THE 4 DISCIPLINES OF EXECUTION BY CHRIS MCCHESNEY

The 4 Disciplines of Execution by Chris McChesney is an excellent guide to removing the distractions of the day-to-day tasks in your day job and being able to focus on 'Wildily Important Goals' and execute these excellently. Using real life examples such as the ever-successful Apple and Steve Jobs, McChesney produces a straightforward and actionable step-by-step guide that could transform the way you and your team work.

DISCIPLINE 1: FOCUS ON THE WILDLY IMPORTANT

The first discipline is to focus your nest effort on the one or two goals that will make all the difference, instead of giving mediocre effort to dozens of goals. Execution starts with focus. Without it, the other three disciplines won't be able to help you.

Focusing on the wildly important means narrowing the number of goals you are attempting to accomplish beyond the day-to-day demands of your whirlwind.

Discipline 1 is about applying more energy against fewer goals because, when it comes to setting goals, the law of diminishing returns is as real as the law of gravity.

One thing
The fundamental principle at work in Discipline 1 is that human beings are genetically hardwired to do one thing at a time with excellence. Science tells us the human brain can give full focus to only a single object at any given moment. You can't even give your best effort to driving a car while talking on a mobile phone and eating a burger, let alone juggle multiple important business goals at once.

In our culture of multitasking, the neural circuits devoted to scanning, skimming, and multitasking are expanding and strengthening, while those used for reading and thinking deeply, with sustained concentration, are weakening or eroding.

One wildly important goal (WIG)

Of course, you don't have to overload the brain. You can leverage the brain's capacity to concentrate superbly on one wildly important goal at a time, while still being aware of the other priorities.

WIGs are the goals you must achieve with total excellence beyond the circling priorities of your day to day. To succeed, you must be willing to make the hard choices that separate what is wildly important from all the many other merely important goals on your radar. Then, you must approach that WIG with focus and diligence until it is delivered as promised, with excellence.

That doesn't mean you abandon all your other important goals. They're still on your radar, but they don't require your nest diligence and effort right now.

The leaders challenge
Why is there so much pressure toward expanding, rather than narrowing, the goals? If you understand the need to focus, why is it so difficult to actually do it?

You might say that, as a leader, it's because you can always see more than a dozen existing things that need improvement and another dozen new opportunities you'd like to be chasing on any given day.

However, more often than any of these external forces, there's one real culprit that creates most of the problem: you. Although the tendencies that drive you to the higher side of the scale are well-intentioned, in a very real sense, you are often your own worst enemy. Being aware of these tendencies is a good place to start.

Things to be aware of
1. One reason you may drive your team to take on too much is that, as a leader, you tend to be ambitious and creative. The problem is that creative, ambitious people always want to do more, not less.
2. Another reason you might lead your team to go after too many goals is to hedge your bets. In other words, if your team pursues everything, then it seems likely that something might work. So, you may resist the increased accountability for results that would come with fewer goals and instead rely on the sheer volume of effort to drive your success.
3. However, the greatest challenge you face in narrowing your goals is simply that it requires you to say no to a lot of good ideas. It may even mean saying no to some great ideas, at least for now. Nothing is more counterintuitive for a leader than saying no to a good idea, and nothing is a bigger destroyer of focus than always saying yes.

"There will always be more good ideas than there is the capacity to execute."

Saying no
As Stephen R. Covey says, "You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage—pleasantly, smilingly, unapologetically—to say no to other things. And the way you do that is by having a bigger 'yes' burning inside."

Once you understand the importance of saying no to good ideas in order to keep your team's focus narrow, you can avoid the first of two focus traps.

Not everything can be a WIG
However, the second trap, trying to turn every- thing in the whirlwind into a WIG, is even more common. Once caught in it, you try to turn everything in the whirlwind(day job) into a goal.

Unless you can achieve your goal with a stroke of the pen, success is going to require your team to change their behavior; and they sim- ply cannot change that many behaviors at once, no matter how badly you want them to. Trying to significantly improve every measure in the whirlwind will consume all of your time and leave you with very little to show for it.

Now what?
Narrow your focus to one or two wildly important goals and consistently invest the team's time and energy into them. In other words, if you want high-focus, high-performance team members, they must have something wildly important to focus on.

Identifying the WIG
A wildly important goal (WIG) is a goal that can make all the difference. Because it's your strategic tipping point, you're going to commit to apply a disproportionate amount of energy to it—the 20 percent that is not used up in the whirlwind.

Sometimes, the choice of a WIG is obvious, but at other times it can be confusing. The urgent priorities in your whirlwind are always competing to be the most important and a very good argument can usually be made for choosing any one of them.

In determining your wildly important goal, don't ask "What's most important?" Instead, begin by asking "If every other area of our operation remained at its current level of performance, what is the one area where change would have the

greatest impact?" This question changes the way you think and lets you clearly identify the focus that would make all the difference.

