



# The 4 Disciplines of Execution

## Achieving Your Wildly Important Goals

### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

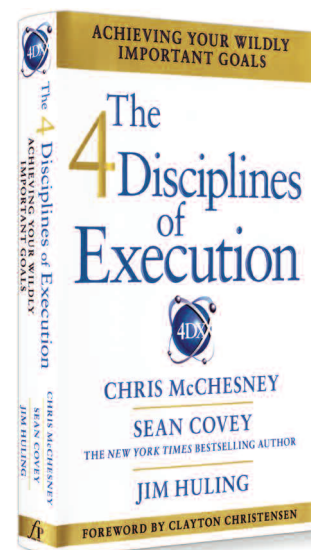
Do you remember the last major initiative you watched die in your organization? Did it go down with a loud crash? Or was it slowly and quietly suffocated by other competing priorities? By the time it finally disappeared, it's likely no one even noticed. What happened? The "whirlwind" of urgent activity required to keep things running day-to-day devoured all the time and energy you needed to invest in executing your strategy for tomorrow! *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* can change all that forever.

The 4 Disciplines of Execution (4DX) is a simple, repeatable, and proven formula for executing on your most important strategic priorities in the midst of the whirlwind. By following the 4 Disciplines: focusing on the wildly important, acting on lead measures, keeping a compelling scoreboard, and creating a cadence of accountability, leaders can produce breakthrough results.

4DX is not theory. It is a proven set of practices that have been tested and refined by hundreds of organizations and thousands of teams over many years. When a company or an individual adheres to these disciplines, they achieve superb results — regardless of the goal. 4DX represents a new way of thinking and working that is essential to thriving in today's competitive climate.

### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- What the 4 Disciplines of Execution are and why they work.
- How to execute your strategic priorities and get results.
- How to effect change in human behavior to achieve your goals.
- How to install the 4 Disciplines of Execution in your team and organization.



by Chris McChesney,  
Sean Covey and Jim Huling

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE 4 DISCIPLINES OF EXECUTION

by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey and Jim Huling

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For additional information on the authors, go to [www.summary.com](http://www.summary.com) or visit [www.4dxbook.com](http://www.4dxbook.com).

## The Real Problem with Execution

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. To be successful, you will need their commitment. Getting the kind of commitment that will endure in the midst of the daily grind is not easy.

When you execute a strategy that requires a lasting change in the behavior of other people, you're facing one of the greatest leadership challenges you will ever meet. With the 4 Disciplines of Execution (4DX), you are implementing a set of proven practices that meet that challenge successfully every time.

The real enemy of execution is the *whirlwind*, the massive amount of energy that's necessary just to keep your operation going on a day-to-day basis. The 4 Disciplines aren't designed for managing your whirlwind but for executing your most critical strategy in the midst of your whirlwind. ●

## PART 1: THE 4 DISCIPLINES OF EXECUTION

### Discipline 1: Focus on the Wildly Important

Focus your finest effort on 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.

#### Identifying Your Wildly Important Goals

A wildly important goal (WIG) is a goal that can make all the difference. You're going to commit to apply a disproportionate amount of energy to it — the estimated 20 percent that is not used up in the whirlwind.

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?"

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 the Organization

Here are four rules to help you narrow the focus of your entire organization:

**Rule # 1: No team focuses on more than two WIGs at the same time.** The key is not to overload any single leader, team or individual performer.

**Rule #2: The battles you choose must win the war.** The sole purpose of WIGs at lower levels in the organization is to help achieve the WIGs at higher levels.

**Rule #3: Senior leaders can veto, but not dictate.** While the senior leaders will undoubtedly determine the top-level WIG, they must allow the leaders at each level below to define the WIGs for their teams.



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**Rule #4: All WIGs must have a finish line in the form of from X to Y by when.** Every WIG at every level must contain a clearly measurable result, as well as the date by which that result must be achieved. ●

## Discipline 2: Act on the Lead Measures

While a lag measure tells you if you've achieved the goal, a lead measure tells you if you are *likely* to achieve the goal. 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.

We call them lag measures because by the time you get the data the result has already happened. A lead measure is *predictive*, meaning that if the lead measure changes, you can predict that the lag measure will also change. A lead measure is also influenceable; it can be influenced by the team.

It's the *data* on lead measures 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.

### Defining and Tracking Lead Measures

Oakland Athletics General Manager Sandy Alderson and his assistant manager Billy Beane brought together the best thinkers they could find on the subject: What produces wins? The answer: the highest number of runs. What are the lead measures that create a run? They discovered that the mighty sluggers were often not all that productive. The most productive players were the ones who could just get on base. They could score runs much more reliably than the power hitters who commanded astronomical salaries.

