

Praise for *Stick with It* and its business impact

“We have successfully applied Colan’s powerful tools for 12 years to help drive our business growth and organizational engagement. Stick with It delivers another clear model and supporting tools presented in Colan’s practical and actionable style. We have integrated his thinking into our business, which has been an important factor in our ability to adapt and thrive in the market.”

Barry E. Davis, President and CEO
Crosstex Energy Services

“Stick with It simplifies the complex topic of business execution. We have applied these concepts to create winning business results and a winning culture.”

Paul Spiegelman, CEO
The Beryl Companies

“The Art of Adherence is to Strategy what The Theory of Relativity is to Physics. It’s just as compelling but much simpler. Why settle for anything less than eloquent execution and stratospheric success? You don’t have to with Stick with It as your guide book.”

Ronald G. Rossetti, Esq., Associate Vice President,
Trial Division, Nationwide Insurance

“We have applied the concepts from Stick with It, and we have won! Colan’s practical approach makes the hard work of execution very logical, and this book lays it all out clearly and simply.”

Andrew Levi, CEO
Aztec Systems

“Colan is a truly elite corporate coach. Stick with It delivers invaluable insights into adherence—a common factor for winning leaders. As a result, this book will quickly become a common factor for winning organizations.”

Mark Blinn, CEO
Flowserve

“This book is the secret sauce to being successful with any strategy. Stick with It is a practical guide for avoiding the very reason that most strategies fail—lack of adherence. The authors bring in real-world and understandable examples that will make you and your organization soar to new heights.”

David T. Feinberg, MD, MBA, President and CEO
UCLA Health System

“The Stick with It model works in any company because Colan’s strategies are grounded in real organizations and in the reality of human nature—not the theoretical. His passion for “keeping it simple” gives leaders confidence they can successfully create positive change.”

Joe Bosch, Chief Human Resources Officer
DIRECT TV

“Stick with It delivers a simple way to tackle a complex problem—execution. This book contains practical tools and insights that help you win on and off the field—in business and in life.”

Roger Staubach, Executive Chairman—Americas
Jones Lang LaSalle Americas, Inc.

“Colan’s cut-through-the-clutter approach to strategy enabled us to spend more time on important questions about our business. The art of adherence does the same thing when it’s time to put the strategy to work and execute. Stick with It brings it all together in a quick-read and easy-to-apply format.”

Mike Barnes, Group CEO
Signet Jewelers

“The adherence equation (focus _ competence _ passion) is a powerful formula for driving growth and winning in today’s market. Stick with It balances research with real-world examples to deliver field-tested tools, so you can read it on Friday and apply it on Monday.”

John Walker, COO
KidKraft

Lee Colan is not only a successful businessman, leader, and great verbal communicator—he writes a great book! His simple, clean, and carefully worded prose makes reading this book a joy. Real-world examples provide positive reinforcement for each point made. Simplicity—focus—prioritization—visibility—meeting effectiveness—accountability. Lee handles all of these important issues with wit and clarity. I heartily recommend Stick with It to leaders and their teams.

Bryon Potter, Vice Chairman and CEO
DW Distribution

“Persistence and perseverance—to me, two of the most important attributes of a great leader. Lee and Julie provide a wonderful field guide for those committed to developing great strategies and ideas, but most important, executing them with excellence.”

Melissa Reiff, President
The Container Store

“Stick with It brings a new level of clarity and simplicity to the age-old challenge of how to achieve outstanding results. Lee’s ability to cut through the clutter and give you just the right formula is priceless.”

Cheryl Johnson, Director
Field Human Resources and
Organization Development, ULTA Beauty

“Some books impact your business. Other books change your life. This book does both.”

Richard A. Lavinski, CPA, Managing Partner
The SolomonEdwardsGroup

“Stick with It clearly outlines the art and the science of consistent execution. Its rare simplicity and clarity for a business book make it quick to read and easy to apply. The authors build a bridge between knowledge and action that creates a powerful competitive advantage.”

Darron Ash, Chief Financial Officer
Sammons Enterprises, Inc.

“Stick with It is a great book for any company, large or small, or any individual striving for success. It contains a terrific road map on how to win! The timing of this book could not be better because there are so many companies trying to dig out of the recession. I invite everyone to use this book to chart their goals and objectives whether personal or business.

Larry Foster, Chairman
Foster Financial Group

“Strategy is the fuel to survive, and flawless execution is how you thrive. Fill your tank with this superb book and reenergize your leadership journey.”

Robert J. Bunker, Chairman and CEO
Medical Staffing Network LLC

“At a time when clutter, fast-changing priorities, and obsessive doubting seem to be the norm, Stick with It provides the most practical blueprint for achieving business and personal success that I have ever seen. This is a ‘must read’ book for every business leader.”

Chuck Corbin, Vice President, Strategy and
Business Development, BancTec, Inc.

“Most business books leave you hanging somewhere between ‘too theoretical’ and ‘too simplistic’ and nothing ever gets applied. Stick with It is all about application, application, application—striking the right balance of explaining the why’s and giving clear steps on how. You will not be left hanging.”

John C. Bentley, Executive Vice President
Retirement Advisors of America

“Stick with It is unusually clear and straightforward for books on this topic. The authors outline a simple, actionable blueprint for building a successful and profitable organization.”

Dudley Hafner, Former CEO
American Heart Association, Inc.

“I have spent my career in the field of adherence to fitness routines. The adherence equation these authors have field-tested applies to business and personal success. Its simplicity is what distinguishes it from being just another model to serving as a powerful tool for getting results.”

Charles L. Sterling, Ed.D.
Chairman Emeritus, Fitnessgram
The Cooper Institute

“A fresh management approach to getting better results. The techniques are so simple, but seldom followed by the business world. This is a practical, informative, and an easily readable guide for winning leaders.”

