



# Building a Winning Culture: Execute with Excellence

Nearly every team has an articulated strategy, But that strategy becomes meaningless if the team fails to produce results. Successful leaders not only create a clear strategy, they *execute* it.

Most strategies **fail**, not because they are poor strategies, but because they are **never executed.**

Fulfilling that strategy requires a deeply engaged team and creating that team is the leader's perennial challenge. Assuming you have an engaging mission and strategy, your next priority is to execute that strategy.

Wharton management professor Lawrence Hrebiniak points out that many MBA-trained managers "know a lot about how to decide on a plan and very little about how to carry it out." So how *do* you get that extraordinary commitment from others? How do you engage them in new

and demanding goals when they're already struggling with the whirlwind of the "day job"?

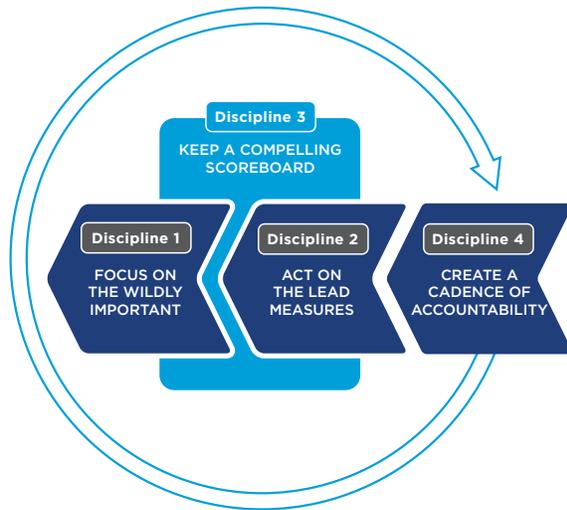
It's no longer enough to have a great strategy. The job to be done now is to get yourself and your team absolutely clear on the wildly important goals.

THE JOB USED TO BE...	THE JOB THAT YOU MUST DO NOW...
To come up with a great strategy	Execute your strategy <i>with excellence and precision</i> to achieve required results

To help you achieve these goals with excellence, apply *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*®:

1. Focus on the Wildly Important
2. Act on the Lead Measures
3. Keep a Compelling Scoreboard
4. Create a Cadence of Accountability

## THE 4 DISCIPLINES OF EXECUTION®



### FOCUS ON THE WILDLY IMPORTANT

Most people are trying to do too much. To stay engaged with the real priorities, leaders need to carefully distinguish what is most important from what is wildly important.

A goal that is wildly important is one that must be achieved or nothing else will matter very much.

Businesses have a way of piling up priorities, making it impossible to do a good job on any of them. One recipe for disengaging people is to overwhelm them with things to do, all of which are “job one” and “top of the list priorities.” There is tremendous power in focus. As you prioritize your goals, think about those things that must be done or nothing else matters, focus on those true priorities, and move lower priorities to the back burner.

If a goal is wildly important and people know it matters most, their engagement goes off the charts — in fact, it’s tough to distract them. Formula One racers don’t answer their cell phones during the race.

When Tom Weisner became mayor of Aurora, the largest city in Illinois after Chicago, he confronted dozens of important issues. The Fox River district was blighted; the crime rate was sky high; gang violence had reached a high point; scores of businesses had fled the city; and the city workers weren’t even taking down the holiday decorations (a sore point with a lot of people). Mayor Weisner wisely surveyed his entire team of twelve hundred workers, and together, they decided on three wildly important goals:

1. Reduce shootings by 20 percent.
2. Reduce the resolution time for citizen requests from all city divisions by 20 percent.
3. Revitalize the Fox River Corridor by approving a minimum of 650 new residential units and creating one acre of open space for the corridor.

A goal that is wildly important is one that **must be achieved** or **nothing else will matter** very much.

Everyone agreed that if the first goal was not met, nothing else would matter very much. The second goal meant a lot to the citizens — to catch up on a huge backlog of requests would rekindle their faith in the city. The third goal was about turning a declining city into a revitalized city. These goals were wildly important to everyone’s future, and the people who set the goals *owned* them. They were engaged.

### ACT ON THE LEAD MEASURES



In tracking progress of a goal, there are two kinds of measures: lead and lag. Lead measures track actions you take to achieve the goal. For example, if you want to lose weight, your lead measure might be “number of calories consumed.” Lag measures quantify the results; your weight, for example. To effectively reach your goals, personally or organizationally, you must choose lead measures you can control and that will make a true difference in the outcome. Tracking lead measures is harder than tracking lag measures, but you do it if you’re serious about your goal: If you do not hit the lead measures, you will most likely not hit the lag measures.

As our team worked with Mayor Weisner and the city of Aurora leadership team, each department created its own lead measures. One lead measure for reducing shootings focused on getting gang leaders off the streets. Within months, the police had swept the city clean of twenty-one gang leaders. Municipal workers knew that crimes usually happened in poorly lit areas, so their lead measure was to ensure all burned-out city lights were replaced within three hours. They also knew that crimes tended to occur where graffiti had been painted, so they established a “Remove graffiti within twenty-four hours” rule as a second lead measure.

True leaders work with their teams to decide what lead measures are in their power and then hold them accountable for acting on those lead measures. People get engaged when they know they can actually make a difference.

