

Excellence. NO EXCUSES!

Excerpt:

**CROSS-
FUNCTIONAL
EXCELLENCE:
OPPORTUNITY #1**

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Cross-functional EXCELLENCE

“Allied commands depend on mutual confidence, and this confidence is gained, above all, through the development of friendships.”—General D.D. Eisenhower

“I got to know his secretaries.”—Dick Parsons
(former CEO Time Warner, on the key to successfully fending off raider Carl Ichan)

Look at any organizational failure, and poor cross-functional integration is more often than not the *chief* culprit. (A strong assertion, I’d be the first to acknowledge—but based on one hell of a lot of observation.) Within an engineering company, for example, research, marketing and finance are routinely at each other’s throats—and the result is, say, that a critical new product comes to market 12 months late. Or take the local police and federal police: Each doubtless has the fight against terrorism as their pre-eminent goal—but frequently refuse to share all their data with one another.

Strategic advantage #1:

“Let’s do lunch.”

I chose in introducing this topic the word “excellence,” as in “cross-functional

EXCELLENCE,” or, as I prefer ... **XFX**. That is, the idea here is *not* merely about “removing barriers.” It *is* about what I sincerely believe is no less than the No. 1 opportunity to achieve competitive dominance—e.g., cut that new-product development by, perhaps, 50 percent or even more.

I have the utmost respect for Oracle and SAP. But this is not primarily a software issue. Or, rather, it is—but a *softer* form of software. Secret #1 (yes, I’ll go that far) is “*Let’s do lunch.*” In fact I insist, or would if I could, that bosses literally *measure* their direct reports on the number of lunches per month they have with members of other functions!

It works like this: *Joe in procurement invites Sam in finance to lunch. Odds are high that along the way they discover a host of connections—e.g., both have eighth-graders in the same school. Joe-the-professional will still tenaciously represent his “function,” and Sam his—but the tenor of interactions is likely to change significantly, if not dramatically, from “gotcha” to something approaching “How can we colleagues jointly add maximum value—or at least eliminate the wasteful and long-term pollution that accompanies posturing and other petty inter-departmental bullshit?”*

Or this: *“They brainstormed about how to turn around this [catastrophic] misunderstanding, and came up with a simple plan—every day for the next three months she would have lunch or coffee with one of the partners. Today she is executive vice president for [a Fortune 50 company].”*—Betsy Myers, an extraordinarily talented professional who had been blocked from leadership positions in her firm, from *Take the Lead: Motivate, Inspire, and Bring Out the Best in Yourself and Everyone Around You* (A talented partner at a prestigious law firm kept missing the promotions she clearly was due. After some analysis and coaching, it appeared that she had her head down working hard and effectively—but had not bothered to bond with her fellow partners; she assumed that the clearly brilliant work would stand on its own.)

I call things like “doing lunch” the ... *“social accelerators”* ... of cross-functional excellence. I can muster a list of a in a flash—e.g., present small *weekly* awards to those in other functions who have helped your team-function move forward. One should not promise miracles lightly, but taken together these notions—a sample of which follows—can lead to miracles of the first order.

AFX/Cross-Functional EXCELLENCE:
Typical Social Accelerators

New product 9 months late to market? Sloppy response to a customer problem? Missed deadlines our de facto trademark? A dark cloud always seems to hover over head? The problem-behind-the-problem is almost always the same: Screwed up cross-functional co-ordination. The answer is not primarily a mega-investment in new “enterprise software,” or some such. The answer is a culture of mutual support. Which is to say the answer is ... SOCIAL ... not technical. To smooth the ties, to make cross-functional cooperation a primo source of value added rather than pain, requires paying rapt attention to what I’ve come to call the “AFX Social Accelerators.” Herein a sample:

1. EVERYONE’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. Religiously invite counterparts in other functions to your team meetings. Ask them to present “cool stuff” from “their world” to your group.
5. **PROACTIVELY SEEK EXAMPLES OF “TINY” ACTS OF “AFX” TO ACKNOWLEDGE—PRIVATELY AND PUBLICALLY. (Bosses: ONCE A DAY ... make a short call or visit or send an email of “Thanks” for some sort of AFX 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. Routinely discuss—A SEPARATE AGENDA ITEM—good and problematic acts of cross-functional cooperation at every Team Meeting.