Gary Siegel, Chief Human Resources Officer
ZTE USA

“Perseverance is a real commitment to overcoming all obstacles—a true virtue. The Colans teach us the secret of winning—the what and how of sticking with it.”

Denis G. Simon, Senior Executive Vice President
Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

“Stick with It gives us what we really need—a blueprint for successful execution. It contains important insights into the application of simple, time-honored principles that yield results. It helps us bridge the knowing-doing gap.”

Scott Topping, EVP, CFO, and Treasurer
Hawaiian Airlines, Inc.

“Lee excels at packing an enormous amount of wisdom and practical application into concise, quick reading. Lee’s material could not be easier to share, train, and reinforce with your associates. Teaming up with his wife Julie on this book brings a true complementary and fully comprehensive perspective to the art of adherence.”

Cindy Lewis, President/CEO
AirBorn, Inc.

“If you are looking for the keys to making your strategy come to life, you have found it in Stick with It. The authors present an easy-to-follow blueprint for executing any strategy. They address the critical components of mastering the art of adherence—from focus to competence to passion. A must read for anyone responsible for delivering results!”

Matt Krzysiak, CEO
National Motor Club

“Stick with It provides a simple yet elegant blueprint for success for any organization. Despite the fact that we live in a rapidly changing, interconnected, and always-on world, the keys to success in life and in business remain the same, namely, that clarity of purpose, a solid game plan, and, most important consistent daily execution always produces superior results. Stick with It should be required reading for every leader. I know it will be for ours.”

Dave Borden, CEO
Pharmaceuticals Strategies Group

“The beauty of Stick with It is that it embodies the very principles it sets out to teach—focus and simplicity. Lee and Julie present strategies that will transform managers into leaders. It charts a clear course for personal accountability and challenges every individual to take the leap from where they currently are to what they can become!”

Sharon Goldstein, Campus Operating Officer
Berkeley College Online

“For change to matter, it must endure. Lee and Julie lay out thought-provoking and relevant tools to make change, but also to create and sustain impact that really sticks.”

Dean Carter, Chief HR Officer
Sears Holdings

“Stick with It is a treasure chest of practical advice. A plan can be brilliant, but if you don’t have the confidence in it to execute it with precision and consistency, you cannot succeed. Tenacity is critical to personal success in any area of life. This book is a powerful reminder of that basic truth.”

David L. Boren, President
University of Oklahoma

“Serving on boards and being a student of the ‘pillars of wisdom’ for the last 20 years has allowed me to see, hear, and read the work of great thought leaders—Lee and Julie Davis-Colan are among the elite. The Colans’ discipline of simplicity with depth is compelling. Stick with It is beautifully framed and sequenced. It presents a system of thinking and acting that, if followed, can be the basis of your personal and professional success.”

Jerry McNabb
McNabb Advisory
Advisor to Affluent Families and Their Businesses

“The authors of Stick with It artfully make the point that adhering to your organizational plan is the key success determinant. This is another outstanding, actionable book by Colan for those of us seeking to optimize our organizations’ effectiveness and success.”

Stephen L. Mansfield, PhD, FACHE
President and CEO
Methodist Health System

“Stick with It captures in an exceptional way the challenges faced by leaders in maintaining a sharp focus on the execution of strategy, especially when facing the immense tactical pressures of day-to-day business.”

Raanan Horowitz, CEO
Elbit Systems of America

“Colan illuminates the adherence gap between strategy and action. He simplifies what many of us all too easily overcomplicate: that a good strategy can take us to ‘next’ as long as we dedicate ourselves to the belief in and diligent execution of the plan. Stick with It provides simple, useful concepts and exercises to help leaders with the why and what, but as important, the how of winning.

Jennifer Pritchard, President, Global Retail
FOSSIL

“The adherence equation presented in this book is perhaps one of the single-most important leadership formulas ever produced. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind based on personal observations that the “stick with it” principle separates the great leaders from the good ones. The authors articulate this principle masterfully in this book and break the components—focus, competence, and passion—into understandable and applicable actions. I not only read the original 2003 edition in one day, but I took my entire leadership team through it. I plan on doing the same with this book!”

Larry Taylor, PhD
Head of School
Prestonwood Christian Academy

“The authors hit the bull’s-eye! In our company, one of the single biggest challenges is finding leaders who will execute a plan. I strongly recommend Stick with It to any leader who wants to build a successful team.”

Jerry Crawford, President
Jani-King International, Inc.

“Lee and Julie provide a road map to a strategic system with proven effectiveness that can be implemented by ANY leaders in ANY company to reach their potential.”

Terri Lynn Schmidt
Top Leader in a Multi-million Dollar
Direct Sales Company

Stick

with

It

Other Books by Lee J. Colan

- *Engaging the Hearts and Minds of All Your Employees*
- *Leadership Matters: Daily Insights to Inspire Extraordinary Results*
- *Winners ALWAYS Quit* (with David Cottrell)
- *The Nature of Excellence* (with David Cottrell and Tom Fox)
- *7 Moments . . . That Define Excellent Leaders*
- *107 Ways to Stick to It*
- *Power Exchange: How to Boost Accountability and Performance in Today's Workforce*
- *INSPIRE! Connecting with Students to Make a Difference*
- *Orchestrating Attitude: Getting the Best from Yourself and Others*
- *Passionate Performance: Engaging Minds and Hearts to Conquer the Competition*
- *Sticking to It: The Art of Adherence*

Stick

with

It

Mastering the Art of Adherence

Lee J. Colan, PhD
and Julie Davis-Colan



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Gratefully,

Lee J. Colan and Julie Davis-Colan
April 2013

Introduction: Winning in Today's World

How do you win in today's world?

Is it having a distinct competitive advantage, such as exceptional talent, a cutting-edge product, or standout service? Perhaps it comes down to being able to anticipate market trends or fostering a culture of creativity and innovation. Or maybe the answer is having the best strategy. While all these factors are clearly important, none (nor all) guarantees success.

