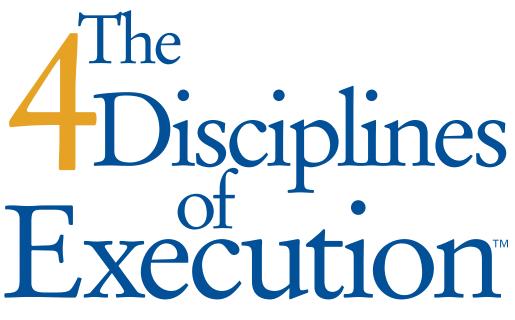
## ACHIEVING YOUR WILDLY IMPORTANT GOALS





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## Foreword

*"The 4 Disciplines of Execution* offers more than theories for making strategic organizational change. The authors explain not only the 'what' but also 'how' effective execution is achieved. They share numerous examples of companies that have done just that, not once, but over and over again. This is a book that every leader should read!"

## Clayton Christensen, Professor, Harvard Business School, and autor of *The Innovator's Dilemma*

Andy Grove, who helped found Intel and then led the enterprise for years as its CEO and chairman, has taught me some extraordinary things. One of them occurred in a meeting where he and several of his direct reports were plotting the launch of their Celeron microprocessor. I was there as a consultant. The theory of disruption had identified a threat to Intel. Two companies—AMD and Cyrix—had attacked the low end of the microprocessor market, selling much lower-cost chips to companies that were making entry-level computers. They had gained a significant market share and then had begun moving up-market. Intel needed to respond.

During a break in the meeting, Grove asked me, "How do I do this?"

I readily responded that he needed to set up a different, autonomous business unit that had a different overhead structure and its own sales force.

Andy said, in his typical gruff voice, "You are such a naïve academic. I asked you *how* to do it, and you told me *what* I should do." He swore and said, "I know what I need to do. I just don't know how to do it."

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I felt like I was standing in front of a deity with no place to hide. Grove was right. I was indeed a naïve academic. I had just shown him that I didn't know the difference between *what* and *how*.

As I flew back to Boston I wondered whether I should change the focus of my research as an academic, trying to develop a theory of "how." I dismissed the idea, however, because I really couldn't conceive how I might develop a theory of "how."

My research has continued to focus, consequently, on the *what* of business—which we call strategy—and it has been quite productive. Most strategy researchers, consultants, and writers have given us static views of strategic issues—snapshots of technologies, companies and markets. The snapshots describe at a specific point in time the characteristics and practices of successful companies versus struggling ones; or of executives who perform better than others at the time of the snapshot. Explicitly or implicitly, they then assert that if you want to perform as well as the best-performing ones, you should follow what the best companies and the best executives do.

My colleagues and I have eschewed the profession of photography. Instead we have been making "movies" of strategy. These are not, however, typical movies that you might see at a theater, where you see fiction conceived in the minds of the producers and screenwriters. The unusual movies that we're making at Harvard are "theories." They describe what causes things to happen and *why*. These theories comprise the "plots" in these movies. In contrast to the movies in a theater that are filled with suspense and surprise, the plots of our movies are perfectly predictable. You can replace the actors in our movies—different people, companies and industries—and watch the movie. Because the plots in these movies are grounded in theories of causality, however, the results of these actions are perfectly predictable.

Boring, you ask? Probably, to those who seek entertainment.

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But managers, who must know whether their strategy—the *what* of their work—is the right one or the wrong one, need as much certainty as possible. Because the theory is the plot, you can rewind the movie and watch the past repeatedly, if you want, to understand what causes what and why to a certain point. Another feature of movies of this sort is that you can watch the future, too—before it actually occurs. You can change your plans, based upon different situations in which you might find yourself, and watch in the movie what will happen as a result.

Without boasting, I think it is fair to say that our research on strategy, innovation, and growth has helped managers who have taken the time to read and understand the theories, or movies, of strategy to become and sustain success more frequently than was historically the case.

What remains is the "how" of managing a company during times of change. This "how" has been studied minimally, until this book.

The reason why good research on "how" has taken so long to emerge is that it requires a different scale of research. Causal theories of strategy—the "what"—typically come from a deep study of one company, as was the case with my disk-drive study. The "how" of strategic change, in contrast, arises incessantly in every company. Developing a theory of "how" means that you can't study this phenomenon once in one company. You can't take snapshots of "how." Rather, you need to study it in deep detail over and over again, over years, in many companies. The scale of this endeavor is why I and other academics have ignored the "how" of strategic change. We simply could not do it. It requires the perspective, insight, and the scale of a company like FranklinCovey to do it.

This is the reason why I am so excited about the book. It isn't a book filled with anecdotes about companies that succeeded once. Rather, the book truly contains a theory of causality of "how" effec-

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tive execution is achieved. The authors have given us not snapshots of execution but movies—movies that we can rewind and study over and over, into which you, as a leader can insert your company and your people as actors. And you can watch your future before it emerges. This book is derived from deep study of many companies over time as they deployed new ways of doing "how," store by store, hotel by hotel, division by division.

I hope you will enjoy this book as much as I have.

— Clayton Christensen, Harvard Business School There are two principal things a leader can influence when it comes to producing results: your *strategy* (or plan) and your ability to execute that strategy.

Stop for a moment and ask yourself this question:

Which of these do leaders struggle with more? Is it creating a strategy, or executing the strategy?

Every time we pose this question to leaders anywhere in the world, their answer is immediate: "Execution!"

Now, ask yourself a second question:

If you have an MBA or have taken business classes, what did you study more—execution or strategy?

When we ask leaders this question, the response, once again, is immediate: "Strategy!" It's perhaps not surprising that the area with which leaders struggle most is also the one in which they have the least education.

After working with thousands of leaders and teams in every kind of industry, and in schools and government agencies worldwide, this is what we have learned: once you've decided what to do, your biggest challenge is in getting people to execute it at the level of excellence you need.

Why is execution so difficult? After all, if the strategy is clear, and you as the leader are driving it, won't the team naturally engage to achieve it? The answer is "no," and it's likely that your own experience has proven this more than once.