What Beane did was to track the on-base record of players across the league and then recruit from those who were very good at getting on base.

For a decade, the Oakland A's maintained the fifth best record in Major League Baseball while ranking twenty-fourth in player salaries. The Oakland management team reframed the game by acting on the lead measures that produce wins.

If you are serious about your WIG, then you must create a way to track your lead measures. Without data,

## Shooting for the Moon

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy shook NASA to its foundations when he made the pronouncement "land a man on the moon and return him safely to the earth before this decade is out." When the team moves from having a dozen we-really-hope goals to one or two no-matter-what goals, the effect on morale is dramatic. If you can throw that switch, you have laid the foundation for extraordinary execution. When Kennedy said to the moon and back by the end of the decade, he threw that switch.

you can't drive performance on the lead measures; without lead measures, you don't have leverage.

### Lead Measures and Engagement

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. A good example is the advertising department of the *Savannah Morning News*. Their WIG was to close a serious revenue gap. Their focus was spread across so many initiatives that they had taken their eye off of their main product.

Everything changed when they started practicing Discipline 2: Act on the lead measures. In the weekly WIG sessions people committed to hit a certain number of new customer contacts, reactivation calls, and upsell offers. The newspaper closed their revenue gap and shot past their goals for the year. ●

## Discipline 3: Keep a Compelling Scorecard

The third discipline is to make sure everyone knows the score at all times, so that they can tell whether or not they're winning. This is the discipline of engagement. If the lead and lag measures are not captured on a visual scoreboard and updated regularly, they will disappear into the whirlwind. People disengage when they don't know the score.

Great teams know at every moment whether or not they're 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.

When team members themselves are keeping score, they truly understand the connection between their per-

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formance and reaching their goal, and this changes the level at which they play.

When everyone on the team can see the score, the level of play rises, not only because they can see what's working and what adjustments are needed, but also because they now want to *win*.

There are four questions to ask when determining if a scoreboard is likely to be compelling to the players:

**1. Is it simple?** Think about how many pieces of data the coach is tracking on the sideline. Coaches need this data to manage the game, but the scoreboard on the field shows only the data needed to play the game.

**2. Can I see it easily?** It has to be visible to the team. The results become personally important to the team when the scoreboard is displayed where it can be seen by everyone.

**3. Does it show lead and lag measures?** The lead measure is what the team can affect. The lag measure is the result they want.

**4. Can I tell at a glance if I'm winning?** If you can't tell within five seconds whether you're winning or losing, you haven't passed this test.

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.

## The 4 Disciplines and Team Engagement

Many believe that engagement drives results, and so do we. However, we know now that results drive engagement. Nothing affects morale and engagement more powerfully than when a person feels he or she is winning.

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.

A winning team doesn't need artificial morale boosting. All the psyching up and rah-rah exercises companies do to raise morale aren't nearly as effective in engaging people as the satisfaction that comes from executing with excellence a goal that really matters. ●

## 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 happens. 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.

In Discipline 4, your team meets at least weekly in a WIG session. This meeting lasts no longer than 20 to 30 minutes, has a set agenda and goes quickly, establishing your weekly rhythm of accountability for driving progress toward the WIG. Here's the three-part agenda for a WIG session and the kind of language you should be hearing in the session:

**1. Account: Report on commitments.** *"I committed to make a personal call to three customers who gave us lower scores. I did, and here's what I learned..."*

**2. Review the scoreboard: Learn from successes and failures.** *"Our lag measure is green, but we've got a challenge with one of our lead measures that just fell to yellow. Here's what happened..."*

**3. Plan: Clear the path and make new commitments.** *"I'll meet with Bob on our numbers and come back next week with at least three ideas for helping us improve."*

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?"

Remember that the WIG session should move at a fast pace. The WIG session also gives the team the chance to process what they've learned. You should often ask each team member "What can I do this week to clear the path for you?"

Each commitment must meet two standards: First, the commitment must represent a specific deliverable. Second, the commitment must influence the lead measure.

If you simply tell your team what to do, they will learn little. What you ultimately want is for each member of your team to take personal ownership of the commitments they make.

## A Different Kind of Accountability

The accountability created in a WIG session is not organizational, it's personal. Instead of accountability to a broad outcome you can't influence, it's accountability to a weekly commitment that you yourself made and that is within your power to keep. When members of the team see their peers consistently following through on the commitments they make, they learn that the people they work with can be trusted to follow through. When this happens, performance improves dramatically.