So, what is the answer? Sticking with your plan. The topic of executing your plans might not be currently trending on Twitter, but it is the key to success. You can be the best and have all the advantages, but to win, you must execute consistently. Plain and simple. It is not necessarily easy, but it is certainly simple.

In 2003, Lee wrote a rapid-read handbook on the topic of consistent execution titled *Sticking to It*. In the years since, the world has changed dramatically. Consider that in 2003 smartphones didn't exist and the iPod was only two years old. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube had not yet launched, and LinkedIn was in its infancy. AOL was at its peak and virtually no one texted. Blockbuster and Lehman Brothers were the darlings of their respective industries. And few people had heard of an Illinois senator named Barack Obama.

A lot has changed in the last 10 years, but one thing hasn't: Sticking with it is still the biggest factor for winning in business and in life. Today, we face never-ending, rapid-fire change including constantly

shifting priorities, sweeping advances in technology and communication, fluctuating markets, and heightened global competition. Let's face it. It's tough to stick with anything in this kind of environment. Yet this is precisely the reason why adhering to your strategy is so vitally important to long-term success.

Our mission has always been to provide our clients, readers, and audiences with clear thinking and practical tools to help them succeed in a “more, better, faster” world. We know your time is a precious and limited resource. That's why this book cuts through the information clutter and explains the *how* of sticking with it using a simple blueprint. Understanding why and how the highest performers consistently win will help you achieve breakthrough results and propel you ahead of your competition.

We have been privileged to collaborate with, advise, interview, and train more than 20,000 leaders on this topic. It has been an enriching opportunity for us to learn from leaders at every level, in organizations of all sizes, from fast-growing small businesses to Fortune 100s, and across all industries. Many of these organizations and leaders have applied the concepts in this book to win, and you will find their insights, advice, and real-world experiences throughout.

Achieving your goals is a primary business benefit of consistent execution. However, those who consistently execute their plans predictably realize these additional benefits, that combine to create a powerful and sustainable competitive advantage:

- Increased productivity and improved morale
- Improved accountability and follow-through
- Better results with fewer resources
- Elevated market position and employer brand

While each of us may have different goals and dreams, we all have one thing in common: We want to win! Whether you lead an entire organization, a small department, or just yourself, applying the action-

able steps found in *Stick with It* will guide you to victory.
So, get ready to win!



*Look for the QR codes throughout the book to
download free tools that will help you stick with it.*

www.theLgroup.com/StickwithIt

Stick

with

It

PART I

The **Art**
of
Adherence

The Knowing-Doing Gap

How many times have we been told that the formula for maintaining a healthy weight is to eat a balanced diet and exercise regularly? Although sophisticated marketers package this information in many creative ways, it's really quite simple: calories in equal calories out. If we know the formula, then why do so many of us still struggle to lose weight? The real secret to maintaining a healthy weight is not in knowing the formula, but in executing it. That is where our challenge seems to lie—in applying what we already know.

This same dynamic is magnified every year on January 1, when millions of us make New Year's resolutions. The beginning of a new year is a time to start fresh, to set new goals, and to make new plans for various areas of our lives. But we all know what happens. We slip back into our routine, and those resolutions fall by the wayside. A recent survey by FranklinCovey found that 35 percent of people break their resolutions by the end of January (many in less than a week) and that a mere 23 percent of New Year's resolutions are ever kept.¹

It's not that our intentions are bad; quite the contrary. And it's not that we don't know how to tackle our resolutions. The problem is that most of us don't stick with it long enough to permanently change our behavior and get the results we want. (It takes at least 21 days of repeated action for a new behavior to become a habit.) **There is a knowing-doing gap—we know what to do, but fail to do it consistently.**

The same knowing-doing gap happens in business every day. Organizations develop brilliant strategies and are initially motivated to implement them. And yet many don't adhere to their strategies long enough to achieve the desired results. Most organizations understand how to develop a strategy, but many fail to successfully execute it. Consider the following findings:

- Ernst & Young found that a full 66 percent of corporate strategy are never executed.²
- Robert Kaplan and David Norton (*The Strategy-Focused Organization*) reveal that 90 percent of well-formulated strategies fail due to poor execution.³
- Deloitte identified top executives' single biggest hindrance to their companies' growth was "poor execution of strategy."⁴

Now consider that in a typical year about 15 percent of CEOs are removed from their posts.⁵ Why? Of course, some have poor strategies. However, if we read between the lines of most corporate press releases, the most common reason CEOs lose their leadership positions is that they don't fully execute their strategies. In fact, according to highly regarded business consultant Ram Charan and *Fortune* columnist Geoffrey Colvin, 70 percent of CEO failures come not as result of poor strategy but of poor execution.⁶ Chief executives are well aware of the challenges. According to a survey of 769 CEOs by The Conference Board, "excellence in execution" ranked as their number one business challenge.⁷

Lack of strategy execution is not isolated to the c-suite. Leaders at all levels and in every corner of the organization, from the production line to sales, experience challenges in executing their plans. For example, many organizations have formal quality processes in place, yet still deal with quality concerns. Chances are that frontline team members understand the quality control processes but don't consistently apply them. Safety is another area in which the knowing-doing

gap is prevalent. Safety professionals know all too well the challenges of trying to get employees to follow safety procedures.

But perhaps nowhere in business is the knowing-doing gap more obvious than in sales. For many businesses, sales are a numbers game: a specified number of calls lead to a certain number of prospects that generate requests for proposals that ultimately yield a predictable number of sales. It's the classic sales funnel. Salespeople know the formula behind the funnel and are typically well trained in sales techniques. Those who execute consistently are high performers, the sales superstars. Those who consistently fail to execute, fail.