#### STRATEGY AND EXECUTION

The book you are reading represents the most actionable and impactful insights from all that we've learned. In it, you will discover a set of disciplines that have been embraced by thousands of leaders and hundreds of thousands of front-line workers, enabling them to produce extraordinary results. When I saw a three-hour meeting on my calendar that day, I was skeptical. As a new VP of Eli Lilly and Company's U.S. affiliate, I was swamped. But since one of my leaders was running the meeting, I decided to attend.

It was a decision I will always be glad I made, because within the first few minutes of the meeting I realized I was seeing something special. I watched a team reporting on the remarkable results they had achieved by piloting a new set of practices known as the 4 Disciplines of Execution. These were individuals who had not only achieved their goals, but who walked and talked like *winners*. Their chests were out and their heads held high. As a leader, I wanted those results, but more important, I wanted that *mindset* throughout my entire organization.

We launched the 4 Disciplines throughout our managed healthcare business, aiming at two critical goals: to dramatically increase customer access to our medicines while simultaneously improving bottom-line profitability. During this same period, there was a larger initiative throughout Lilly to reorganize for more effective operations. We could not have chosen a more difficult context for creating engagement. In the end, we exceeded both of our goals by a significant margin, but these results were not really our greatest outcome.

Our greatest outcome was strengthening our culture by raising the engagement of our teams. During a time of high demand coupled with a reorganization that brought significant change, our employee engagement scores actually *went up*.

#### A LETTER

I often look back on the decision to attend that initial meeting, and more important, on the journey we've made to create not only great business results but also a high-performing culture. It was a pivotal decision for me—one that changed the way I lead forever.

> Alex Azar President, Lilly USA, LLC

B. J. Walker was facing the greatest challenge of her career. When she was the newly appointed Commissioner of the Department of Human Services for the U.S. State of Georgia in 2004, she could see that her twenty thousand employees were completely demoralized. The department had burned through six commissioners in five years and was under constant media scrutiny, due to the number of deaths and accidents involving children in the state's care. For months, her employees had operated under constant fear of making a mistake, which only made their poor productivity worse and led to some of the largest backlogs in the country. B. J. Walker needed a way to bring focus and direction to her team and she knew that the clock was ticking.

Less than eighteen months later, B. J. and her team had reduced repeat cases of child maltreatment by a stunning 60 percent.

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One of the hotels near Marriott International's headquarters, the Bethesda Marriott, wanted to improve performance measures, an effort magnified by being so close to the company's leadership. General Manager Brian Hilger, his team and the hotel's owners worked together on a \$20 million renovation that included remodeled rooms, an impressive lobby and a new restaurant—improvements critical to higher guest scores. And the results were amazing—the hotel looked fantastic. *But the guest scores were still not at desired levels...yet.* 

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The second part of the equation would involve how associates interacted with The second part of the equation would involve how associates interacted with guests and executed at the hotel—a strategy

dependent on new behaviors.

After one year Brian and his team proudly celebrated earning the highest Guest Satisfaction Scores in the thirty-year history of the hotel. As Brian said, "I used to dread the arrival of our new Guest Satisfaction Scores every Friday. Now, I'm excited to get up on Friday mornings."

• • •

These stories from Eli Lilly, the State of Georgia, and Marriott sound very different from each other, but they aren't. For each of these leaders, the challenge was essentially the same. So was the solution.

Their common challenge? Executing a strategy that required a significant change in human behavior—the behavior of many, or even all, of the people in the team or organization.

Their common solution? Deeply implanting The 4 Disciplines of Execution (4DX).

All leaders struggle with this challenge even if they don't realize it. 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, a family or a factory, 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.

We completed more than fifteen hundred implementations of the 4 Disciplines before we were ready to write this book. Why? Because we wanted to test and refine the 4 Disciplines against hundreds of real-world challenges like the ones faced by Alex Azar, B. J. Walker, and Brian Hilger.

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.

#### THE REAL CHALLENGE

Whether you call it a strategy, a goal, or simply an improvement effort, any initiative you as a leader drive in order to significantly move your team or organization forward will fall into one of two categories: The first requires mainly a stroke of the pen; the second requires behavioral change.

Stroke-of-the-pen strategies are those that you execute just by ordering or authorizing them to be done. Simply put, if you have the money and the authority, you can make them happen. It might be a major capital investment, a change in the compensation system, a realignment of roles and responsibilities, adding staff, or a new advertising campaign. While executing these strategies may require planning, consensus, guts, brains, and money, you know that in the end it is going to happen.

Behavioral-change strategies are very different from strokeofthe-pen strategies. You can't just order them to happen, because executing them requires getting people—often a lot of people—to do something different. And if you've ever tried to get other people to change their ways, you know how tough it is. Changing yourself is hard enough.

For example, you may have to get all of your store employees to greet every customer that enters the store within thirty seconds, or get your entire sales force to begin using the new CRM system, or get your product development team to collaborate with the marketing team. If you're Alex Azar or B. J. Walker, you may be changing routines that have been entrenched for decades. This stuff is hard!

#### STROKE OF THE PEN Strategy

Capital Investment Expansion of Staff Process Change Strategic Acquisition Media Buy Change in Product Mix

#### BEHAVIOR CHANGE Strategy

Improved Customer Experience Higher Quality Faster Responsiveness Operational Consistency Consultative Sales Approach Reduced Cost Overruns

Examples of strategic moves that require people to change their behavior contrasted with those that can be executed by "the stroke of a pen."

It's also not uncommon to find many stroke-of-the-pen strategies that, once approved, evolve into those that require significant be-havioral change.

Our colleague Jim Stuart summarized this challenge as follows: "To achieve a goal you have never achieved before, you must start doing things you have never done before." It could be a new sales approach, an effort to improve patient satisfaction, better project management discipline, or adherence to a new manufacturing process. If it requires people to do something different, you are driving a behavioral-change strategy and it's not going to be easy. Have you ever found yourself on the way to work muttering something like, "For the love of heaven, can't we just do this one thing?"