Two options
Your wildly important goal will come from one of two categories: either from within the whirlwind or from outside it. Within the whirlwind, it could be something so badly broken that it must be fixed, or it could a key element of your value proposition that isn't being delivered.

Outside the whirlwind, the choices tend to be about repositioning yourself strategically. Launching a new product or service, either to counter a competitive threat or seize a huge opportunity, could be a WIG that would make all the difference.

Whether your WIG comes from within the whirlwind or outside it, your real aim is not only to achieve it, but also to then make the new level of performance a natural part of your team's operation.

Focusing an organisation
Up to this point, we've talked a lot about narrowing the focus as it relates to you and your team. This in itself is a huge challenge. Narrowing the focus for an entire organization or even a large portion of an organization, however, is a much bigger challenge.

These are some rules to follow: 1. No team focuses on more than 2 WIGs. 2. The battles you choose must win the war. 3. Senior leaders can veto, but not dictate. 4. All WIGs must have a finish line in the form of X & Y by Z.

DISCIPLINE 2: ACT ON THE LEAD MEASURES

The second discipline is to apply disproportionate energy to the activities that drive your lead measures. This provides the leverage for achieving the lag measures. Discipline 2 is the discipline of leverage. Lead measures are the "measures" of the activities most connected to achieving the goal.

Discipline 1 takes the wildly important goal for an organization and breaks it down into a set of specific, measureable targets until every team has a wildly important goal that it can own. Discipline 2 then defines the leveraged actions that will enable the team to achieve that goal.

Lag measures and lead measures

A lag measure tells you if you've achieved the goal, a 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.

For example, while you can't control how often your car breaks down on the road (a lag measure) you can certainly control how often your car receives routine maintenance (a lead measure). And, the more you act on the lead measure, the more likely you are to avoid that roadside breakdown.

A lag measure is the measurement of a result you are trying to achieve. We call them lag measures because by the time you get the data the result has already happened; they are always lagging. The whirlwind is full of lag measures such as revenue, accounts payable, inventory numbers and so forth.

Lead measures are different; they foretell the result. They have two primary characteristics. First, a lead measure is predictive, meaning that if the lead measure changes, you can predict that the lag measure also will change. Second, a lead measure is influenceable; it can be directly influenced by the team. That is, the team can make a lead measure happen without a significant dependence on another team.

Define the daily and weekly measures

Long-term plans created by most organizations are often too rigid. They lack the ability to adapt to the constantly changing needs and environment of the business.

Discipline 2 requires you to define the daily or weekly measures, the achievement of which will lead to the goal. Then, each day or week, your team identities the most important actions that will drive those lead measures. In this way, your team is creating a just-in-time plan that enables them to quickly adapt, while remaining focused on the WIG.

Lead measures

In Discipline 2, you create lead measures, the movement of which will become the driving force for achieving the WIG. In the months ahead, your team w ill invest consistent energy toward moving these lead measures and, as we have seen with hundreds of teams, this investment will be the key to their success.

For example; WIG of achieving weight loss. Obviously, the lag measure will be your weight as reflected by the bathroom scale. If you format this WIG correctly, you might define it as "Decrease total body weight from 190 pounds to 175 pounds by

May 30" (from X to Y by when).

This is a good start, but what are the lead measures that will be predictive of achieving the goal and, equally important, that you can influence? You would likely choose both diet and exercise, and, of course, you'd be right.

These two measures fulfill the first characteristic of being predictive: Reducing calories consumed and increasing calories burned strongly indicates that you'll lose weight. Just as important, however, these two lead measures are also directly influenceable by you. Achieve these two lead measures at the level specified, outside your daily whirlwind, and you will see your lag measure moving when you step on the bathroom scale.

Counterintuitive?
There's a problem with lead measures. Where do leaders normally fixate, on lead measures or on lag measures? That's right. As a leader, you've likely spent your entire career focusing on lag measures even though you can't directly affect them.

We see this syndrome every day all over the world and in every area of life. The sales leader fixates on total sales, the service leader fixates on customer satisfaction, parents fixate on their children's grades, and dieters fixate on the scale. And, in virtually every case, fixating solely on the lag measures fails to drive results.

There are two reasons almost all leaders do this. 1. First, lag measures are the measures of success; they are the results you have to achieve. 2. Second, data on lag measures is almost always much easier to obtain and more visible than data on lead measures.

Data
In the end, it's the data on lead measures that makes the difference, that enables you to close the gap between what you know your team should do and what they are actually doing. Without lead measures, you are left to try to manage to the lag measures, an approach that seldom produces significant results.

In simple terms: LAG MEASURE: Measures the goal LEAD MEASURE: Predictive - measures something that leads to the goal & Influenceable - something we can influence.