The consensus among strategy experts is that formulating strategy is relatively easy compared to executing it. But why is it so difficult for us to stick with our plan? What is at the root of this knowing-doing gap? In his book, *Making Strategy Work: Leading Effective Execution and Change*, Wharton School Management Professor Lawrence Hrebiniak proposes that execution is difficult primarily because:

- Leaders are trained to plan rather than to execute.
- Senior leadership tends to leave execution to lower-level leaders and team members and to review progress only periodically.
- Execution requires more people than strategy formulation. Developing strategy is typically done by relatively few people, whereas execution is a teamwide or businesswide endeavor.
- Execution requires more time than strategy formulation. Developing strategy is one action step; execution is a continuous, long-term process.⁸

Execution is simple in theory but difficult to put into practice. The great baseball player Yogi Berra was known as much for his witticisms as for his on-the-field performance. Berra had keen insight when he said, "In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice there is."

Filling the Knowing-Doing Gap

The greatest challenge for today's leaders is not a lack of innovative strategies but a lack of disciplined execution of these strategies. The game is won not by those who stand on the sidelines with a great plan in hand nor those who execute their plans when it is convenient or easy. Rather, the game is won by those who are committed to executing their plans day in and day out. Conceptually, this seems valid and logical, but does it hold true in real organizations run by real people? To answer that question, let's look at research based on real companies from all over the world that know how to execute and get results.

In 2012, *Fortune* magazine and Hay Group conducted a global survey to identify the world's most admired companies and to determine which best practices catapulted these companies to (or kept them at) the top of the list. The study looked at the Fortune 1000, the Global 500, and the top foreign companies operating in the United States. The four characteristics that distinguish the world's most admired companies are:

1. Strategic excellence
2. Structures and processes that sustain performance over time
3. Achieving success through people
4. Placing a high value on leadership and talent

The report concluded: "This doesn't just mean the World's Most Admired Companies are good at making plans (though they are). Where they shine is in their ability to make strategy happen, by aligning both their organizations and their people with key goals and objectives, by seeing things through. . . . Most companies devote a lot of attention to strategic planning. But the Most Admired Companies also put those strategies into practice."⁹

In other words, the world's most admired companies know how to stick with it. They may not have completely eliminated the knowing-

doing gap, but they have certainly reduced it enough to create a significant competitive advantage.

Of course it's nice to be recognized as one of the world's most admired companies. However, bottom-line results are key indicators of an organization's health. So how do the top 50 world's most admired companies compare in that respect? Below is a comparison of total shareholder returns for these same companies versus the S&P 500.¹⁰

	Shareholder Returns For Top 50 World's Most Admired Companies	Shareholder Returns for S&P 500
Year of Study	22.6%	15.1%
Previous 3 Years	4.3%	(2.8%)
Previous 5 Years	8.3%	2.3%
Previous 10 Years	7.8%	1.4%

In every time period, the world's most admired companies outperformed not only the competition within their industries but also the market as a whole. And over a 10-year period, their returns were *five times* that of the S&P 500. These are pretty compelling differences. They are even more amazing when you consider the simplicity of the four differentiating characteristics: strategy, structure, people, and leadership. Could it really be that simple? Yes, it is. The difference between the world's most admired companies and the rest of the pack is that they do the basics exceptionally well and they execute their strategies masterfully.

These findings confirm that having a sound strategy is only one piece of a winning formula. Disciplined execution is the game-changer. How much of a game changer? A survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit (a sister organization of CFO.com) of 197 executives attempted to determine the value of filling the knowing-doing gap.

These senior executives predicted that if they were to stick with it and become “very effective” at strategy execution, they would likely improve operating profits by an average of 30 percent over two years.¹¹

Bottom line: **Consistent execution consistently wins.**

*Ideas are easy. It's the execution of ideas that really separates
the sheep from the goats.*

SUE GRAFTON, NOVELIST

What Is Adherence?

In business and in life, the game is usually won by those who can consistently execute a well-thought-out strategy. In other words, winners stick with it—they practice adherence.

Adherence is the ability to consistently execute. Not coincidentally, the word “adherence” appears to have originated in the 1500s from the French word “adherer,” which means “to stick to.”¹ Adherence is the critical link between strategy (knowing) and results (doing). Therefore, it is the solution to the knowing-doing gap. Winning requires adherence because successful execution of your plan is not a one-time event but rather steady progress over an extended period of time.

No discussion about the concept of adherence would be complete without mentioning one man who likely knew more about adherence in his day than any other: George de Mestral. George was a Swiss engineer and part-time inventor. A simple incident in 1948 changed the course of his life and led to a common product that is still used all over the world.

While he was out hunting with his dog one day, George found that his pants and his dog’s fur were covered with burdock burrs. He had such difficulty removing the burrs that he became intrigued with the little seeds’ pods. Later when he was back home, he examined one under a microscope. George noticed that it was covered with hundreds of tiny “hooks” that allowed it to grab hold of strands of clothing or

fur. Inspired by nature's ingenuity, he conceived the idea for a similar fastener based on the burr's design.²

After several years of trial and error and working with a weaver in France, George perfected the design for his "locking tape." He called his invention Velcro®, from the French words *velours* and *crochet* (meaning "velvet" and "hook"), and was awarded a patent for the world's first hook-and-loop fastener in 1955. George quit his job, established his own company, and obtained a \$150,000 loan to market the concept. Velcro was officially introduced in 1960, but it was not an immediate commercial success. It took some time before people began to grasp its many applications. Eventually, it was adopted by industries as varied as aerospace and children's clothing, making de Mestral a multimillionaire many times over.

Today, Velcro is a household name. It is found in everything from sneakers and wallets to blood-pressure cuffs and toys. It was used on the space shuttle and helped hold a human heart together during the first artificial heart surgery.³ It was even used as a piece of comedic genius in 1984 when late night talk show host David Letterman launched himself from a trampoline onto a Velcro wall while wearing a Velcro suit. He stuck.