If so, then you remember how it felt when the inability to get people to change was the one thing standing between you and the results you wanted. And you're not alone.

In a key study on organizational change, the global managementconsulting firm Bain & Company reports these findings: "About 65 percent of initiatives required significant behavioral change on the part of front-line employees—something that managers often fail to consider or plan for in advance."

Despite the significance of this problem, leaders seldom recognize it. You don't hear leaders saying, "I wish I were better at driving strategies that require people to do things differently." What you are more likely to hear is a leader saying, "I wish I didn't have Tom, Paul, and Sue to deal with!"

It's natural for a leader to assume the people are the problem. After all, they are the ones not doing what we need to have done. But you would be wrong. *The people are not the problem!* 

W. Edwards Deming, the father of the quality movement, taught that any time the majority of the people behave a particular way the majority of the time, the people are not the problem. The problem is inherent in the system. As a leader, you own responsibility for the system. Although a particular person can be a big problem, if you find yourself blaming the people, you should look again.

When we began to study this challenge several years ago, we first wanted to understand the root causes of weak execution. We commissioned an international survey of working people and examined hundreds of businesses and government agencies. During the early stages of our research we found problems everywhere we looked.

One prime suspect behind execution breakdown was clarity of

the objective: People simply didn't understand the goal they were supposed to execute. In fact, in our initial surveys we learned that only one employee in seven could name even one of their organization's most important goals. That's right—15 percent could not name even one of the top three goals their leaders had identified. The other 85 percent named what they *thought* was the goal, but it often didn't remotely resemble what their leaders had said. The further from the top of the organization, the lower the clarity. And that was just the beginning of the problems we uncovered.

Lack of commitment to the goal was another problem. Even those people who knew the goal lacked commitment to achieving it. Only 51 percent could say that they were passionate about the team's goal, leaving almost half the team simply going through the motions.

Accountability was also an issue. A staggering 81 percent of the people surveyed said they were not held accountable for regular progress on the organization's goals. And the goals were not translated into specific actions—87 percent had no clear idea what they should be doing to achieve the goal. No wonder execution is so inconsistent.

In short, people weren't sure what the goal was, weren't committed to it, didn't know what to do about it specifically, and weren't being held accountable for it.

These were only the most obvious explanations as to why execution breaks down. On a more subtle level, there were problems with lack of trust, misaligned compensation systems, poor development processes and poor decision making.

Our first instinct was to say "Fix everything! Fix it all, and then you'll be able to execute your strategy." It was like advising them to boil the ocean.

As we dug in further, we began to put our finger on a far more fundamental cause of execution breakdown. Certainly all of the

#### THE REAL PROBLEM WITH EXECUTION

problems we just cited—the lack of clarity, commitment, collaboration, and accountability—exacerbate the difficulty of strategy execution. But, in reality, they initially distracted us from seeing the deeper problem. You may have heard the expression, "Fish discover water last." That expression sums up our discovery very well. Like a fish discovering the water it's been swimming in the whole time, we finally realized that the fundamental problem with execution had always been right in front of us. We hadn't seen it because it was everywhere, hiding in plain sight.

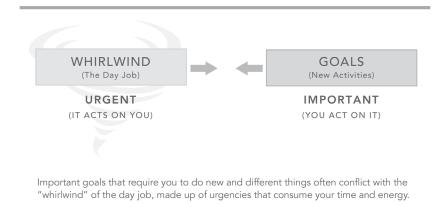
#### THE WHIRLWIND

The real enemy of execution is your day job! We call it the *whirl-wind*. 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 whirl-wind robs from you the focus required to move your team forward.

Leaders seldom differentiate between the whirlwind and strategic goals because both are necessary to the survival of the organization. However, they are clearly different, and more important, they compete relentlessly for time, resources, energy, and attention. We don't have to tell you which will usually win this fight.

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. Once you become aware of this struggle, you will see it playing out everywhere, in any team that is trying to execute anything new.

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Consider your own experience. Can you remember an important initiative that launched well and then died? How did the end come? Was it with a loud crash and a tremendous explosion? Or did it go down quietly over time, suffocated by the whirlwind? We've asked thousands of leaders this question and we always get the same answer: "Slow suffocation!" It's like finding that faded tee-shirt in the bottom of your drawer and saying, "Oh yeah, Operation Summit. I wonder whatever happened to that." It died, and you didn't even have a funeral.

Executing in spite of the whirlwind means overcoming not only its powerful distraction, but also the inertia of "the way it's always progress—all your energy is spent just trying to stay upright in the wind. The challenge is executing your most important goals in the midst of the urgent!

Different leaders experience the whirlwind in different ways. A senior executive with one of the world's largest home-improvement retailers describes it this way: "We don't have dragons swooping down and knocking us off our priorities. What we have are gnats. Every day we have gnats getting in our eyes, and when we look back over the last six months, we haven't accomplished any of the things we said we were going to."

You've almost certainly found yourself facing the whirlwind when you were trying to explain a new goal or strategy to someone who works for you. Can you remember the conversation? Your mind is centered clearly on the goal and you are explaining it in easyto-understand terms. But, while you're talking, the person you are talking to is backing slowly out of the room, all the while nodding and reassuring you, but trying to get back to what they would call *the real work*, another name for the whirlwind.

Is that employee fully engaged in achieving that goal? Not a chance. Is he trying to sabotage your goal or undercut your authority? No. He's just trying to survive in his whirlwind.

To illustrate, one of our colleagues shares this story: "I was chair of the community council for my local high school, and we as a council developed a serious goal of improving test scores. My job was to orient the teachers to the new goal, so I made an appointment with key teachers to explain what we were doing and get things started.

"At first I was baffled—they didn't seem to be listening to me. Slowly, I learned why: On one teacher's little desk was a stack that looked like a thousand papers. It was just one day's collection of essays she would have to evaluate and grade. Plus, she had a parent conference to go to and the next day's lessons to plan. She looked kind of helpless while I jabbered on and on, but she wasn't really listening. There wasn't room in her brain for this, and I didn't blame her!"

