

X2

I have a new habit. Before flashing my title slide up on the screen these days, I offer up two others first—or “REALLY First Things Before First Things.” I label them “X2.” Or: “The Excellence TWO.” They encompass two central ideas that often get lost in a list of 10 or 20 key ideas—or never make the list at all.

They encompass two notions of ... **Surpassing Strategic Importance.**

Two notions we all “care about”—but two notions that we frequently fail to ...

OBSESS ... on. And it is precisely ...

OBSESSION ...
that is called for.

Cross-Functional EXCELLENCE: Strategic Opportunity #1

“Let’s do lunch.”

Those immortal words—typically associated with talent agents—are or can be, more broadly, the most important words for anybody’s business. In general, they refer to the heart of relationship development and the cementing thereof.

In particular, “Let’s do lunch” is the key to what is unquestionably ...

Organization Effectiveness Tool #1.

In simple terms, whether the topic is national intelligence gathering, car making, recovering from a customer blooper, or waiter and maître d' and busboy and chef producing a “memorable dining experience” at a 7- or 67-table restaurant in North Podunk or Paris, so-called ... “*cross-functional communication and integration and synergy*” ... is indeed often/repeatedly/usually/almost always Issue #1 and, hence, SO#1. (Strategic Opportunity #1. Short-term and long-term.)

The goal?

XFX.

X-Functional eXcellence.

The tools of choice these days for dealing with the issue are the likes of a sexy ERP system from SAP or Oracle.

But ...

The “sleeper tool”?

“Let’s do lunch.”

Fact is, “the all-important 1st 95%” of XFX is ...

“Social stuff.”

It’s Mary in Finance and Herb in Marketing “doing lunch,” discovering that their respective 9-year-olds go to the same school and that both spouses are Northwestern grads, and, thence, totally re-coloring the relationship between the two. Mary will still be her characteristic “tough-as-nails” Finance self; and Herb will still be the quintessential frenetic, over-achieving “marketing guy.” But now their dealings will be encased in an empathetic personal relationship—which, on the “organization effectiveness” dimension, will indubitably lead to a better appreciation of each other’s professional roles accompanied by the likes of a sharp reduction in organizational friction and the emergence over time of creative approaches to this and that, in fact lots of “thises and thats.”

In fact ...

I will virtually guarantee, that if Mary religiously devotes 25% to 40% of her precious 230-annual at-work lunches to colleagues in other functions, she’ll accelerate her climb to CFO—and contribute to a mighty leap in her larger organization’s XFX Score and thence overall effectiveness.

Beyond the various Marys and Herbs, one can readily create a significant portfolio of ...

“XFX Social Accelerators.”

Consider this list, which could easily be thrice as long:

1. EVERYBODY’s [more or less] JOB #1: Make friends in other functions! (*Purposefully. Consistently. Measurably.*)
2. “Do lunch” with people in other functions!! Frequently!! (Minimum 10% to 25% for everyone? *Measured.*)
3. Ask peers in other functions for references so you can become conversant in their world. (It’s one helluva sign of ... GIVE-A-DAMN-ism.)
4. Invite counterparts in other functions to your team meetings. Religiously. Ask them to present “cool stuff” from “their world” to your group. (B-I-G deal; useful and respectful.)

5. *PROACTIVELY SEEK EXAMPLES OF “TINY” ACTS OF “XFX” TO ACKNOWLEDGE—PRIVATELY AND PUBLICLY.* (Bosses: **ONCE A DAY** ... make a short call or visit or send an email of “Thanks” for some sort of XFX gesture by your folks and some other function’s folks.)
6. Present counterparts in other functions awards for service to your group. Tiny awards at least weekly; and an **“Annual All-Star Supporters** [from other groups] **Banquet”** modeled after superstar salesperson banquets.
7. Discuss—A SEPARATE AGENDA ITEM—good and problematic acts of cross-functional co-operation at every Team Meeting.
8. When someone in another function asks for assistance, respond with ... **more**... alacrity than you would if it were the person in the cubicle next to yours—or even more than you would for a key external customer. (Remember, XFX is the key to Customer Retention which is in turn the key to “all good things.”)
9. **Do not bad mouth ... “the damned accountants,” “the bloody HR guy.” Ever.** (Bosses: Severe penalties for this—including *public* tongue-lashings.)
10. Get physical!! *“Co-location” may well be the most powerful “culture change lever.”* Physical X-functional proximity is almost a ... *guarantee* ... of remarkably improved co-operation—to aid this one needs flexible workspaces that can be mobilized for a team in a flash.
11. Formal evaluations. *Everyone, starting with the receptionist, should have a significant XF rating component in their evaluation. (The “XFX Performance” should be among the Top 3 items in all managers’ evaluations.)*
12. Demand XF experience for, especially, senior jobs. For example, the U.S. military requires all would-be generals and admirals to have served a full tour in a job whose only goals were cross-functional achievements.
13. XFX is ... PERSONAL ... as well as about organizational effectiveness. PXXF [Personal XFX] is arguably the #1 Accelerant to personal success—in terms of organizational career, free-lancer/Brand You, or as entrepreneur.

