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## What I learned from Franklin Covey

Veterinary economics isn't always about big financial trends. Sometimes it's about drilling down to what you're trying to do in your practice and trying out a new process, like this one, to get there.



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One framework I've used and found helpful is an idea from Franklin Covey called the "Four Disciplines of Execution." (Shutterstock.com) Last month, I wrote about how a focus on short-term wins while pursuing long-term change will help improve veterinarians' lives today and will also—over time—improve the economic dynamics of the profession. ([Read it here.](#)) So, whether you're looking to grow market share, boost revenue, reduce employee turnover or enhance the client experience, improving your business requires changing behavior—your own or someone else's. But behavioral change isn't easy, especially amid the many pressing needs of a busy day.

One framework I've used and found helpful is an idea from Franklin Covey called the "[Four Disciplines of Execution](#)," or 4DX. These are four steps to doing things in a new way to achieve goals, even while contending with the urgent and competing priorities of a demanding practice. 4DX defines four key disciplines that lay out a straightforward path to achieving your goals and executing a successful strategy:

Discipline 1: Focus on 'wildly important goals'

Start by setting a small number of goals (just one or two) to focus energy on—these are your "wildly important goals." This might be difficult to do—it goes against our basic wiring to be ambitious and manage many things at once—but it's important to

successful execution of a strategy. An economics principle called the law of diminishing marginal returns explains why this is critical: The more you agree to do, the less you can actually get done.

Be clear on what you want to achieve, and by when. A good format for goal setting is “from x to y by z.” For example, “Increase practice revenue by 20 percent by the end of the year.” This approach to establishing your wildly important goal recognizes where you are today, where you want to go, and by when.

This seems simple, but a surprising number of leaders fail to do this.

#### Discipline 2: Measure success *better*

Now that you’ve defined your wildly important goals, you need to measure success. There are two types of metrics for this: lag measures and lead measures.

**Lag measures** describe the thing you’re trying to change or improve—where you’re falling behind. For example, if you want to reduce the number of single-visit clients, your lag measure would track this. The problem with lag measures is that they come too late—it’s like looking in the rearview mirror.

**Lead measures** focus on the activities most critical to success that help drive lag measures. How might you apply this in practice? If your goal is to increase practice revenue, one of your lead measures could be to increase the number of follow-up phone calls you make to discuss patient progress. Another could be to sign up more clients for their next appointment before they leave your clinic.

Surveying clients about their customer experience could help you identify other lead measures to drive the increased business you’re looking for.

#### Discipline 3: Keep score to inspire

Next, create a scoreboard to engage and motivate your team. If your lead measure is the number of follow-up appointments made, track and show your progress with a visible display that reminds team members of that important goal—and motivates them to follow through with their own commitments.

Make your scoreboard big, and hang it prominently on a wall where everyone will see it in your back office. When people see how their efforts contribute to a goal, they’re more vested in success. It’s amazing how people behave differently when keeping score. If you’ve ever worn a Fitbit or other fitness tracker, think about how it affects your decision to take the stairs versus the elevator.

#### Discipline 4: Hold everyone (including yourself) accountable

The fourth discipline is the most crucial: accountability. Schedule brief but regular team meetings to discuss the scoreboard, reflect on how and why the number has changed, and make individual commitments for further action.

The activity of formally examining progress and making decisions together creates accountability and supports teamwork. Team members become accountable not only to the boss, but also to the team as a whole. This dramatically increases performance when working for a common goal.

I’ve experienced success using Franklin Covey’s 4DX approach. However, no matter which tools you choose, the point is to work purposefully and actively on translating your business strategy into action. By doing so, you transform your goals into tangible wins—and bring small improvements to your practice, which build over time into broader success.

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