Let's summarize what we've said so far. First, if you are going to create significant results you will eventually have to execute a behavioral-change strategy. Stroke-of-the-pen moves will only take you so far. Second, when you undertake a behavioral-change strategy you will be battling the whirlwind—and it is a very worthy adversary, undefeated in many organizations.

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The 4 Disciplines of Execution aren't designed for managing your whirlwind. The 4 Disciplines are rules for executing your most critical strategy *in the midst* of your whirlwind.

#### THE 4 DISCIPLINES OF EXECUTION

Tim Harford, author of *The Undercover Economist*, said, "You show me a successful complex system, and I will show you a system that has evolved through trial and error." 3 In the case of the 4 Disciplines of Execution he is absolutely right. It benefited from wellresearched ideas, but it *evolved* through trial and error.

In our initial research with Harris Interactive we surveyed nearly thirteen thousand people internationally across seventeen different industry groups and completed internal assessments with five hundred different companies. Over the years, we've added to this foundation by surveying almost three-hundred thousand leaders and team members. This research has been valuable as a foundation for the principles and in guiding our early conclusions, but the real insights did not come from research. They came from working with people like you in over fifteen hundred implementations. This effort is what enabled us to develop principles and methods that we know will work regardless of the industry or the nation in which they are implemented.

There is good news and bad news here. The good news is that there are rules—rules for executing in the face of the whirlwind. The bad news? The bad news is that there are rules—the kinds of rules that have immediate consequences if you violate them.

Although the disciplines may seem simple at first glance, they are not simplistic. They will profoundly change the way you approach your goals. Once you adopt them, you will never lead in the same way again, whether you are a project coordinator, lead a small sales team, or run a Fortune 500 company. We believe they represent a major breakthrough in how to move teams and organizations

#### forward.

Here's a quick overview of the 4 Disciplines.

### Discipline 1: Focus on the Wildly Important

Basically, the more you try to do, the less you actually accomplish. This is a stark, inescapable principle that 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.

Focus is a natural principle. The sun's scattered rays are too weak to start a fire, but once you focus them with a magnifying glass they will bring paper to flame in seconds. The same is true of human beings—once their collective energy is focused on a challenge, there is little they can't accomplish.

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.

Take champion cyclist Lance Armstrong. At one point in his career, he completely dedicated himself to winning the Tour de France.

His WIG was to win the big one—again and again. Achieving that goal meant that even when he competed in other races, they were always in service to his WIG of winning the Tour, no matter how

important or prestigious they may have been. It also meant constant specialized training and going over every centimeter of the route and planning precisely how to execute every stage of the Tour. The result of this powerful focus? Lance Armstrong won seven Tours de France—more than anyone in history.4

If you're currently trying to execute five, ten, or even twenty important goals, the truth is that your team can't focus. This lack of focus magnifies the intensity of the whirlwind, dilutes your efforts, and makes success almost impossible. This is especially problematic when there are too many goals at the highest levels of the organization, all of which eventually cascade into dozens and ultimately hundreds of goals as they work their way down throughout the organization, creating a web of complexity.

However, when you narrow the focus of your team to one or two wildly important goals, the team can easily distinguish between what is truly top priority and what is the whirlwind. They move from a loosely defined and difficult-to-communicate collection of objectives to a small, focused set of achievable targets. Discipline 1 is the discipline of focus. Without it, you will never get the results you want. It's also only the beginning.

#### **Discipline 2: Act on the Lead Measures**

This is the discipline of leverage. It's based on the simple principle that all actions are not created equal. Some actions have more impact than others when reaching for a goal. And it is those that you want to identify and act on if you want to reach your goal.

Whatever strategy you're pursuing, your progress and your success will be based on two kinds of measures: lag and lead.

*Lag measures* are the tracking measurements of the wildly important goal, and they are usually the ones you spend most of your time praying over. Revenue, profit, market share, and customer satisfaction are all lag measures, meaning that when you receive them,

the performance that drove them is already in the past. That's why you're praying—by the time you get a lag measure, you can't fix it. It's history.

*Lead measures* are quite different in that they are the measures of the most high-impact things your team must do to reach the goal. In essence, they measure the new behaviors that will drive success on the lag measures, whether those behaviors are as simple as offering a sample to every customer in the bakery or as complex as adhering to standards in jet-engine design.

A good lead measure has two basic characteristics: It's *predictive* of achieving the goal and it can be *influenced* by the team members. To understand these two characteristics, consider the simple goal of losing weight. While the lag measure is pounds lost, two lead measures might be a specific limit on calories per day and a specific number of hours of exercise per week. These lead measures are predictive because by performing to them, you can predict what the scale (the lag measure) will tell you next week. They are influence-able because both of these new behaviors are within your control.

Acting on the lead measures is one of the little-known secrets of execution. Most leaders, even some of the most experienced, are so focused on lag measures that the discipline to focus on the lead measures feels counterintuitive.

Don't misunderstand. Lag measures are ultimately the most important things you are trying to accomplish. But lead measures, true to their name, are what will get you to the lag measures. Once you've identified your lead measures, they become the key leverage points for achieving your goal.

#### **Discipline 3: Keep a Compelling Scoreboard**

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. However, 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.

Discipline 3 is the discipline of engagement. In principle, the highest level of performance always comes from people who are emotionally engaged and the highest level of engagement comes from knowing the score—that is, if people know whether they are winning or losing. It's that simple. Bowling through a curtain might be fun in the beginning; but if you can't see the pins fall it will soon become boring, even if you really love bowling.

If you've narrowed your focus in Discipline 1 (your WIG with a lag measure) and determined the critical lead measures that will keep you on course toward that goal in Discipline 2, you have the elements of a winnable game. The next step is to capture that game on a simple but compelling scoreboard.

The kind of scoreboard that will drive the highest levels of engagement with your team will be one that is designed solely for (and often by) the players. This players' scoreboard is quite different from the complex coach's scoreboard that leaders love to create. It must be simple, so simple that members of the team can determine instantly if they are winning or losing. Why does this matter? If the scoreboard isn't clear, the game you want people to play will be abandoned in the whirlwind of other activities. And if your team doesn't know whether or not they are winning the game, they are probably on their way to losing.