The WIG session encourages experimentation with fresh ideas. It engages everyone in problem-solving and promotes shared learning. 4DX produces results not

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from the exercise of authority but from the fundamental desire of each individual team member to feel significant, to do work that matters, and ultimately, to win. ●

## PART 2: INSTALLING 4DX WITH YOUR TEAM

### What to Expect

4DX is not a set of guidelines, but a set of disciplines. Installing 4DX will require your finest efforts, but the payoff will be a team that performs consistently and with excellence.

Most teams go through five stages of behavior change:

- **Stage 1: Getting clear.** Success starts by getting to crystal clarity on the WIG and the 4DX process. The key actions in implementing 4DX are: Be a model of focus on the wildly important goal(s), identify high-leverage lead measures, create a players' scoreboard and schedule WIG sessions at least weekly.
- **Stage 2: Launch.** Some keys to a successful launch are: Recognize that a launch phase requires focus and energy — especially from the leader, remain focused and implement the 4DX process diligently, and identify your models, potentials and resisters.
- **Stage 3: Adoption.** Recognize that adoption of the 4DX process will take time. Keys to successful adoption of 4DX are: Focus first on adherence to the process and then on results, make commitments and hold each other accountable in WIG sessions, track results on a visible scoreboard, make adjustments as needed, invest in the potentials through additional training and mentoring, and answer straightforwardly any issues with resisters and clear the path for them if needed.
- **Stage 4: Optimization.** Encourage and recognize abundant creative ideas for moving the lead measures. Recognize excellent follow-through and celebrate successes.
- **Stage 5: Habits.** Keys to help the team make 4DX habitual are: Celebrate the accomplishment of the WIG, move immediately on to new WIGs to formalize 4DX as your operating system, emphasize that your new operating standard is sustained superior performance on lead measures, and help individual team members become high performers by tracking and moving the middle. If you could move the middle toward the summit of performance, the impact on results would be significant. You do that by consistently motivating new and better behavior, which is the aim of 4DX. ●

### Make Sure the WIG Is Achievable

We often encounter leaders who believe in setting goals that are far beyond anything their team can achieve, while privately acknowledging that they'll be satisfied if they get 75 percent of the goal. This type of gamesmanship can significantly undermine your ability to drive engagement and results. We're not advocating goals that are easy to reach. Set a goal that challenges the team to rise to their highest level of performance but not beyond it.

### Installing Discipline 1: Focus on the Wildly Important

Superb team performance begins with selecting one or two WIGs. Focusing on these vital few goals is the foundational principle of 4DX: Without it, your team will get lost in the whirlwind.

#### Step 1: Consider the Possibilities

Begin by brainstorming possible WIGs:

- Brainstorm with peer leaders, especially if you are all focusing on the same organizational WIG.
- Brainstorm with your team members or with a representative group.
- Brainstorm alone.

Ideally, both the leader and the team participate in defining the WIGs. “No involvement, no commitment.”

#### Step 2: Rank by Impact

When you're satisfied with your list of candidate team WIGs, you're ready to identify the ideas that promise the greatest potential impact on the overall organizational WIG. Avoid the trap of selecting WIGs that improve the team's performance but might have little to do with achieving the overall WIG.

#### Step 3: Test Top Ideas

Once you've identified a couple of high-impact WIG candidates, test them against four specific criteria:

- Is the team WIG aligned to the overall WIG?
- Is it measurable? As one of our clients put it, “If you're not keeping score, you're just practicing.”
- Who owns the results — our team or some other team? Does the team have at least 80 percent ownership of the result?
- Who owns the game — the team or the leader? If the WIG depends too much on the functions that

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only the leader performs, the team will quickly lose interest in the game.

## Step 4: Define the WIG

Once you've selected and tested your ideas for high-impact team WIGs, make them as clear and measurable as possible. Define the WIGs according to these rules:

- **Begin with a verb.** Simple verbs focus the mind immediately on action. For example: "Cut costs" or "Add one plant."
- **Define the lag measure.** Lag measures tell you if you've achieved the goal. They mark a precise finish line for the team. Write lag measures in the format *from X to Y by when*.
- **Keep it simple.** Most organizational goals are vague, complex and pretentious.
- **Focus on what, not how.** Many teams define a clear goal but then complicate it by adding a lengthy description of how the goal will be achieved. The WIG should focus exclusively on *what* the team plans to achieve. ●

## Installing Discipline 2: Act on the Lead Measures

Acting on lead measures is essential to superb performance, but it is also the single most difficult aspect of installing 4DX in your team. There are three reasons for this:

1. Lead measures can be counterintuitive.
2. Lead measures are hard to keep track of.
3. Lead measures often look too simple.

