

Insights from *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling

Why is it so hard to execute promising ideas and important goals?

Authors Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling have surveyed over 200,000 leaders around the world to find out why they struggle to execute. The answers varied, but the authors realized all their answers had one thing in common. The main reason leaders and teams routinely fail to execute promising strategies and important team goals is because they spend all their energy dealing with the whirlwind.

“The real enemy of execution is your day job! We call it the whirlwind. It’s the massive amount of energy that’s necessary just to keep your operation going on a day-to-day basis; and, ironically, it’s also the thing that makes it so hard to execute anything new. The whirlwind robs from you the focus required to move your team forward.” – The 4 Disciplines of Execution

The whirlwind includes all the incoming messages you need to respond to, all the important phone calls you need to take, all the problems you need to resolve, and all the meetings you need to prepare for.

“The whirlwind is urgent and it acts on you and everyone working for you every minute of every day. The goals you’ve set for moving forward are important, but when urgency and importance clash, urgency will win every time.” – The 4 Disciplines of Execution

Executing any promising idea or important goal amid a raging whirlwind requires discipline. It requires the discipline to deal with urgent items while remaining focused on what’s important. The 4 Disciplines of Execution (4DX) is a simple, repeatable, and proven formula to do just that.

Discipline #1: Focus on the WIG

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The first discipline of execution requires sustaining the whirlwind at its current level while you advance one wildly important goal. To find your wildly important goal, DON’T ASK: “What’s most important?” If you ask that question, you’ll inevitably focus on the whirlwind because everything in the whirlwind seems important. Instead, ask yourself: “If everything else remained at its current level of performance, what one achievement would make everything else seem secondary?”

In other words, if you didn’t need to worry about anything else for the time being, what one goal would you focus on right now?

“Once you stop worrying about everything else going backward, you can start moving forward on your WIG.” – The 4 Disciplines of Execution

Discipline #2: Measure Lead Behaviors

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There are two measurements you can focus on while executing: lead behavior measurements and lag result measurements. Lag result measurements are measurements of the results you want. Lead behavior measurements are measurements of the critical day-to-day activities that lead to the results you want.

- More sales calls (lead behavior) leads to more sales (lag result).
- More time spent studying (lead behavior) leads to higher grades (lag result).

Measuring results such as sales or grades can be frustrating because it takes time for your actions to produce measurable results. That’s why they are called lag results.

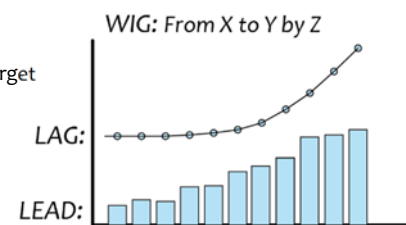
If you measure a value you can’t immediately improve, your willingness to execute will diminish. However, when you focus on a metric you can influence every day or every week, like a lead behavior, you’ll sustain your level of execution. Seeing daily/weekly signs of improvements will increase engagement and drive the execution of your WIG.

Discipline #3: Put up a Scoreboard

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Without a scoreboard, you or your team will lose track of your measurements, forget the score, and lose the will to win. Therefore, you need to create an office scoreboard that includes your WIG (title at the top of the scoreboard), your lag measurements (line chart from left to right), and your lead measurements (bar chart below the lag measurements).

Your office scoreboard should be large enough to notice every day and simple enough to know if you’re winning in 5 seconds or less. If you’re improving the lead measurement, and that lead measurement is corresponding to improvements in the lag measurement, then you’re winning.



Discipline #4: Schedule Weekly Accountability Talks

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The fourth discipline of execution requires setting up weekly accountability meetings with teammates or peers (not bosses or managers). Holding regular weekly accountability meetings with people at your level (called WIG sessions) ensures you stay in the game.

When you set up reoccurring weekly meetings with teammates or like-minded peers to discuss your efforts, you strengthen your commitment to execution.

During your WIG sessions (~15-minute weekly accountability meetings), do three things: **report** on last week’s commitment, **review** the scoreboard and describe the actions you took to advance your WIG, and **commit** to a lead behavior improvement or a specific deliverable for this week.