#### **Discipline 4: Create a Cadence of Accountability**

Discipline 4 is where execution really happens. The first three disciplines set up the game, but until you apply Discipline 4, your team isn't *in* the game. It is based on the principle of accountability: that unless we consistently hold each other accountable, the goal naturally disintegrates in the whirlwind.

The cadence of accountability is a rhythm of regular and frequent meetings of any team that owns a wildly important goal. These meetings happen at least weekly and ideally last no more than twenty to thirty minutes. In that brief time, team members hold each other accountable for producing results, despite the whirlwind.

Why is the *cadence* of accountability so important?

Consider the experience of someone with whom we've worked. He and his teen-age daughter made an agreement that she would be allowed the use of the family car if she washed it every Saturday morning. He would meet with her each Saturday to make sure the car was clean.

They met on Saturday for several weeks and everything went well, but then he had to go out of town for two Saturdays in a row. When he returned, he found that the car had not been cleaned. He asked his daughter why she hadn't taken care of her job.

"Oh," she replied. "Are we still doing that?"

It took only two weeks for the accountability system to break down. If this was the case in a one-on-one situation, think how much more it applies to a work team or a whole organization. The magic is in the cadence. Team members must be able to hold each other accountable regularly and rhythmically. Each week, one by one, team members answer a simple question: "What are the one or two most important things I can do in the next week (outside the whirlwind) that will have the biggest impact on the scoreboard?" Then members report on whether they met the previous week's commitments, how well they are moving the lead and lag measures on the scoreboard, and their commitments for the coming week, all in only a few minutes.

The secret to Discipline 4, in addition to the repeated cadence, is that team members create their own commitments. It's common to find teams where the members expect, even want, simply to be told what to do. However, because they make their own commitments, their ownership of them increases. Team members will always be more committed to their own ideas than they will to orders from above. Even more important, making commitments to their team members, rather than solely to the boss, shifts the emphasis from professional to personal. Simply put, the commitments go beyond their job performance to become promises to the team.

Because the team commits to a new set of objectives each week, this discipline creates a just-in-time weekly execution plan that adapts to challenges and opportunities that can never be foreseen in an annual strategic plan. In this way, the plan is adapting as fast as the business is changing. The result? The team can direct enormous energy to the wildly important goal without getting blocked by the shifting whirlwind of change all around them.

When your team begins to see the lag measure of a big goal moving as a direct result of their efforts, they will know they are winning. And we have found nothing that drives the morale and engagement of a team more than winning.

A remarkable example is a worldclass luxury hotel chain that set a WIG with a lag measure of 97 percent guest retention. "If you stay here once, we want you back!"



was their mantra. And they executed that goal with excellence.

They chose to achieve their goal through lead measures of individualized personal service.

So, what did they do differently?

Every staff member had a role in achieving that goal. House-

keepers, for example, carefully recorded on computers the individual preferences of each guest so they could provide the same services each time the customer came back. One guest asked the maid to leave his partially smoked cigar in the ashtray because he would be returning to the room. When he returned, there was a new cigar of the same brand in the ashtray. He thought that was nice, but what he never expected was to find a new cigar of that brand waiting for him in his room in another hotel in the chain months later! He says, "Now, I have to go back just to see if the cigar will be there. They own me!" In addition to their whirlwind, the housekeepers had quite a few new things to do: note guest preferences, enter and retrieve guest preferences from a computer, and fulfill guest preferences. Clearly, the housekeepers would not have done all those new things if they hadn't known without question:

- That the goal of customer retention was top priority
- That a few new activities were vital to achieving that goal
- That they would track those activities carefully
- That they would account for their commitments daily

In other words:

- They knew the goal (Discipline 1)
- They knew what to do to achieve the goal (Discipline 2)
- They knew the score at all times (Discipline 3)
- They held themselves accountable regularly and frequently for the results (Discipline 4)

These are the characteristics of organizations that practice the 4 Disciplines of Execution.

People want to win. They want to make a contribution that matters. However, too many organizations lack this kind of discipline—

#### THE REAL PROBLEM WITH EXECUTION

the conscious, consistent regimen needed to execute key goals with excellence. The financial impact of a failure to execute can be huge, but it is only one of the impacts. Another is the human cost to people who want to give their best and be part of a winning team. By contrast, nothing is more motivating than belonging to a team of people who know the goal and are determined to get there.

The 4 Disciplines work because they are based on principles, not practices. Practices are situational, subjective, and always evolving. Principles are timeless and self-evident, and they apply everywhere. They are natural laws, like gravity. Whether you understand them or even agree with them doesn't matter—they still apply.

One of the best-selling business books of all time is *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* written by Stephen R. Covey. In his book, Stephen identified some of the core principles that govern human behavior and effectiveness, such as responsibility, vision, integrity, understanding, collaboration, and renewal.

Just as there are principles that govern human behavior, there are principles that govern how teams get things done, or how they execute. We believe the principles of execution have always been focus, leverage, engagement, and accountability. Are there other principles at play when it comes to execution? Yes. But is there something special about these four and their sequencing? Absolutely. We didn't invent them and we freely acknowledge that understanding them has never been the problem. The challenge for leaders has been finding a way to implement them, especially when the whirlwind is raging.

#### HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

*The 4 Disciplines of Execution* is organized into three parts to provide you with a progressively deeper understanding of the disciplines and their application to any team.

Section 1, "The 4 Disciplines of Execution," presents a thorough

understanding of the 4 Disciplines. This section also explains why these apparently simple concepts are actually so difficult to practice and why they are the key to successfully meeting any leader's greatest challenge.

Section 2, "Installing 4DX with Your Team," is designed like a field guide. It gives very detailed step-by-step instructions for implementing the disciplines within your team. A separate chapter is devoted to each discipline. The final chapter of this section introduces you to an online system for managing the 4 Disciplines with your team.