For example, a retail store chose this lead measure for driving sales: Limit out of stocks on top items to 20 or fewer per week. But if this simple lever is applied inconsistently, customers who can't find what they want will not return. Just as a simple lever can move a big rock, a good lead measure provides powerful leverage.

### Step 1: Consider the possibilities.

Begin by brainstorming possible lead measures. A famous example of a productive lead measure is the 15 percent rule at 3M Company requiring the research teams to devote 15 percent of their time on projects of their own choice. The author Jim Collins comments: "No one is told what products to work on, just how much to work. And that loosening of controls has led to a stream of profitable innovations ... 3M's sales and earnings have increased more than 40-fold since instituting the 15 percent rule."

### Step 2: Rank by Impact

We often hear team members say, "We need to do all of these things." No doubt they are all good things to do, but the more you try to do, the less energy you have to give to any one thing. Narrowing the focus to a few lead measures permits stronger leverage.

### Step 3: Test Top Ideas

Test high leverage lead measures against these six criteria:

- **Is it predictive?** If the idea fails this test, even if it's a good idea, eliminate it.
- **Is it influenceable?** Ask if the team has at least 80 percent control over the measure.
- **Is it an ongoing process or a "once and done"?** The ideal lead measure is a behavior change that becomes habitual and brings continuous improvements.
- **Is it a leader's game or a team game?** The behavior of the team must drive the lead measure. Lead measures connect the team to the WIG, but only if it's the team's game to play.
- **Can it be measured?** If the WIG is truly wildly important, you must find ways to measure the new behaviors.
- **Is it worth measuring?** If it takes more effort than its impact is worth, or has serious unintended consequences, it fails the test.

### Step 4: Define the Lead Measures

Answer these questions as you put the lead measures in final form:

- **Are we tracking team or individual performance?** Tracking team results allows for differences in individual performance while still enabling the team to achieve the outcome.
- **Are we tracking the lead measure daily or weekly?** Daily tracking creates the highest level of accountability because it demands the same performance from every associate every day, where weekly tracking allows for varying performance each day as long as the overall result for the week is achieved.
- **What is the quantitative standard?** In other words, "How much / how often / how consistently are we supposed to perform?"
- **What is the qualitative standard?** In other words, "How well are we supposed to perform?"
- **Does it start with a verb?** Simple verbs focus the mind immediately on action.

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- **Is it simple?** State your lead measure in as few words as possible.

The deliverable for Discipline 2 is a small set of lead measures that will move the lag measure on the WIG. ●

### Installing Discipline 3: Keep a Compelling Scorecard

We've found that the more the team is involved in designing the scoreboard, the more the scale is tipped to instill their ownership.

#### Step 1: Choose a Theme

Choose a theme for your scoreboard that displays clearly and instantly the measures you are tracking. You have several options: trend lines, speedometer, bar chart, andon (stoplight), or personalized.

We've seen even the most serious-minded individuals jump into this effort. Cardiac nurses put surgical instruments on the scoreboard; engineers set up flashing lights. When the scoreboard becomes personal, they become engaged.

#### Step 2: Design the Scoreboard

The team should design the scoreboard with these questions in mind:

- Is it simple?
- Can the team see it easily?
- Does it contain both lead and lag measures?
- Can we tell at a glance if we're winning?

#### Step 3: Build the Scoreboard

Let the team build the scoreboard. The greater their involvement, the better. Most teams embrace the opportunity to create their own scoreboard and often volunteer their own time for it. You can put up an electronic sign, a poster, a whiteboard or even a chalkboard, as long as it meets the design standards discussed here.

#### Step 4: Keep It Updated

The design of the scoreboard should make it easy to update at least weekly. If the scoreboard is hard to update, you'll be tempted to put it off when the whirlwind strikes. The leader should make very clear who is responsible for the scoreboard, when it will be posted and how often it will be updated.

The deliverable for Discipline 3 is a scoreboard that keeps the team engaged. It's the sense of winning that drives engagement — you'll see that every time you update the scoreboard. ●

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

Avoid these common pitfalls that undermine the cadence of accountability:

- Competing whirlwind responsibilities.
- Holding WIG sessions with no specific outcomes.
- Repeating the same commitment more than two consecutive weeks.
- Accepting unfulfilled commitments. When a team member fails to keep a commitment, you face the moment that matters most.