### KEEP A COMPELLING SCOREBOARD

People play differently when they’re keeping score. Your team needs a scoreboard so you can tell at a glance how you’re progressing towards your wildly important goals. Chris McChesney, FranklinCovey’s Execution Practice leader, says: “The highest level of performance comes from people who are emotionally engaged, and the highest level of engagement comes from knowing the score — that is, knowing whether one is winning or losing. If your team members don’t know whether they are winning the game, they are probably on their way to losing.”

If your team members **don’t know** whether they are winning the game, they are **probably** on their way to **losing**.

The scoreboard is for the team — it needs to be big and visible and constantly updated. We're not talking about the vast compilations of data a business runs on. All we need to see is the lag measure — “Is the murder rate dropping?” — and the lead measure — “How many gang leaders have we cleared off the streets?”

The scoreboard enables people to track activities, compare results, and improve performance continuously. By watching the scoreboard closely, they can tell if their lead measures are well chosen. Are their lead measures actually having an effect on the lag measures? If not, it's time to rethink them. By watching the few scores that matter very closely, the team can change strategy if needed.

### CREATE A CADENCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

So you've decided on your wildly important goals. You've set your measures, put up a scoreboard...and then you might watch the entire effort fall apart.

“A really great talent finds its **happiness in execution.**”

— Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

Wayne Boss, a professor of management and entrepreneurship at the University of Colorado Boulder, studies the “regression effect” — the tendency of work teams to get really enthusiastic about new goals and then gradually disengage. Boss writes: “People became very enthusiastic about making improvements, but within a few weeks, the spark dwindles, and they regress to old

behaviors and performance levels.”

Boss says the most effective way to avoid the regression effect is to regularly and often monitor progress. We call this a “cadence of accountability.”

The cadence of accountability is a simple, four-step process that will help you and your team cut through the chaos of the day-to-day and engage in your team's wildly important goals.

The agenda of the meeting is simple:

- Start by reviewing the scoreboard. Is the lag measure moving in the right direction? Are the lead measures having any effect? Are we where we're supposed to be, or have we slipped behind? Should we reconsider our lead measures?
- Then review what each team member committed to do the prior week. Celebrate successes and help people who are running into barriers. The leader in particular can do things no one else can, such as getting access to resources and talking to executives.
- Finally, make new commitments for the next week. What's the one thing each team member can do that will have the most impact on the measures? These commitments are recorded and form the agenda for the next meeting. Keeping your commitments to your team can engage you more than anything else.

After studying hundreds of teams over a decade, Boss found that if these meetings are held on a regular basis, performance toward a goal can stay high without regression for several years. By following these principles and this process, you will do more to create a highly engaged, self-starting team than anything else you can do.

BUILDING A WINNING CULTURE: EXECUTE WITH EXCELLENCE

**THE 4 DISCIPLINES OF TEAM ENGAGEMENT**

Now, what happened to the city workers in Aurora, Illinois, as they started to live by the principles of excellent execution? The *Aurora Beacon-News* reported that the “city missed its first goal — shootings were reduced by 14.5 percent, rather than 20 percent.

Only a few departments fell short of the 20 percent reduction in response time, and two big development agreements for projects on either side of the river exceeded the goal for residential units and open space.” Additionally, and most importantly, murders dropped from thirty to two; in the most recent year, no murders at all occurred in the city of Aurora. In this case, the result was not just an improvement in the “numbers.” It literally saved lives.

**EXECUTING WITH EXCELLENCE: ACTION STEPS**

Meet with the team and have the following discussions.

DISCIPLINE	DISCUSSION POINTS
1. Focus on the Wildly Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are our most important goals?</li> <li>• Which of these goals are “wildly important”? (That is, if we don’t achieve these goals, nothing else matters much.)</li> <li>• Can we narrow these wildly important goals to three or fewer?</li> <li>• What is the measure of success on each goal (the lag measure)? Can you write your WIG in the “X to Y by when” format?</li> </ul>
2. Act on the Lead Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the one, two, or three key actions that will drive success on each goal? What do we need to do differently?</li> <li>• How will we measure those actions?</li> </ul>
3. Keep a Compelling Scoreboard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who will create a scoreboard with both lag and lead measures?</li> <li>• Who will maintain the scoreboard, updating it regularly and frequently?</li> </ul>
4. Create a Cadence of Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the scoreboard telling us? Are we moving the lag measure? Are the lead measures influencing the lag measure? Do we need to consider other lead measures?</li> <li>• What have we learned about the right way to move the scoreboard?</li> <li>• What commitments did you make the last time we met? How are you doing on your commitments? What can we do to “clear the path” for you, to help you keep your commitments?</li> <li>• What commitments will you make to “move the needle” this coming week?</li> </ul>

## BUILDING A WINNING CULTURE: EXECUTE WITH EXCELLENCE

Everyone talks about accountability. The word makes some shiver, because it's filled with fear. But the accountability created by *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* is personal; instead of being accountable for things you can't influence, you're accountable for a commitment you make yourself.

The question we have our clients ultimately answer is, "Did we do what we committed to each other as promised?" When the answer is yes, the client's group feels like a team,

grows in respect and trust for one another, and becomes more and more deeply invested in the success of the team. Ultimately the execution process is about real human engagement. And that engagement brings real results.

Learn more about the third key practice to engage your people in our next article, *Building a Winning Culture: Unleash Productivity*.

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Ready to build a winning culture in your organization? [Contact us at 1-888-868-1776 or visit franklincovey.com.](https://www.franklincovey.com)

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