Section 3, "Installing 4DX in Your Organization," provides you with some rules of the road that have evolved from the hundreds of implementations we've guided over the past decade. You will gain insights from the leaders of top companies who are successfully using 4DX to drive strategy and create breakthrough results in their organizations. This section also answers, from our direct experience, many of the questions that arise in executing strategies in a wide range of industries.

Throughout all three of these sections you will find links to FranklinCovey's execution website where you can watch video case studies of many of the examples cited in this book.

At the end of the book we've included a chapter of Frequently Asked Questions and a short chapter which shows how the 4 Disciplines can help you accomplish personal or family-oriented goals.

This book is a little different from most other business books you've read. Most business books share a lot of very helpful ideas and theories but are shallow on application. In this book we are heavy on application and will tell you exactly what you can do to implement these disciplines—the specifics, the tips, the watch outs, the must do's. We'll share everything we know. Section 1 will teach you The 4 disciplines of Execution. Sections 2 and 3 will show you how to apply them, in vivid detail. We hope you'll find this approach refreshing.

• • •

Before you begin . . .

We've learned that there are three things to watch out for when you begin studying the 4 Disciplines more deeply:

- **4DX says easy, does hard.** First, the disciplines will sound deceptively simple, but they take sustained work to implement. As one of our clients put it, "Says easy, does hard." Don't be misled by this simplicity: The 4 Disciplines are powerful in part because they are easy to understand. But successful implementation takes significant effort over an extended period. It requires sustained commitment. If the goal you're seeking isn't one you just have to achieve, you might not make the sustained commitment necessary. The payoff, however, is that you will not only achieve this goal but also build the organizational muscle and capability to achieve the next goal and the next.
- **4DX is counterintuitive.** Second, each of the 4 Disciplines are paradigm shifting and might even fly in the face of your intuition. While it might seem instinctive to you to have a lot of goals, the more you have the fewer you will achieve with excellence. If you want to achieve a certain goal, don't focus on the goal itself but on the lead measures that drive the goal. As you implement each discipline, at least initially, you'll be doing things that, at first glance, might not seem to make sense and that run counter to your instincts. Let us emphasize, though, that the 4 Disciplines are the result of serious, intense experimentation and hypothesis testing over many years; everything you learn here has been thor-

#### THE REAL PROBLEM WITH EXECUTION

oughly vetted. The good news is that once you gain some experience with the 4 Disciplines, what seemed awkward in the beginning will become more comfortable and more effective.

**4DX is an operating system.** Third, the 4 Disciplines are a matched set, not a menu of choices. While every one of the disciplines has value, their real power is in how they work together in sequence. Each discipline sets the stage for the next discipline; leave one out and you'll have a far less effective result. Think of the 4 Disciplines as the operating system of a computer—once it's installed, you can use it to run almost any strategy you choose, but you need the whole system for it to work. As we move through the next chapters, the reasons for this will become clear.

## Endorsements

"In place of the top-down, control-oriented management techniques of the industrial age, the 4 Disciplines offer a release-oriented, knowledge-worker-age approach to executing goals and strategies, an approach that engages people's hearts and minds toward a common goal unlike anything I've seen. Truly a profound work!"

## Stephen R. Covey, #1 New York Times bestselling author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People and The 3rd Alternative: Solving Life's Most Difficult Problems

"Marriott was founded on the philosophy 'Take care of your employees and they'll take care of your customers.' Through the principles of The 4 Disciplines of Execution, we've been able to give our people a powerful tool for staying focused on what is most important to us: 'Our Guests' Experience.' I highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to create breakthrough results!"

## — David Grissen, President, The Americas, Marriott International, Inc.

"The State of Georgia had unprecedented success as a result of implementing the principles outlined in The 4 Disciplines of Execution. We certified hundreds of leaders to take the disciplines to every department, achieving unprecedented results in customer service, quality improvement, and cost reduction. These execution principles are a must for any government agency that is seeking to be world class."

> — The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Governor of Georgia, 2003–2011

"The 4 Disciplines' practical guidance on goal-setting and measurement resonates with groups at all levels in our organization. Many teams have applied this intuitive approach to build engagement and increase execution and accountability."

## — Dave Dillon, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, The Kroger Co.

"We believe that The 4 Disciplines of Execution are the keys to growth and success. For years we have struggled with creating focus for our people. We have used priority sheets, standards of performance measures, and other methods. We have fallen in love with the concepts of 'whirlwind' and 'WIG'! When you read this book, you will never look at work or life the same!"

## Danny Wegman, Chief Executive Officer, Wegmans Food Markets, Inc., #1 on *Fortune's* 2005 list of the "100 Best Companies to Work For"

"You don't have a strategy problem, you have an execution problem! The 4 Disciplines of Execution tells you everything you need to know to make your wildly important goals a reality. This simple, effective model is easy to understand, easy to apply, and delivers results. I've used it in my personal life, with my family, and in my organization. It works!"

## Richard Stocking, President and Chief Operating Officer, Swift Transportation

"I've seen many great initiatives fail because of the inability to make the transition from strategy to execution. The authors here have developed a real-world, practical guide for navigating through the obstacles to success. While reading this book, I thought over and over again to myself, 'I wish I would have had this resource ten years ago."

## Terry D. Scott, 10th Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, April 2002–July 2006, Retired

"Few things in business are harder than finding the handful of simple actions that every employee can take to help the company achieve its most important objectives. The 4 Disciplines provide a simple, common-sense way to help achieve real results."

## - Rob Markey, Partner, Bain & Company, and coauthor of *The Ultimate Question 2.0*

"The 4 Disciplines of Execution methodology and process, contained in this book, have been extremely helpful to our organization. It has allowed us to align and cascade our wildly important goals throughout our teams, which has resulted in an increase in employee engagement and improved client service and project delivery. As we continue to invest in our employees, this process r mains critical to achieving our overall corporate goals."

## — Andrew Frawley, President, Epsilon

"Genius and simplicity describe The 4 Disciplines of Execution. If you want to succeed with your strategic plan, utilizing this process and methodology will pay dividends. Focusing one's efforts on lead measures will result in success. And, the process of continual, quick accountability checkups encourages excellence."