It took George de Mestral 12 years from the day he first encountered those sticky burrs to the time he brought his locking tape idea to market and even longer for it to become a success. Not only did he tenaciously stick to his plan, but the product he planned and then executed literally stuck to him. So when you think of adherence, think of George de Mestral. Perhaps we should dub him "the father of adherence." He stuck with it long enough to create one of the stickiest materials we know.

The Adherence Equation

So how do you achieve adherence? How can you ensure that you will stick with your strategy long enough to win? Fortunately, adherence is a skill that can be learned. Based on the experiences of winning

individuals, teams, and organizations, we have identified three components of adherence:

- **Focus** provides the clarity necessary to make decisions that support your most important goals. It results in a clearly defined pathway to success. A sharp focus answers the “what” question. *What* do you need to do to execute your strategy?
- **Competence** is used in the broadest sense of the term. It encompasses all the skills, systems, processes, and tools a team uses to achieve its goals. The result is the ability to commit to, measure, and hit your targets. Building competence answers the “how” question. *How* will you execute your strategy?
- **Passion** creates a sense of connectedness. It creates a connection between teammates, a connection to our human need for meaningful work, and a connection to each individual’s sense of value and contribution. Igniting passion answers the “why” question, *Why* are you executing your strategy?

The relationship between these three components is best illustrated by a multiplication equation we call the adherence equation:

$$\text{Focus} \times \text{Competence} \times \text{Passion} = \text{ADHERENCE}$$

When you think about adherence this way, the critical role of each component becomes clear. From elementary school math we know that if any multiplier in an equation is 0, then the product is 0. For example, assume that each of the three components—focus, competence, and passion—are rated on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. If any one of the three components is missing, (e.g., focus = 0), then there is no adherence:

Focus	x	Competence	x	Passion	=	Adherence
0	x	4	x	8	=	0

The three adherence components are interrelated, meaning that changes in one affect changes in the others, similar to the way the various systems of the human body affect one another. As you address one component of the equation—or conversely, as you ignore one—you will see direct implications in the other two. Consider what happens with a modest improvement in all three components:

Focus	x	Competence	x	Passion	=	Adherence
5	x	5	x	5	=	125
6	x	6	x	6	=	216

A modest improvement in each component produces a 73 percent increase in adherence (125 to 216). This underscores the compounding relationship among these components. Focus, competence, and passion are equally important and more powerful together.

This interrelationship creates a multiplier effect that can work for you (or against you if the components are not managed). Enhancing one component creates a multiplier effect on your adherence. As we discuss each of the three components, you will see the connections and notice that focus, competence, and passion are not three distinct and separate elements; rather, they are interconnected dynamics that influence and build upon each other.

The Art of Adherence

As we discuss at the beginning of this book, adherence is simple but not necessarily easy. It takes skill and creativity to continually nurture focus, competence, and passion with your team. This is why we call it the *art* of adherence.

The art of adherence is a lot like growing Indian Thorny bamboo, which is native to Asia. Like many bamboo species, when this particular seed is planted, it requires the right amount of watering, sunlight, care, and feeding. It takes up to two years of this kind of careful attention

for the bamboo to build a strong root structure, which is not visible aboveground. However, once the sprout finally breaks through the earth, the Indian Thorny bamboo can grow up to 100 feet in a month!

When you consistently sharpen focus, build competence, and ignite passion, you build a strong foundation for adherence. Initially, you may not see many tangible results. But rest assured that things are happening beyond your sight. Adherence is growing. Leaders and team members begin to stick with it, to execute their plans consistently. Your team builds momentum as it adheres to its plan and achieves small goals that lead to bigger goals. The required effort decreases over time as actions become habits. Momentum continues to build, resulting in a self-reinforcing cycle of achievement. Then, seemingly overnight, your results will multiply.

Mastering the art of adherence is a primary job of every leader at every level of the organization, and the adherence equation is designed to help you do just that. It offers a proven way for you to consistently execute your plan. Before we dive into the components of focus, competence, and passion, let's explore the relationship between adherence and strategy.

*I think our lives are akin to the Chinese bamboo tree.
Sometimes we put forth effort, put forth effort, and put forth effort
and nothing seems to happen. But if you do the right things
long enough, you'll receive the rewards of your efforts.*

CATHY TRUETT, FOUNDER
CHICK-FIL-A

The Role of Strategy

The quality of your strategy is certainly important in order for your team to win. However, it is not the primary factor in seizing victory. The primary factor in winning is adherence. Winning is achieved through adherence. **Winning depends less on a brilliant plan than on consistent actions.**

While it may at first seem counterintuitive, research shows that adherence is indeed more important than the quality of your plan. *Fortune* magazine and the Hay Group studied the issue of strategy execution. The researchers found that virtually all the companies in the study:

- Saw strategy as important
- Had detailed implementation plans
- Used strategy to help identify what to *stop* doing.¹

All the companies seemed to talk the “planning and strategy talk.” However, these factors were not what differentiated the companies in the study from those that made *Fortune’s* Top Ten Most Admired list. The characteristics that were unique to the Top Ten Most Admired Companies and separated them from their industries peers were:

- Roles were clearly defined for executives, managers, and employees (focus).

- Leaders were held accountable—both personally and for their team (competence).
- Performance measurement was continuous and aligned with the strategy (competence).
- Business visions and purpose were communicated deep into the organization (passion).²

The researchers concluded that for the top 10 companies, strategy execution was not an exercise—it was the focus of everything they did: “Even in highly competitive and rapidly changing environments, most admired companies are distinguished by their success in executing against strategic plans.”³ In other words, they had strong adherence to their plans. These companies knew how to create a strategy; but more important, they achieved superior results because they knew how to stick with it.

