



Execute Your Strategic Goals and Create Breakthrough Results

By **Chris McChesney**
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Create a Winnable Game

When you execute a strategy that requires a lasting change in the behavior of other people, you are facing one of the greatest leadership challenges you will ever meet. With The 4 Disciplines of Execution[®], you are not experimenting with an interesting theory; you are implementing a set of proven practices that meet that challenge successfully every time.

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— **Chris McChesney**

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If you're leading people, right now you are probably trying to get them to do something different. Whether you lead a small work team or a whole company, no significant result is achievable unless people change their behavior. Yet, to be successful, you will need more than just their compliance; you will need their commitment. As every leader knows, getting the commitment of hearts and minds—the kind of commitment that will endure in the midst of the daily grind—is not easy.

The 4 Disciplines of Execution are designed to create a winnable game. They give you the power to execute your most important goals in the face of competing priorities and distractions. The disciplines are powerful yet simple. They are not, however, simplistic. They can be complicated to apply and sustain because they require you to work differently than you normally do.



Discipline 1: Focus on the Wildly Important

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 most intelligent, ambitious people don't want to do less, especially if it means saying no to good ideas. They're wired to do more, but there are always more good ideas than there is capacity to execute.

Start by selecting one or two Wildly Important Goals®, or WIGs®, instead of trying to work on a dozen goals all at once. I am not suggesting you ignore the work necessary to maintain your operation. I am suggesting you narrow your focus to work on what you want to significantly improve. While any important goal is worth achieving, a Wildly Important Goal must be achieved. Failure to do so renders any of your other achievements inconsequential. That's why it's so crippling to be distracted by 6, 8, 10—or more—important goals at once. You will end up doing a mediocre job on many goals, when you could do a great job on one or two Wildly Important Goals.

When you choose a Wildly Important Goal, you identify the most important objective that won't be achieved unless it gets special attention. In other words, your normal course of business won't make it happen. To define a WIG, identify where you are now, where you want to be, and by when. Said differently, you define a starting line, a finish line, and a deadline. Psychologically, it's very important to have a single measure of success. This is the discipline of focus and it's the first step to creating a winnable game.

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Focusing on the **wildly important** requires you to go against your basic wiring as a leader to do more, and instead, **focus on less** so that your team can **achieve more**.

The **most important contribution** a senior leader can make is to remain focused on the Wildly Important Goal and **resist the allure** of the next great idea.

— Chris McChesney
Co-Author, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*



Discipline 2: Act on the Lead Measures

No matter what you're trying to achieve, your success will be based on two kinds of measures: lag and lead.



Lag measures track the success of your Wildly Important Goal. Lags are measures you spend time losing sleep over at night: revenue, profit, quality, and customer satisfaction are examples. They're called lags because by the time you see them, the performance that drove them has already passed. You can't do anything to fix them. They're history.

In contrast, lead measures track the critical activities that drive the lag measure. They predict the success of the lag measure and are influenced directly by your team. A common example of a lag measure is weight loss. Which activities or lead measures will lead to weight loss? Proper diet and exercise predict the success of weight loss and their activities, both of which can be directly influenced right now.

While a lag measure tells you if you've achieved the goal, the lead measure tells you if you are likely to achieve the goal. While a lag measure is hard to do anything about, a lead measure is virtually within your control because it tracks your own actions. Think of a lead measure as a lever that moves your Wildly Important Goal. Be careful. Even the smartest people fall into the trap of fixating on a lag measure they can't directly influence. This is because lags are easier to measure and they represent the result you ultimately want.

“Without clear measures, the same goal will mean a hundred different things to a hundred different people.”

— Jim Stuart

Former Sr. Consultant, FranklinCovey

Discipline 3: Keep a Compelling Scoreboard

People play differently when they are keeping score.

If you doubt this, watch a group of teenagers playing basketball. As long as no one is keeping score, it's not really a game. They talk and laugh and show off for each other. But when someone starts keeping score, things change. The play becomes intense. They huddle, they plan, they execute with energy. The lag and lead measures won't have much meaning to the team unless they can see the progress in real time. Your teams must know at any moment if they are winning or not; otherwise, they won't know how play the game. A

compelling scoreboard tells the teams where they are and where they should be—information essential to problem solving and decision making.

Discipline 3 is the discipline of engagement. People perform best when they are emotionally engaged, and the highest level of engagement comes when people know the score—whether they are winning or losing the game. It's that simple. The best scoreboard is often

designed by the players. A player's scoreboard is quite different from the complex scoreboard coaches love to make. If players know the score, and if they can influence the lead measures, and if the lead measures move the lag measures, you know you have a winnable game. Disciplines 1, 2, and 3 are nothing more than a formula for creating a winnable game.



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The **magic is in the cadence**. Team members **must be able** to hold each other accountable regularly and **rhythmically**. Each week, one by one, every member of your team answers a **simple question**:

“What are the one or two most important things I **can do** in the **next week** that will have **the biggest impact** on the scoreboard?”

— Chris McChesney
Co-Author, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*



Discipline 4: Create a Cadence of Accountability

Discipline 4 is how we play the game established by Disciplines 1, 2, and 3. It is about creating a “cadence of accountability.”

The cadence of accountability is a rhythm of regular and frequent team meetings that focus on the Wildly Important Goal. These meetings happen weekly, sometimes daily. Ideally, they last no more than 20 minutes. In that brief time, team members hold each other accountable for commitments made to move the score, and determine what to do to move the score this week.

The secret of this discipline are the commitments team members create in the meeting. One by one, team members answer a simple question: “What are the one or two most important things I can do this week that will have the biggest impact on the scoreboard?” Great teams get into a cadence of accountability—a recurring cycle of accounting for last week’s performance and planning to move the score this week.

In the meeting, each team member reports on three things:

- 1. Account.** Report on last week’s commitments. You’ll see a celebration of successes. You will hear people who are unafraid to admit they need help.
- 2. Review.** Examine the scoreboard. Learn from successes and failures. You will sense the excitement when people move the score. You’ll feel the energy when people have learned something new that everyone can use next week.
- 3. Plan.** Clear the path and make new commitments. You’ll see energetic problem solving and people volunteering to help each other. You will hear team members commit to specific actions to move the crucial measures on the scoreboard.

When individuals commit, not only to their manager but to their fellow team members, the commitment goes beyond professional job performance and becomes a personal promise. When the team sees that they are having a direct impact on the Wildly Important Goal, they know they are winning, and nothing drives morale and engagement more than winning.

Chris McChesney
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