## — Walter Levy, Co-President and Co-Chief Executive Officer, NCH Corporation

" 'Wildly important goals,' 'lead measures,' 'compelling scoreboard,' 'cadence of accountability'—The 4 Disciplines of Execution delivers the essential battle cry every leader and organization requires, plus the guidelines on how to respond. The disciplines allow any leader the ability to move beyond the vision into the flawless execution of strategy. This book is a great gift to any leader in any organization."

## Frances Hesselbein, President and Chief Executive Officer, The Frances Hesselbein Leadership Institute, and founder of The Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management

"Well done! Disciplined leveraging of this work will profoundly help raise the standard of executional excellence in any and all organizations."

## Douglas R. Conant, Chief Executive Officer, retired, Campbell Soup Company, and New York Times bestselling author

"I've practiced and embraced the principles and process found in this book for many years and can attest this is a great framework to help organizations achieve their strategic goals."

## Roger Morgan, President and Chief Executive Officer, Retail Products Group

"The 4 Disciplines of Execution is a practical guide for organizational excellence. It provides a simple, actionable approach for success at all levels of any organization. The process creates maniacal focus and leads to uncommon results. Though the word 'proactive' is overused and underachieved in business, the 4DX process truly creates proactive momentum and sustainable results."

## Matt Oldroyd, President and Chief Executive Officer, Partsmaster

"Each person comes to this world packed with unlimited capacity. He can accomplish wonders. There is nothing in life more exhilarating than to achieve something important to him and to achieve it with excellence. In The 4 Disciplines of Execution, the authors have captured the principles and procedures that are key to human achievement."

#### -Mohammed Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize Winner, 2006

"Having worked in higher education administration for thirty-five years, with increasing management responsibility at both a private and public university, I have learned that the greatest obstacle any higher education leader faces is the challenge of execution, i.e., successfully and consistently achieving the institution's key strategic goals. Although The 4 Disciplines of Execution begins as it must with theory, the greatest contribution of this book to educational administrators is its powerful focus on the fundamentals of the process of execution. For that reason, this book is must reading for every college and university administrator with responsibility for achieving strategic goals."

### Angelo Armenti, Jr., Ph.D., President, California University of Pennsylvania

"Military leaders recognize that people are central and essential to achieving the organization's mission. The value of The 4 Disciplines of Execution centers on connecting everyone specifically, concretely, and visibly to the fulfillment of that mission. Every single person has a clear role to play, is measured on it, and can celebrate his or her contribution to its achievement. Whether delivering combat aircraft to the navy or dramatically improving an urban public education system, the focus on executing a few critical goals with excellence makes the difference between failure or success."

## — Captain John W. Scanlan, USN Retired, Chief Financial Officer, Cleveland Municipal School District

"The 4 Disciplines of Execution is a leadership breakthrough enabling strategy into execution. Based on significant research, the book demystifies moving from 'knowing to doing.' With this approach everyone wins! Most important, employees are more engaged in their work. Employees clearly understand and experience how their efforts and results contribute to the execution of a company's strategy. Their work is meaningful. It contributes to a team, and they can be proud of what they have accomplished."

-Tom Halford, General Manager and Marketing, Whirlpool

"Having spent years working with organizations whose goal was to achieve greatness, I highly recommend reading The 4 Disciplines of Execution! It is truly a how-to manual for teams committed to achieving their wildest dreams and a must-read for leaders who have chosen to achieve greatness!"

# Ann Rhoades, President, People Ink, former Executive Vice President, JetBlue, former Chief People Officer, Southwest Airlines, and author of Built on Values

"The 4 Disciplines of Execution offers not only a clear description of the critical relationship of execution to viable strategy but also specific recommendations for increasing the likelihood of success. The approaches recommended will ensure focus, line-of-sight from tasks to goals, and the production of simple dashboards to give vital and timely feedback. As important as these, however, are the authors' granular examples, suggestions, and prescriptions."

 Joel Peterson, Chairman, JetBlue Airways; Robert L. Joss Consulting Professor of Management, Stanford Graduate School of Business; founding Partner, Peterson Partners "The 4 Disciplines of Execution has a powerful way of inviting every frontline employee to commit to and then execute on the highest priority goals of their agency. As a leader in the public sector, I found myself revisiting these principles over and over again at a time when resources were dwindling, while the need for human services was rising."

## — B. J. Walker, former Commissioner, Department of Human Services, State of Georgia

"My first experience with the 4 Disciplines of Execution was in a meeting with a group of front-line managers who were reporting their first six-month results. I saw a room full of winners. After applying these disciplines and this methodology throughout my entire organization, we saw improved employee engagement and teamwork during a time of downsizing, and we achieved our stretch business objectives."

### -Alex M. Azar II, President, Lilly USA, LLC

"The 4 Disciplines of Execution is a principle-based system that simplifies the complexities of everyday execution and gets us consistent value increase over time. Thank you, FranklinCovey, for cracking the execution code!"

## — Juan Bonifasi, Chief Executive Officer, Grupo Entero, Guatemala

"Keeping the eyes on execution is the single most important task for a leader. This book provides great guidance for leaders who want to stay focused on their most important goals. It is a practical guide to creating a cadence of accountability throughout their organizations. The book is as relevant in Europe as in the rest of the world, a great read, and a great method to achieve strong results over time."

## — Sanna Rydberg, Head of Healthcare, sub-Region Europe North, AGA Gas AB, a member of the Linde Group

"The best way to prove the validity and effectiveness of any business concept or methodology is to apply it to real situations and observe the results obtained. At Bladex, we have had the opportunity to apply the principles proposed by The 4 Disciplines of Execution as a means to successfully achieve the strategic objectives of the organization. Our experience leads us to affirm that with consistency, once the degree of maturity in the application of these principles is attained, the desired objectives are gratifyingly achieved and justify the efforts required in the adoption process. The key lies in the discipline of the process."

## - Miguel Moreno, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Bladex, Foreign Trade Bank of Latin America, Inc.

