



Book Review

McChesney, C., Covey, S., & Huling, J. (2012). *The 4 disciplines of execution*. New York, NY: Free Press. Hardcover, \$28.00. 322 pages.

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The 4 Disciplines of Execution book is divided into three main sections. The first section describes the 4 disciplines of execution (4DX), the second section explains how to use 4DX with your team, and the third section describes the process of using 4DX in an organization. The authors were able to use constructs from the field of management and organizational behavior as the foundation of this book. According to the authors, the 4 disciplines are:

- Discipline 1 = Focus on the wildly important goals.
- Discipline 2 = Act on the lead measures.
- Discipline 3 = Keep a compelling scoreboard.
- Discipline 4 = Create a cadence of accountability.

Discipline 1 emphasizes the importance of achieving the most important goals. The authors believe that the more a person tries to do, the less he or she will actually accomplish. In today's competitive society, managers and leaders are expected to multi-task and accomplish a number of goals on a daily basis. This may explain why job performance levels and organizational commitment levels have declined over the years. "The fundamental principle at work in Discipline 1 is that human beings are genetically hardwired to do one thing at a time with excellence" (McChesney, Covey, & Huling, 2012, p. 25). Interestingly enough, this discipline relates to the division of labor concept developed by Adam Smith in the 1700s. This idea can have positive implications for managers and leaders. The authors provide the following practical example, "Steve Jobs of Apple had a big company to run, and he could have proudly brought many more products to market than he did; but he chose to focus on a handful of "wildly important" products. His focus was legendary. And so were his results" (McChesney, Covey, & Huling, 2012, p. 25). Discipline 2 focuses on 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. The authors provide the following practical 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" (McChesney, Covey, & Huling, 2012, p. 45). As a manager or leader, it is important to always be proactive as oppose to reactive. Discipline 3 emphasizes the importance of keeping a scorecard to track progress. "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” (McChesney, Covey, & Huling, 2012, p. 13). The authors provide the following practical example, “Great teams know at every moment whether or not they are winning. They must know, otherwise, they don’t know what they have to do to win the game. A compelling scoreboard tells the team where they are and where they should be, information essential to team problem solving and decision making” (McChesney, Covey, & Huling, 2012, p. 66). Discipline 4 is based on the principle of accountability; that unless we consistently hold each other accountable, the goal naturally disintegrates in the whirlwind. Accountability is important in all organizations and starts from the top of the organization and works its way down to the bottom. By creating a culture of accountability, organizations will thrive and employees will embrace this phenomenon. It is imperative to hold oneself accountable before expecting others to be accountable. The authors provide the following practical example, “It is truly amazing what you can accomplish by the simple discipline of meeting around a goal on a weekly basis over an extended period of time” (McChesney, Covey, & Huling, 2012, p. 80). Throughout the book, the authors provide examples for how to use these 4 disciplines with one’s team and with one’s organization.

The authors make a compelling point regarding strategy formulation and implementation. According to the authors, “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” (McChesney, Covey, & Huling, 2012, p. xxiii). In most undergraduate and graduate business programs, students learn how to draft a strategy but do not necessarily understand how to execute the plan. The execution of a strategy is extremely important because of the short-term and long-term implications that may emerge as a result of the strategy.

The authors conclude their book with 4DX Frequently Asked Questions with answers (pp. 263-285). Below are some examples of the questions that are addressed in the FAQ section:

- What are the most common mistakes leaders make in implementing 4DX?
- How do you handle the resisters on a team?
- Does 4DX need to start at the top of an organization?
- As a senior leader, what is the most important thing I can do to sustain 4DX?
- How can implementing 4DX increase employee engagement?

This book is a helpful tool for all current and future managers and leaders because of the important concepts that are addressed throughout the book. This book can be used in a graduate business program to help students learn how to strategically use the 4 disciplines of execution for optimum results. Furthermore, the authors provide a number of practical examples to help support each discipline. Although the concepts mentioned throughout this book may seem rudimentary to the layperson, it is important to emphasize that the application or execution of these 4 disciplines can be a quandary. Overall, this book is highly recommended.