

Jim's Profit Accelerator 24: Deceptive Discipline

The discipline myth promises that those with self-discipline will inherit the earth, or something like that. Not only is that unbelievable (inherit the earth?!), it's deceptive—in a corrosive way. It's corrosive due to the self-talk and judgment that accompany it: the idea that those who fall off the discipline track are losers.

Genuine discipline is taking the next step in spite of the fear, failure, and foolishness that accompany us through our lives. The Discipline Promise is that diligent followers will be successful. Beyond diligence, success requires faithful execution of three principles: scaffolding, goals, and resistance.

Scaffolding

Discipline suggests continuous action in spite of distractions, or the remarkable drive to return to the discipline action immediately after a distraction.

Most organizations and most people don't work that way, and they are unlikely to do so without structured support to help them. Here are the elements of that help:

- Clear goals
- Frequent progress feedback (heavy on encouragement)
- Easily available help over the inevitable fences

NBA legend Michael Jordan started every practice earlier than his teammates and stayed later. Most Jordan stories stop there instead of asking the more important questions: How did he decide what to work on? When did he move on to something else? Who helped him? Either Jordan is one-of-a-kind in the discipline department, or he had genius help. Either way, he's an appealing but useless role model. I want to learn how "regular folks" do it.

Here's an example of regular folks' discipline: Francis Geddes is a Christian pastor whose specialty is healing prayer. Stay with me here. In the only such retreat I've ever attended, he ambushed me many times. One encounter happened like this: As we began meditating (something I struggle with on a good day), he presented this golden advice: "Most people think that successful meditation requires emptying your mind for 15 or 20 minutes straight. No one does that," he said. "Here's how it's been done since the fifteenth century: Just start, observe your mind, and when it wanders, gently bring it back to the focus of your meditation. This will happen many times in a single meditation. Meditation means bringing it back, not keeping it there the whole time."

Successful discipline includes both wandering and bringing it back. Organizations that don't allow for wandering but provide structural help to "bring it back" will have inconsistent operations and low

morale. Wandering and bringing it back each require structured support by outsiders. Without such support, most regular folks will feel ashamed about wandering, which cripples their ability to bring it back.

Do you think Tiger Woods is disciplined? I'm waiting for it... Yes. He's a textbook for wandering and returning, and he certainly had skilled help along the way.

The Success and Discipline Fantasy that I'm trying to drown is this one: "If we're disciplined, success will roll toward us like the tide." I've never seen that happen. If you have, write to me.

SPEED BUMP: *Discipline isn't playing with pain; it's wandering and coming back.*

Goals

"Just Do It" assumes that the goal is clear and desirable. Too often in an organization, goals are unclear or unattainable, or have no emotional appeal. That scenario produces groups of people who are on their own to figure out what's important. The good ones will figure out something and go after it, but without guidance the odds of that supporting company goals are less than miniscule.

Even when a company has goals that are current, clear, and limited (not the norm in my experience), those goals seldom impact the daily behavior of individual employees. Instead, employees do their best to do what they think is "right" and frequently work on the wrong "stuff."

SPEED BUMP: *What's your contribution to this business?*

Management prophet Peter Drucker asks every executive to ask him or herself, "What is your contribution to this business?" Why stop there? Shouldn't that be a vital question for every employee?

Here's a one-month leadership experiment that can lay the foundation for discipline across your organization: Ask each employee as you encounter them, "What will your contribution to the business be this week?" If the answer is good, you can encourage them, providing a powerful boost. If the answer is wrong, ask the employee why that is their answer, listen, and say thank you. Reflecting later on these insights will spotlight big opportunities to improve. Self-discipline won't get you anywhere when the goals aren't valuable or exciting.

SPEED BUMP: *Most of your people work on the wrong things.*

Resistance

Resistance is real, and ubiquitous. It's the partly conscious or unconscious click that holds us back, pushes us away, and keeps us from our goals. Since it's in us, we need a plan to deal with it.

Here's what to do: Grab your Resistance Blowtorch. Watch for the resistance and name it: "Oh, there it is; I'm dithering again." Naming cuts its power magically. Most folks require a safe partner to enable a conversation like this:

You: "I'm avoiding what I need to do."

Partner: "Why?"

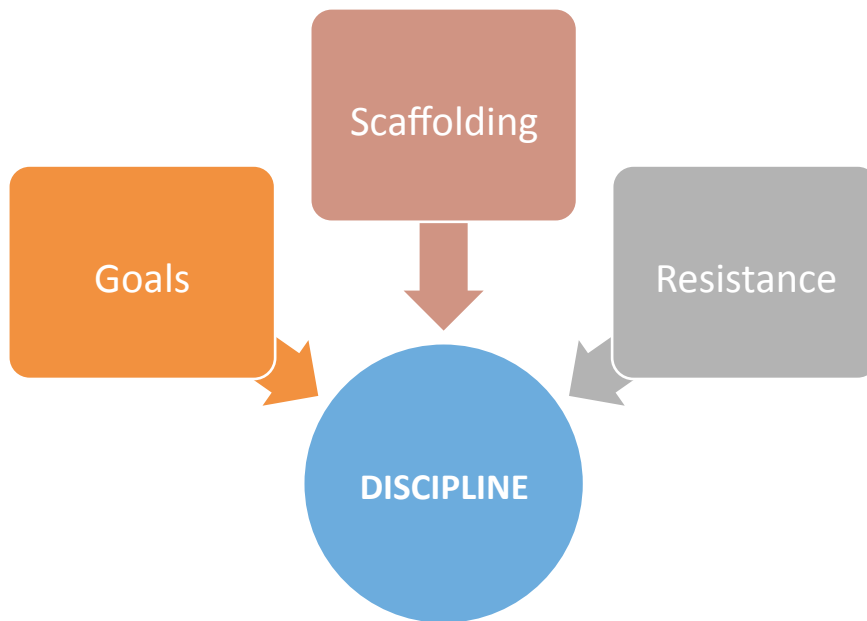
You: "I'm afraid I can't do it..." (speaking the thought that first came to mind).

Partner: Silence...

Look away from it and move back toward your goal.

Get a partner. There's a reason most runners and bikers have a partner, and it's not just for someone to talk with. It's for someone to talk with when you hit the wall—that fear or discomfort that comes with every significant effort.

SPEED BUMP: *Resistance lives in the same head as discipline. Admit it.*



Organizational speed is built upon the discipline to take the next step, with help. Most of us will take the step when we feel safe enough, when we feel the emotion of the goal enough, when we can see the next step clearly, and when we have a plan for handling the inevitable resistance.

ACCELERATOR: How are you growing discipline in your organization?

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Jim Grew is an expert in CEO-level strategy and executive leadership whose clients refer to him as the Business Defogger and Accelerator. Jim helps leaders swiftly discover the hidden opportunities within their businesses and exploit them for dramatic results. Nearly three decades of success as a COO and CEO coupled with his experience running nine thriving businesses provide the foundation for his consulting work as president of the Grew Company. He presents regularly to industry groups, mentors business leaders, and shares insights on his blog, BizBursts.com: <http://bizbursts.com/>. He holds BA and MBA degrees from Stanford University.

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