"After approximately seven months working with the 4 Disciplines of Execution, we have seen the following improvements in my area; a cost savings from 5.9 percent to 26.1 percent and an improved bottom line from 3.7 percent to 43.3 percent. But most important, a quantum increase in employee engagement and trust."

-Per Birkemose, Regional Manager, Euromaster Denmark

"The most important thing for us in using the 4 Disciplines of Execution was to have a real impact in the achievement of our goals, and that has been the case. The methodology has been an extraordinary tool to align the efforts of all our 7,168 collaborators toward the corporate goals, each knowing their role and the impact of this in our corporation. We also obtained additional benefits, such as an increased exchange of best practices, greater integration and teamwork, and even a tough but healthy competition between the different areas, generating enormous benefit for our organization."

## — Ricardo E. Fernández, Chief Operations Officer, Corporación BI, Guatemala

"All leaders must read The 4 Disciplines of Execution to help them consistently achieve breakthrough results. The 4D execution process is a true competitive advantage in present global markets and fastpaced business environments."

## — Giulio M. Zafferri, Associated Senior Management Consultant, Cegos Italia Spa

"The implementation of the methodology of the 4 Disciplines of Execution in our company has had a positive influence in the corporate culture to such extent that today each member of the organization understands the business priorities and knows the correct path to materialize them. Today, we have a better view with regard to what we expect from each team, and we have a common language that makes people feel more engaged, since their valuable individual contribution is better acknowledged. The methodology not only allows us to have an adequate follow-up on the fulfillment of the wildly important goals, but it has also influenced a more effective management of the way in which meetings are held, thus producing a better focus and prioritization. I really recommend the 4 Disciplines as an effective method to lead and set the course for the execution of strategy."

### Luis Fernando Valladares Guillen, Chief Executive Officer, Tigo, Guatemala

#### ENDORSEMENTS

"Beyond theories, the 4 Disciplines of Execution process is a truly useful guide on strategy execution. It has kept our organization focused on what really matters to achieve the objectives. This book is a great instrument for our business leaders to avoid the most common pitfalls in the execution of our strategy, based on our multiple business areas across the world."

#### -Dr. Pietro Lori, President, Georg Fischer Piping Systems

"The implementation of the 4 Disciplines of Execution at Progreso has been a great learning experience for everybody in the company. We have been able to work as a team—the board of directors and the top management—to establish what is wildly important for the company and at the same time define a cadence of accountability with the different business units, making sure everybody understands what is expected of them, but more important, being able to follow through week by week on the things that really help achieve results. The 4 Disciplines also helped us implement a leadership agenda based on the core values of the company, but with special emphasis on a culture of execution through performance-based management. For me, learning about the 4 Disciplines of Execution has changed the way I set goals in my life. Now, with every activity in which I get involved, I recommend

or try to apply these concepts in goal setting and follow-through."

## — José Miguel Torrebiarte, President, Grupo Progreso, Guatemala

"Over the last twenty years in charge of operations, I have made it a priority for associates and supervisors to execute our core operational routines. With the 4 Disciplines of Execution, we have been very effective in institutionalizing the adoption of these routines and have gained a common visibility around our wildly important goals. These three goals have been shared with every associate from the 212 Supercenter stores located across Mexico. This effort has increased satisfaction and teamwork, resulting in an improvement in the quality of the work life of our associates."

## Guadalupe Morales, Vice President of Operations, Supercenters, Mexico and Central America

"Working in a business environment characterized by a lot of changes and varied information, the 4 Disciplines of Execution have really given us a step change in organizational efficiency through prioritizing and setting up transparent goals and actions in close cooperation with the employees."

> — Jens Erik Pedersen, Senior Vice President, Power Production, DONG Energy, Denmark

"What Six Sigma and Lean are to manufacturing, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* is to executing your strategy. 4DX is a practical methodology that can solve every leader's #1 challenge: execution."

#### -RAM CHARAN, coauthor of the bestselling Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done and author of What the CEO Wants You to Know

"Many of the foundational values of Marriott are embodied within *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*. By utilizing this process inside our organization, our leaders and teams have been able to set and achieve extraordinary goals, which have had a significant impact on making 'Our Guests's Experience' truly remarkable. Any organization can create these same kinds of breakthrough results if they apply the principles and processes taught in this book!"

#### -J.W. MARRIOTT, JR., Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Marriott International, Inc.

"Customers are loyal to a brand when they can trust it to deliver a consistently outstanding experience. This requires the commitment of everyone up and down the organization to innovate new ways to economically delight customers so they become promoters. *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* offers a proven process for engaging the hearts and minds of every employee toward this vital goal. I highly recommend this book to any leader committed to making customer loyalty a mission-critical goal."

#### -FRED REICHHELD, Bain Fellow, inventor of the Net Promoter<sup>®</sup> System, and author of *The Ultimate Question 2.0*

"In a business world where the essence of leadership centers around strategy, this book highlights the true requirements of any organization to focus on the principles of execution. At The Ritz-Carlton, I believe the only way to strengthen operational excellence is through flawless execution. The application of Focus, Leverage, Engagement, and Accountability, as discussed in The 4 Disciplines of Execution, are key to our success and make exceptional reading for today's business leaders."

#### -HERVE HUMLER, President and Chief Operations Officer, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company

*"The 4 Disciplines of Execution* contains principles and processes that do indeed work. I do believe that 'execution excellence' is the ultimate competitive differential of this decade. As we have partnered with FranklinCovey to apply the methodology and process globally throughout our organization, it has not only had a significant impact on our organization's business results, it has been transformational for me as a leader, both personally and professionaly."

#### -JEFF SIMMONS, President, Elanco Animal Health, Eli Lilly and Company

"*The 4 Disciplines of Execution* helps leaders, teams, and front-line employees narrow their focus and spend their time executing those things that will bring the highest return for their organization and customers. This book is a must-read for any leader who wants to achieve that which is extraordinary in their company!"

—DIANA THOMAS, US Vice President of Training and Learning Development, Hamburger University, McDonald's Corporation

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT www.4dxbook.com