What this tells us is that although a solid strategy is important, it only gets you in the game. Adherence to the strategy is what propels you into the winner’s circle.

This is consistent with our observations over 25 years. Winning teams develop solid strategies (not always great ones) but they spend lots of time and energy to ensure they adhere to their strategies. One way to express this relationship between strategy and adherence is this:

$$\text{Strategy} + \text{Adherence} = \text{Level of Achievement}$$

$$\underbrace{\hspace{10em}}_{\text{focus} \times \text{competence} \times \text{passion}}$$

This equation shows that strategy has only an additive impact on your achievement level, whereas adherence has a multiplier effect on achievement. For instance, if you have a mediocre strategy (say a 4 on a scale of 0 to 10) and your adherence is average (focus = 4, competence = 5, passion = 6), your achievement level would be:

Strategy + Adherence = Level of Achievement

$$4 + 120 = 124$$

$$\begin{array}{c} | \\ \hline 4 \times 5 \times 6 \end{array}$$

Now assume that you really work on your strategy and make it great—say a 9 out of 10:

$$9 + 120 = 129$$

$$\begin{array}{c} | \\ \hline 4 \times 5 \times 6 \end{array}$$

All your efforts to improve your strategy would result in a modest increase in achievement from 122 to 129.

But now let's say that you put that same effort into adhering to your original strategy (even though it was a mediocre one) instead of focusing on improving the strategy itself. Even if you slightly improve on every component of adherence by only 1 point (focus = 5, competence = 6, passion = 7), your achievement level gets a significant boost:

$$4 + 210 = 214$$

$$\begin{array}{c} | \\ \hline 5 \times 6 \times 7 \end{array}$$

Because of the multiplier effect, this small improvement in each component of adherence results in a greater than 72 percent increase in achievement level (124 to 214), and this is with a mediocre strategy. Imagine what would happen if you improved your adherence even a little bit more.

This is why an average strategy with strong adherence tends to produce better results than a brilliant strategy with minimal adherence. So, **spend more effort on adherence than on tweaking your strategy.**

We certainly do not recommend blind adherence—sticking with a bad strategy at all costs. Winning organizations are keenly attuned to their marketplaces and are flexible enough to adjust strategies when necessary to address changing market conditions. However, leaders

frequently tinker with strategy in ways that are often counterproductive. For example, new leaders typically feel pressure to “make their mark” on the team or organization. So a common reaction of these leaders is to shift strategic direction, regardless of whether the previous strategy was working.

We frequently find that when a strategy doesn't seem to be working, even seasoned leaders can be too quick to assume it's the strategy that is faulty rather than the execution. The opposite is usually true; the problem is execution. Constantly tinkering with strategy inhibits success by not allowing the original strategy to take root. On the other hand, leaders who stick with it see results.

You can observe this same principle in sports. Winning coaches tend to focus more on improving execution than on shifting strategy in reaction to a bad play, a loss, or a slump. In 2011, the NBA's Dallas Mavericks were a middle-of-the-pack playoff team (which is not saying much since more than half the teams make the playoffs). There were good odds that they would get knocked out in the first round of the playoffs. That prospect did not faze Mavericks coach Rick Carlisle. He stuck with his simple strategy of good passing, hustle, and team-oriented basketball, even against faster, stronger, more athletic teams. He continued to hone his team's ability to execute its game plan. As a result, the Mavericks were able to beat perennial powerhouses like the Los Angeles Lakers. We ultimately enjoyed watching our hometown team win the NBA championship by out-executing a Miami Heat team that had more youth, speed, and talent.

The ultimate competitive advantage, organizationally or personally—and even in sports—is being the very best at adhering to your strategy. If you do not adhere to your plan—even the very best plan—it is like having a great blueprint for a new house but never building it. It's just a plan, so don't start inviting friends over for the housewarming party yet. If you want to win, a good plan is necessary but not sufficient. You also have to stick with it to make your plan a reality.

*Success doesn't necessarily come from breakthrough innovation
but from flawless execution. A great strategy alone won't win a game
or a battle; the win comes from basic blocking and tackling.*

NAVEEN JAIN, BUSINESS
EXECUTIVE AND ENTREPRENEUR

Start with Strategy

While the key factor in winning is the ability to stick with your plan, it makes sense that you start with the best plan possible. Our experiences working with clients on strategic planning and execution indicate a direct correlation between the simplicity of a plan and the chances of adhering to it. A theme we hear over and over again is, “Give us three steps, and we will knock ’em out. Give us a three-ring binder, and it will sit on the shelf.”

It is important to start with a simple, clear, and well-thought-out plan, whether you are developing a corporate strategic plan or setting your department’s strategy. Why stack the odds against yourself with an overly complex or unclear plan? Our goal is to have clients articulate their plans in a just few pages. **If you are going to work on a plan, your plan should work for you.**

Management journals, books, and articles are filled with countless approaches to strategic planning. The definitions for the various components of a strategic plan can be debated endlessly—a vision versus a mission, initiatives versus tactics, goals versus objectives. So rather than use valuable client time debating definitions or working through a complex planning process, we cut through the clutter by answering six simple questions about your business or team (depending on your level in the organization). Think of these questions as the “Cliffs-Notes” version of planning. Develop clear answers to these questions, and you’ll be off to a strong start. Don’t be deceived by the simplicity

of the questions. They require deep thought, good supporting data, and honest discussion in order to articulate concise answers. And remember, the questions apply to leaders of organizations, regional offices, departments, or small teams.

Six Simple Questions for a Winning Plan

Every leader should answer the following six questions for his or her function.

1. Why do we exist?

What promises are you making to customers? Which wants, needs, desires, pains, or problems do your products or services solve? The answer to this question should rarely change since it reflects the core of your existence. Keep your answer real and relevant because people can commit only to what they understand, and your leaders must be able to own and live the answer. And keep it simple. Anything more than a sentence might be too long to remember and too long for employees to really connect with.

