

Excellence: Cross-Functional Communication

I sometimes think that six out of seven or seven out of eight or nine out of ten people would say the most significant problem in their organization is lousy cross-functional communication. The finance people don't talk to the marketing people don't talk to the purchasing people don't talk to logistics people, etc. I see it over and over again cited as issue number one.

Well, I put together a list of 50 items a while back that I called XFX, which was my shorthand for cross-functional Excellence. Fifty items. I don't think it's a bad list. But on the other hand—and I thought about this a lot—I *really* think that cross-functional excellence boils down to a significant degree, a surprisingly significant degree, to one main variable. And you know what that is? Lunch.

Which is to say, if the purchasing guy goes to lunch with the accounting guy, if the logistics woman goes to lunch with the finance guy, or what have you, they will discover at lunch that they have a hell of a lot in common. That's the way human beings are. They've both got 12-year-old boys or 13-year-old girls or one 13-year-old girl, an 11-year-old boy, and they go to the same school and they both play golf or they both play tennis.

And at the end of this lunch, they won't have lost their professional identities. But they will literally, "I'll be able to call Dick back and say, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah about professionally and we'll tie it into the tennis or the golf or whatever it is."

Now, what I want to do to take that—I mean, first of all, I believe it. Getting to know people—simply developing friends—is an awful lot more important than spending \$20 million on an Oracle or an SAP software system, period.

Lunch matters.

That's number one. Number two: If you are a boss, I want it measured. I literally, on a monthly basis, want you, as part of your evaluation, formal or informal, with every employee, to say, "Okay, 22 working days in a month, 22 working days equals 22 lunches. How many of those lunches did you have with people in another function?"

I have no problem with you having lunch with your friends in your own function, but lovely as it may be, you're not going to learn anything new and you're not going to deal with this problem. Want to deal with cross-functional issues? Make lunch a strategic priority, A, measure it, B. Trust me. This will work.