Leverage

The key principle behind lead measures is simply this: leverage. Think of it this way: achieving your wildly important goal is like try- ing to move a giant rock; but despite all the energy your team exerts, it doesn't move. It's not a question of effort; if it were, you and your team would already have moved it. The problem is that effort alone isn't enough. Lead measures act like a lever, making it possible to move that rock.

Get that data

lead measure data is almost always more difficult to acquire than lag measure data, but you must pay the price to track your lead measures. We often see teams struggle with this, zeroing in on a high-leverage lead measure only to say, "Wow, getting that data is going to take real work! We're too busy to do that." If you're serious about your WIG, then you must create a way to track your lead measures. Without data, you can't drive performance on the lead measures; without lead measures, you don't have leverage.

Lead measures and engagement

When a team defines its lead measures they are making a strategic bet. In a sense, they are saying, "We're betting that by driving these lead measures we are going to achieve our wildly important goal." They believe that the lever is going to move the rock, and because of that belief, they engage.

Coming up with the right lead measures is really about helping everyone see themselves as strategic business partners and engaging them in dialogue about what can be done better or differently in order to achieve the WIGs.

DISCIPLINE 3: KEEP A COMPELLING SCOREBOARD

The third discipline is to make sure everyone knows the score at all times, so that they can tell whether or not they are winning. This is the discipline of engagement.

The difference in performance between a team that simply understands their lead and lag measures as a concept, and a team that actually knows their score, is remarkable. If the lead and lag measures are not captured on a visual scoreboard and updated regularly, they will disappear into the distraction of the whirlwind. Simply put, people disengage when they don't know the score. When they can see at a glance whether or not they are winning they become profoundly engaged.

In Discipline 3, the strategic bet for your team, their lead and lag measures, are translated into a visible, compelling scoreboard.

Visual

In implementing Discipline 3, you and your team need to build a players' scoreboard, one that's designed solely to engage the players on your team to win.

If your scoreboard includes complicated data that only you, the leader, understand, it represents a leader's game. But for maximum engagement and performance you need a players' scoreboard that makes it the team's game. The fundamental purpose of a players' scoreboard is to motivate the players to win.

Characteristics of a compelling players scoreboard
1. Is it simple? It has to be simple. Show only the data necessary to play the 'game'.
2. Can I see it easily? It has to be visible to all of the players. Visibility drives accountability.
3. Does it show lead AND lag measures? The lead shows what the players can influence and the lag shows their results.
4. Can I tell at a glance if I am winning? You need to be able to tell within a 5 second glance.

Playing to win

One of the most demoralizing aspects of life in the whirlwind is that you don't feel you can win. If your team is operating exclusively in the whirlwind, they're giving everything they have just to sustain their day to day operation and survive. They're not playing to win; they're playing not to lose. And the result is a big difference in performance.

In essence, you and your team make a bet that you can move the lead measures and that those lead measures will move the lag mea- sure. When it starts to work, even people who have shown little interest become very engaged as the entire team starts to see that they are winning, often for the first time. Keep in mind that their engagement is not because the organization is winning, or even that you as their leader are winning: it's because they are winning.

Engagement drives results or results drive engagement?

Many believe that engagement drives results. However, we know now, that results drive engagement. This is particularly true when the team can see the direct impact their actions have on the results.

Nothing affects morale and engagement more powerfully than when a person feels he or she is winning. In many cases, winning is a more powerful driver of engagement than money, benefits packages, working conditions, whether you

have a best friend at work, or even whether you like your boss, all of which are typical measures of engagement. People will work for money and they will quit over money, but many teams are filled with people who are both well paid and miserable in their jobs.

Scoreboards can be a powerful way to engage employees. A motivating players' scoreboard not only drives results but uses the visible power of progress to instil the mindset of winning.

DISCIPLINE 4: CREATE A CADENCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The fourth discipline is to create a cadence of accountability, a frequently recurring cycle of accounting for past performance and planning to move the score forward.

Discipline 4 is where execution actually happens. As we've said, Disciplines 1, 2, and 3 set up the game; but until you apply Discipline 4, your team isn't in the game

This is the discipline that brings the team members all together, and that is why it encompasses the other disciplines.

Great teams operate with a high level of accountability. Without it, team members go off in all directions with each doing what he/she thinks is most important. Under this approach, the whirlwind soon takes over.

Disciplines 1, 2, and 3 bring focus, clarity, and engagement, which are powerful and necessary elements for your success. But with Discipline 4, you and your team ensure that the goal is achieved no matter what is going on around you.

The WIG session
In Discipline 4, your team meets each at least weekly in a WIG session. This meeting, which lasts no longer than twenty to thirty minutes, has a set agenda and goes quickly, establishing your weekly rhythm of accountability for driving progress toward the WIG.