Consider how your function or organization makes life better for others. Your answer should stir the emotions. It should not be a project goal (too time-restricted), financial target (not emotionally compelling), or a specific strategy (too narrow). People don't get emotionally charged about a "10 percent net profit," a "20 percent return on investment" or a "30 percent increase in market share." Your answer to this question should give your employees a reason to be excited about getting up and going to work every day, a reason to get excited about Monday mornings.

Your answer should also guide your team members in making daily decisions that support the core reason for your function's existence. One of the most powerful psychological human needs is the need for meaning or significance. We all want to contribute to something bigger than ourselves. When it comes to your plan, meaning precedes motivation. Give your team a connection to something meaningful, and they will provide discretionary effort.

Here is how a few winning organizations and teams have answered the “why do we exist” question (but don’t be restricted by their structure or wording):

- **Google:** To organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.
- **Bristol-Myers Squibb:** To discover, develop, and deliver innovative medicines that help patients prevail over serious diseases.
- **Coca-Cola:** To refresh the world, to inspire moments of optimism and happiness, to create value and make a difference.
- **National Motor Club:** To provide peace of mind and convenience for our traveling public.
- **Customer call center:** To brighten the day of each and every caller.
- **Information technology department:** To improve personal productivity.
- **Purchasing department:** To ensure that all company products are made with the best raw materials available.

Your team’s purpose may not be apparent at first glance. For example, DW Distribution is a regional building products distributor in its third generation of family leadership. Its leaders experienced a common challenge when answering this question, “Why do we exist?” Like many companies, it was easy for the leaders to describe *what* they do instead of *why* they do it. Their initial response to this question was, “We move quality building products from point A to point B on time.” While, in fact, this is what the company does, there was also a deeper “why.” Since many of its products were used for new home construction, the ultimate answer was, “We distribute building products that help the American dream come true.” Now, that’s a purpose worth working for! If you have a clear, brief description of what you do, consider adding to the end of that statement the words, “so that”

or “in order to.” You will find that it makes for a much more meaningful and emotionally compelling answer because it answers why your function exists.

2. Where are we going?

The answer to this question should be a forward-looking statement that inspires your entire team, from customer-facing operations to back-office support. It should connect today’s tasks to tomorrow’s promise. The answer may change over time to drive constant learning and innovation.

Fossil is a worldwide watchmaker and also one of the fastest-growing lifestyle brands with its line of American vintage watches, accessories, clothing, and shoes. Jennifer Pritchard, president of retail for Fossil, has led its retail growth to 418 stores worldwide with a vision of being a distinctive lifestyle brand. Pritchard has been a client of ours for several years and shared her perspective on this question, “Where are we going?”: “If you don’t invest the time to know where you want to go, you will never be in a position to get there. It is in the development of your vision and strategy that you take the first real step toward making it a reality. Once you have your ‘where’ you can invest in the ‘how’.”¹

Here are some other examples of answers to the question, “Where are we going?” Note that some of the examples are from the same companies and teams for which we gave examples to question 1:

- **Zappos:** One day, 30 percent of all retail transactions in the United States will be online. People will buy from the company with the best service and the best selection. Zappos.com will be that online store.
- **Nike:** To be the number one athletic goods company in the world.
- **DuPont:** To be the world’s most dynamic science company, creating sustainable solutions essential to better, safer, and healthier lives for people everywhere.

- **National Motor Club:** To become the recognized number 1 quality service provider benefiting our customers and members.
- **Customer call center:** To always be in the industry's top 10 percent in response time and caller satisfaction.
- **Information technology department:** To consistently deliver 99 percent uptime for all business-critical systems.
- **Purchasing department:** To reduce our company's carbon footprint by 50 percent in the next five years.

3. How will we conduct ourselves?

Your answer to this question should reflect your values. It will influence how you design your people systems (e.g., selection, training, promotion, rewards) and your work systems (e.g., meeting ground rules, response expectations, decision making, quality control, collaboration, innovation). Consider these value pillars as you formulate your answer: customer, team, individual, and excellence. Think about the very few values you hold as core, as nonnegotiable. Avoid the typical, long laundry list of values and instead target three to five core values at most. For example, one of *Fortune's* most admired companies, Marriott, boils its values down to: put people first, pursue excellence, embrace change, act with integrity, and serve the world. We elaborate more on values in Chapter 18, "Value Your Values."

4. What will we do?

Strategies generally revolve around customers/markets, people/organizations, products/services, systems/technology, and distribution/sales channels. The answer to this question should address how your team will compete in the marketplace or service other departments (if you lead an internal service function). Consider what you will specifically do (and not do), who you will serve (and not serve), and how you will differentiate yourself. Will you enter new markets, roll out new products, leverage a new technology, consolidate operations, use a new marketing approach, build upon your supply chain, become more operationally efficient?

It is far better to limit yourself to a few strategies and stick with them than to formulate so many strategies that you can't fully execute them. Try to identify no more than three strategies to execute.

5. How will we measure success?

Measures of success tell you in quantifiable ways if you are making progress in executing your plan and, ultimately, if you have fully implemented it. The nature of your strategies will dictate what makes sense to measure: sales, profits per employee, expenses as a percent of sales, employee engagement level, return on equity, market share, customer satisfaction, year-over-year growth, and so on. We address the importance of measurement in Chapter 13, "Balance Your View."

6. What improvements or changes must we make?

Rarely does a solid strategy enable your team to proceed with business as usual—it should trigger some changes in order to take your performance to the next level. Your answer to this question should describe just a few key initiatives to support each strategy that you outlined in question 4. Let's assume that one of your strategies is to add services to support your product offerings in order to deepen customer loyalty. Key initiatives might include identifying those services customers perceive as most valuable to their product purchase and testing initial service offerings in key markets to measure customer and revenue impact.