Here are steps to handle this important moment in the WIG session along with sample dialogue:

#### Step 1: Demonstrate Respect

Susan: *"Jeff, I want you to know that the event last week was a huge success, and without you, it could've been a disaster."* Susan shows Jeff that she respects him as a team member, but she also shows the team that she respects the whirlwind.

#### Step 2: Reinforce Accountability

Susan: *"Jeff, I also want you to know how important your contribution is to this team. Without you, we can't reach our goal."* Because Susan has made it clear that she respects Jeff and the demands of the whirlwind, Jeff should be able to see the importance of doing his best for the team.

#### Step 3: Encourage Performance

Susan: *"Jeff, I know you want to help us follow through. Can we count on you to catch up next week, by fulfilling last week's commitment as well as the one you were planning on making for next week?"* Susan gives Jeff the opportunity to report with real pride that all commitments have been fulfilled.

Discipline 4 keeps your team in the game every week, as the members connect their personal contributions to the most important priorities of the organization. With this comes not only the awareness that they are winning on a key goal, but that they have become a winning team. Which is the ultimate return on the investment you make in 4DX.

The deliverable for Discipline 4 is a regular, frequent WIG session that moves the lead measures. ●

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## PART 3: INSTALLING 4DX IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

### Best Practices from the Best

Dave Grissen, president of the Americas for Marriott International, began by implementing the 4 Disciplines in eight pilot hotels. These produced results so significant that his team ultimately implemented the 4 Disciplines in more than 700 Marriott hotels over the next two years. Here are his insights:

“First, design your implementation to fit your culture. Second, realize that it's harder to implement the 4 Disciplines in an organization that's already very successful. Third, the senior leader must focus on holding all leaders accountable. Fourth, make sure you have the infrastructure to support your implementation. Fifth, remember that implementing the 4 Disciplines will raise the engagement of your team ... Everyone from our front-line staff to our management teams to our COOs understand how what they are doing impacts the company. And this gives our employees a strong voice; everyone can make a difference.

“For great business skills or great life skills, the 4 Disciplines is an all-encompassing process about how you hold yourself accountable, how you hold others accountable, and ultimately, how you execute better.” ●

### Rolling Out 4DX Across the Organization

Even though the 4 Disciplines are easy to understand, in the end, they are still *disciplines*. It takes real work to make them an established part of an organization's operation and culture.

The following are the key aspects of our approach:

- The 4 Disciplines must be implemented as a process, not an event.
- The 4 Disciplines must be implemented with intact teams.
- The 4 Disciplines must be implemented by the leader.

#### The 4DX Installation Process

A six-step installation process leads not only to results, but more important, to adoption of an “operating system” for achieving your most important organizational goals over and over again:

Step 1: Clarify the overall WIG.

Step 2: Design the team WIGs and lead measures. This step usually requires two full days.

Step 3: Leader certification. In this critical step, which usually requires a full day, the leaders learn how to launch 4DX with their teams.

Step 4: Team launch. Leaders schedule and conduct a team launch meeting that usually lasts about two hours. In this session, they also design the team scoreboard and assign responsibility for its completion.

Step 5: Execution with coaching. Leaders typically need experienced guidance for about three months as they foster new behaviors and encounter unexpected challenges. Our experienced consultants coach leaders while developing strong internal coaches for the organization.

Step 6: Quarterly summits. Leaders report to their senior leaders on progress and results in the presence of their peers. ●

### Bringing It Home

It happens all the time. People approach us after a 4DX work session, look around to make sure no one is listening, and whisper: “Do you think 4DX would work in my personal life?” Our answer? Absolutely. The principles of focus, leverage, engagement, and accountability seem to work at any level.

We know people who have used 4DX to achieve all kinds of life goals: running a marathon, finishing a degree, learning a new sport, even blending two families.

So many of the wildly important things in our lives never get the attention we should give them because they aren't urgent. Caring for our health, helping our children, getting more education, strengthening our marriage — these things tend to take second place to the whirlwind of urgencies that require our attention right now.

Do we think 4DX can apply to your personal life? Our answer is a resounding yes! In fact, we think the principles can help you to achieve any great purpose you have in mind. ●

#### RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, you'll also like:

1. ***The Advantage* by Patrick Lencioni.** Lencioni's first non-fiction book provides leaders with a groundbreaking, approachable model for achieving organizational health.
2. ***Change the Culture, Change the Game* by Roger Connors and Tom Smith.** Learn how to build a culture of accountability in your organization.
3. ***Escape Velocity* by Geoffrey A. Moore.** Moore offers a pragmatic plan to move beyond past success and drive next-generation growth from new lines of business.