This discipline literally makes the difference between successful and failed execution.

The focus of the WIG session is simple: to hold each other ac- countable for taking the actions that will move the lead measures, resulting in the achievement of the WIG despite the whirlwind. Easy to say, but hard to do. To ensure that this focus is

achieved every week, two rules of WIG sessions must absolutely be followed.

The rules

1. First, the WIG session should be held on the same day and at the same time every week. This consistency is critical. Without it, your team will never be able to establish a sustained rhythm of performance. Missing even a single week causes you to lose valuable momentum, and this loss of momentum impacts your results. This means that the WIG session is sacred—it takes place every week, even if the leader can't attend and has to delegate the role of leading it.

2. Second, the whirlwind is never allowed into a WIG session. No matter how urgent an issue may seem, discussion in the WIG session is limited solely to actions and results that move the scoreboard. This high level of focus makes the WIG session not only fast but extremely effective at producing the results you want.

3. Keeping your WIG sessions to twenty to thirty minutes is a standard to strive for.any team in any function can learn to conduct fast, efficient sessions centered on the wildly important goal in place of protracted meetings covering every- thing under the sun.

The agenda
1. Account: report on commitments.
2. Review the scoreboard: learn from successes and failures.
3. Plan: clear the path and make new commitments.

Staying focused
To prepare for the meeting, every team member thinks about the same question: "What are the one or two most important things I can do this week to impact the lead measures?"

this focus on impacting the lead measures each week is critical because the lead measures are the team's leverage for achieving the W IG. The commitments represent the things that must happen, beyond the day to day, to move the lead measures. This is why so much emphasis is placed in Discipline 2 on ensuring that the lead measures are influenceable: so that the team can actually move them through their performance each week. Simply put, the keeping of weekly commitments drives the lead measures, and the lead measures drive achievement of the WIG.

Creating a cadence

Remember that the WIG session should move at a fast pace. If each person simply addresses the three cadence items described earlier, it doesn't require a lot of talking.

The WIG session also gives the team the chance to process what they've learned about what does and doesn't work. If the lead measures aren't moving the lag, the team brings creative thinking to the table, suggesting new hypotheses to try. If people are running into obstacles keeping their commitments, team members can commit to clear the path for each other. What might be tough for a frontline worker to achieve might take just a stroke of the pen for the team leader. In fact, as the leader you should often ask each team member "What can I do this week to clear the path for you?"

As you begin to understand the WIG session, you'll also see more clearly the importance of the two characteristics of lead measures we discussed in Discipline 2. If the lead measures are influenceable, they can be moved by the weekly commitments. If they are predictive, then moving them will lead to achievement of the WIG.

The black and the grey

Finally, the WIG session saves your wildly important goals from being engulfed by the whirlwind.

When visualising a day, the grey represents the time dedicated to the whirlwind day-to-day tasks. The black represents your weekly commitments to the WIG.

When we introduce Discipline 4 in our process, some leaders mistakenly picture a week that's mostly black, meaning that the commitments are the predominant focus for the week. This seldom represents reality. The vast majority of your energy will still be spent managing your day-to-day priorities, as it should be. But the critical value of the 4 Disciplines is ensuring that the black—your investment over and above your day to day—stays consistently focused on your WIG.

If your all-grey weeks become a regular experience, you feel the life draining out of you as a leader. Even worse, you will see the same feeling rejected in the engagement and the performance of your team.

WIG sessions are the antidote to all-grey weeks. When the discipline of holding WIG sessions is sustained—when you and your team force the black into the grey every week—not only will you make consistent progress toward your goals, you'll

also begin to feel that you, rather than the whirlwind, are in charge.

Wig sessions and engagement
Three reasons individuals disengage from work:

1. Anonymity: They feel their leaders don't know or care what they are doing.
2. Irrelevance: They don't understand how their job makes a difference.
3. Immeasurement: They cannot measure or assess for themselves the contribution they are making.

On a team that keeps the cadence of WIG sessions, the individual members are not anonymous. On the contrary, they are in the spotlight at least once a week. They are also not irrelevant, because they can see exactly how their commitments are moving the lead measures that drive a wildly important goal. And they are definitely not suffering from immeasurement: They have a clear and public scoreboard that is updated weekly to reflect their performance.

Creating an innovative culture
The WIG session encourages experimentation with fresh ideas. It engages everyone in problem-solving and promotes shared learning. It's a forum for innovative insights as to how to move the lead measures, and because so much is at stake, it brings out the best thinking from every team member.

THE POWER OF THE 4 DISCIPLINES OF EXECUTION

One of the key reasons that 4DX works so powerfully is that it's based on timeless, inviolable principles; and it's proven to work with virtually any organization in any environment.