The Simple Six in Action

Now that you've seen the questions, let's take a look at how a worldwide manufacturer of golf clubs might answer the simple six questions to develop a strategy:

1. **Why do we exist?** To bring confidence and winning strokes to golfers across the globe.
2. **Where are we going?** We will be a trusted club in the golf bag of 75 percent of the world's ranked professional golfers.

3. How will we conduct ourselves?

- Innovate in all we do—the big ideas and the little ideas.
- Respect our teammates and the profession we serve.
- Pour our hearts into our work. Every club is a reflection of us.

4. What will we do?

- Penetrate new markets.
- Boost brand exposure.
- Drive organizational efficiency.

5. How will we measure our success?

- Penetrate new markets
 - Increase sales from \$5 million to \$10 million in China and Japan.
 - Increase sales by 15 percent in the European market.
- Boost brand exposure
 - Achieve number 1 or 2 ranking in all professional player surveys of best brand of clubs.
 - Triple the number of brand impressions in Asian markets by year-end.
- Drive organizational efficiency
 - Reduce manufacturing waste by 10 percent by year-end and by 20 percent over three years.
 - Reduce expenses as a percent of sales by 5 percent by year-end and by 15 percent over three years.
 - Improve average employee engagement score to 4.5 by year-end and to 4.8 (top 1 percent in industry) in three years.

6. What improvements or changes must we make?

- Penetrate new markets

- Hire new sales leaders for Asia and Europe.
- Double pipeline of player endorsements in Asia and Europe by year-end.
- Boost brand exposure
 - Sign three new sponsorship deals with top 100 ranked players by year-end.
 - Double the number of tournaments for which we are a primary sponsor.
 - Sponsor 10 junior golfers' clinics in each geography.
- Drive organizational efficiency
 - Train all employees on innovation techniques.
 - Review lowest-performing products.
 - Implement passionate performance engagement model to drive employee engagement.



Six Simple Questions Template
www.theLgroup.com/StickwithIt

Answering these questions (and making corresponding budget adjustments) will get you started with a solid plan you can adhere to. However, your adherence to the plan will suffer unless all team members clearly understand the answers, so we discuss ways to keep your answers to the six simple questions visible in your organization in Chapter 9, “Keep It Visible.”

Finally, keep in mind that just as we are devoting only one chapter to strategy development and the balance of the book on adhering to that strategy. **Winning leaders spend less time on strategy and more on adherence.**

*In real life, strategy is actually very straightforward.
You pick a general direction and implement like hell.*

JACK WELCH, FORMER CEO,
GENERAL ELECTRIC

Personal Adherence

Adherence is just as challenging for us individually as it is professionally. We already know that few of us stick with our New Year's resolutions, and we also have trouble sticking with other plans we make throughout the year. For example, of those of us who start a workout routine, about half will quit. Interestingly, the exercise dropout rate is nearly the same as it was 20 years ago despite the growth of the fitness industry.¹

Likewise, executing our plans is just as important in our personal lives as it is in our professional lives, perhaps even more so. Our personal plans affect our personal well-being, and our well-being impacts virtually every aspect of our lives. Furthermore, our personal lives and professional lives are intertwined. We tend to bring our work home with us and we also tend to take our personal challenges and successes to work.

Personal adherence is crucial for another reason: adherence, like most aspects of leadership, works inside out, meaning that we must start with ourselves. **We win from within.** Effective team performance begins with effective personal performance, and team adherence begins with personal adherence. We must lead from the inside out—making personal changes and improvements before we can credibly ask our teams to do the same. The power of role modeling is true in every aspect of our lives. Children mimic their parents' values, behaviors, and habits. It has been and always will be that way. This deeply

rooted human behavior of modeling those who lead us is as powerful in the work setting as it is in the home.

In our work with clients, we occasionally see leaders take an outside-in approach—they attempt to change their teams before changing themselves. For example, they tell their teams to be more focused, and yet they are not focused as leaders. Although an outside-in approach can produce short-term results, it will rarely, if ever, produce long-term, sustained change. In fact, most organizational change efforts fail within the first 18 months for exactly this reason—leaders take an outside-in approach to change. This yields compliance rather than commitment from their teams. And behavior change for the sake of compliance is rarely “owned” as deeply as we need in order to sustain high performance.

We must first master self-leadership before we can expect to effectively lead others. Think of self-leadership like this: Every action you take is like a pebble tossed into a quiet pond. Your actions affect others’ actions, which create a ripple effect of reactions. **There are no neutral actions**; everything we do has a positive or negative impact of some sort. This is especially true for leaders. Your team members are watching everything you do. Your actions and attitudes have a direct effect on their actions and attitudes. Whether or not your team members have ever said the words out loud, their mantra is, “If you can’t lead yourself, then don’t lead me.” Winning leaders start with themselves, and they don’t have to assert their leadership because others naturally want to follow them.

If you want your team to stick with it, start with yourself. The good news is that the art of adherence is the same regardless of the application—personal or professional. There is nothing mysterious about the way high-performing individuals achieve their results. They don’t follow fads or trends. They execute the basics, day in and day out, whether it is how they eat, exercise, learn, invest, serve, read, listen, prepare, or work. The critical difference between winners and the rest is their ability to stick with it.

If you want high and sustained results on the outside, remember that it starts on the inside. Master the art of adherence in your own life first. To help you do that, we've included a chapter on personal adherence for each component of the adherence equation. These chapters include examples of people who demonstrate excellent personal adherence, along with practical actions you can take to sharpen your personal focus, build your personal competence, and ignite your personal passion.

So start preparing for victory with the art of adherence. The rest of this book reveals the adherence accelerators and will equip you with tools you need to win.

Self-leadership is the ability to get yourself to do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, whether you feel like it or not, and still do it well.

JIM CATHCART, MOTIVATION
EXPERT AND AUTHOR