**THE WHOLE POINT HERE IS THAT
“XFX” IS ALMOST CERTAINLY
THE #1 OPPORTUNITY FOR
STRATEGIC DIFFERENTIATION.
WHILE MANY WOULD LIKELY
AGREE, IN OUR MOMENT-TO-
MOMENT AFFAIRS, XFX *PER SE* IS
NOT SO OFTEN VISIBLY &
PERPETUALLY AT THE TOP OF
EVERY AGENDA. I ARGUE HERE
FOR NO LESS THAN ...**

**VISIBLE
OBSESSION.**

How Effective Are Your Sergeants: The Stunning Case For Excellence in ... first-line Management

If the regimental commander lost most of his 2nd lieutenants and 1st lieutenants and captains and majors, it would be a tragedy. If he lost his *sergeants* it would be a catastrophe.

The Army and the Navy are fully aware that success on the battlefield is dependent to an extraordinary degree on its Sergeants and Chief Petty Officers. Does industry have the same awareness?

Success in the marketplace is a great thing!
Top quality products you can be proud of are great things!
Integrity and transparency are great things!

But none of the three is the principal determinant of worker satisfaction. That honor goes, hands down, to ... **the employee's relationship with his or her first-line supervisor/manager!**

(NB: This is *not* a hypothesis. Research data, from the likes of Gallup's Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman in *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*, are clear. Employee retention and satisfaction or dissatisfaction with her first-line supervisor is **“overwhelmingly”** the ... **#1 factor** ... in her state of mind about her job, and hence her performance—as check-out clerk or MIT-trained research chemist.)

Hence the “obvious” questions:

- (1) Are you, Big Boss, a ... *f-o-r-m-a-l student of front-line supervisor behavioral excellence?** (*Yes, this sort of thing can be formally studied.)
- (2) Do you spend ... *gobs and gobs (and then more and more gobs and gobs) of time* ... selecting the first-line supervisors?
- (3) Do you have the ... *absolute best training program in the industry* ... (or some subset thereof) for first-line supervisors?
- (4) Do you Formally & Rigorously ... *mentor* ... first-line supervisors?

(5) Are you willing, pain notwithstanding, to ... *leave a first-line supervisor slot open* ... until you can fill the slot with somebody *spectacular*?

(And are you willing to use some word like ... “*spectacular*” ... in judging applicants for the job?)

(Is it possible that promotion decisions for first-line supervisors are more important than promotion decisions for VP slots?) **(Hint: Yes.)**

I am absolutely ... *not* ... suggesting that you aren't serious about first-line supervisor selection, care, and feeding.

I absolutely ... *am* ... suggesting, in pretty much no uncertain terms, that you probably don't take it as seriously as you might if you saw it as precisely what it is ... a first-order ... *strategic** ... decision.

****Strategic!***

I *am* suggesting that you assess your cadre of first-line supervisors more or less posthaste—and, I'd argue, start down the path to ... *Matchless*

Supervisory Excellence ... by creating the best imaginable first-line supervisory training program ASAP and assigning each front-line supervisor a senior mentor.

ASAP = Now.

Suggested addition to your statement of Core Competencies:

“We are obsessed with developing a cadre of first-line managers that is second to none—we understand that this cadre per se is arguably one of our top two or three most important ‘Strategic Assets.’”

(NB: First-line supervisors selection-training-development is ... **more important in very small businesses** ... than in larger ones.)

X2: “REALLY First Things Before First Things.”

Effective (EXCELLENT) *cross-functional communication and integration* and a cadre of superb (EXCELLENT) *first-line managers* are competitive advantages of surpassing importance. We worry about both. But we don't obsess about them and let them keep us awake—or, at least, not that many of us do.

The cases here are cases of...

OBSESSION.

And, of equal importance, it is a case that can be acted on starting ...

TODAY.

There really is no excuse to do otherwise.