what we call the Whirlwind. Together, these challenges can derail even the best leaders from achieving their goals.

How do you prioritize your time so you can concentrate on what's most important?

In the principles of 4DX, there are three specific requirements for concentrating your time on what's most important:

The first requirement is getting the leader to narrow their focus. This is not only hard in the beginning, it's hard to sustain because leaders are always drawn to new ideas. While innovation is important, without focus the team cannot succeed – so leaders must learn to say “no” or “not now” to new ideas until the results on the strategy have been achieved.

The second requirement is focusing on leading outcomes or behaviors, rather than overall results. [Leaders](#) are most often measured (and compensated) based on results, and over time, most of their focus is on these outcomes. Unfortunately, this focus doesn't drive the highest performance – it's like driving a car while looking in the rearview mirror. 4DX asks a leader to put a disproportionate focus on the outcomes or behaviors that will lead to results.

The third requirement is to institute a cadence of shared accountability. When accountability only exists between each team member and their boss, its effect is limited, but when team members feel accountable to each other, their performance shifts from being professional to personally important. Our experience has consistently shown that people will work hard to avoid disappointing their boss, but they will work harder to avoid disappointing their team. The result is a dramatically increased level of performance and follow-through.

What is the best way to formulate achievable goals?

Do you remember the [Law](#) of Diminishing Returns? Basically, the more you try to do, the less you actually accomplish. This is a stark, inescapable principle we all live with. Somewhere along the way, most leaders forget this. Why? Because smart, ambitious leaders don't want to do less, they want to do more, even when they know better. Isn't it really difficult for you to say “No” to a good idea, much less a great one? And yet, there will always be more good ideas than you and your teams have the capacity to execute. That's why your first challenge is “focusing on the wildly important.”

Discipline 1: Focus on the Wildly Important requires you to go against your basic wiring as a leader and focus on less so that your team can achieve more. When you implement Discipline 1 you start by selecting one (or at the most, two) extremely important goals, instead of trying to significantly improve everything all at once. We call this a “Wildly Important Goal” (WIG) to make it clear to the team that this is the goal that matters most. Failure to achieve it will make every other accomplishment seem secondary—or possibly even inconsequential.

But setting the WIG is not enough. Every WIG must contain a clearly measureable result, as well as the date by which that result must be achieved. For example, a revenue-focused WIG might be: “Increase percent of annual revenue from new products from 15% to 21% by December 31st.” This “from X to Y by When” format recognizes where you are today, where you want to go, and the deadline for reaching that goal. As deceptively simple as this may seem, many leaders often struggle to translate their strategic concepts into a single “from X to Y by When” finish line. But once they've done it, both they, and all the teams they lead, have gained tremendous clarity.

How does a leader create and keep an execution scorecard?

People play differently when they're keeping score. If you doubt this, watch any group of teenagers playing basketball and see how the game changes the minute scorekeeping begins. But the truth of this statement is more clearly revealed by a change in emphasis: People play differently when they are keeping score. It's not about you keeping score for them.

The primary requirement for an effective execution scorecard is that it is designed to motivate the team to win the "game" of achieving your most critical goals. Defining a goal and lead measures can represent a winning game for your team, but it's still a game that's on the drawing board, not one that's being played on the field. Designing a compelling scoreboard – one that's designed for the players – gets your team in the game and more importantly, playing to win. But remember, to be a player's scoreboard it has to be simple, visible, have the right leading and lagging measures, and tell you immediately if you are winning or losing. It's a radically different approach to tracking performance.

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