**Job #1/
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***(*Purposefully. Consistently.
Measurably.)***

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 cooperation—to aid this one needs flexible workspaces that can be mobilized for a team in a flash.

11. Establish “adhocracy” as S.O.P. To improve the new “X-functional Culture” (and business results), little XF teams should be formed on the spot to deal with an urgent issue—they may live for but ten days, but it helps the XF habit, making it normal to be “working the XF way.”

12. Early project “management” experience. Within days, literally, of coming aboard folks should be “running” some bit of a bit of a bit a project, working with folks from other functions—hence, “all this” becomes as natural as breathing.

13. Work proactively to give as large as possible numbers of people temporary assignments in other functions—especially Finance.

14. “Get ’em out with the customer.” Rarely does the accountant or bench scientist call on the customer. Reverse that. Give everyone more or less regular “customer-facing experiences.” She or he learns quickly that the customer is not interested in our in-house turf battles!

15. 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.)

16. Consider creating a special role, or even position. Specialty chemical company Buckman Labs established “*knowledge transfer facilitators*,” effectively former “middle managers,” with 100% of discretionary pay based on success at spurring integration across previously impermeable barriers.

17. **Every functional unit should have strict and extensive measures of “customer satisfaction” based on evaluations from other functions of its usefulness and effectiveness and value-added to the enterprise as a whole.**

18. 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.

19. “Deep dip.” Dive three levels down in the organization to fill a senior role with some one who has been noticeably pro-active on adding value via excellent cross-functional integration.

20. XFX is ... PERSONAL ... as well as about organizational effectiveness. PFX (Personal XFX) is arguably the #1 Accelerant to personal success—in terms of organizational career, freelancer/Brand You, or as entrepreneur.

21. **EXCELLENCE!** There is a “*State of XF Excellence*” per se. Talk it up constantly. Pursue it relentlessly. Aspire to nothing less.

**THE WHOLE POINT HERE IS
THAT “XFX” IS ALMOST
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**VISIBLE.
CONSTANT.
OBSESSION.**

Suggested Core Value: *“We will not rest until seamless cross-functional integration/ communication has become our primary source of value-added. EXCELLENCE in cross-functional integration shall become a daily operational passion for 100% of us.”*

“Social” RULES: A General Primer on “Social” POWER

“Courtesies of a small and trivial character are the ones which strike deepest in the grateful and appreciating heart.”

—Henry Clay, American Statesman/1777-1852

“When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudice and motivated by pride and vanity.”

—Dale Carnegie

“Personal relationships are the fertile soil from which all advancement, all success, all achievement in real life grow.”

—Ben Stein

“Let’s not forget that small emotions are the great captains of our lives.”—Van Gogh

“The ‘golden rule’ is of no use whatsoever unless you realize it is your move.”—Frank Crane

“The terms ‘hard facts,’ and ‘the soft stuff’ used in business imply that data are somehow real and strong while emotions are weak and less important.”—George Kohlrieser, *Hostage at the Table* (Kohlrieser is a hostage negotiator and professor of management.)

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“They brainstormed about how to turn this [catastrophic] misunderstanding around, and came up with a simple plan—every day for the next three months she would have lunch or coffee with one of the partners. Today she is executive vice president for [Fortune 50 company].”—Betsy Myers, on an extraordinarily talented professional who had been blocked from leadership positions in her firm, from *Take the Lead*

“Allied commands depend on mutual confidence and this confidence is gained, above all through the development of friendships.”

—General D.D. Eisenhower, in *Armchair General** (*“Perhaps DDE’s most outstanding ability [at West Point] was the ease with which he made friends and earned the trust of fellow cadets who came from widely varied backgrounds; it was a quality that would pay great dividends during his future coalition command.”)

“Keep a short enemies list. One enemy can do more damage than the good done by a hundred friends.”—Bill Walsh, *The Score Takes Care of Itself* (Walsh was the San Francisco 49ers Hall of Fame coach.)

“Appreciative words are the most powerful force for good on earth.”—George W. Crane, physician, columnist

“The two most powerful things in existence: a kind word and a thoughtful gesture.”

—Ken Langone, co-founder, Home Depot

“The deepest human need is the need to be appreciated.”

—William James

“I denied myself the pleasure of contradicting him abruptly and of showing immediately some absurdity in his proposition; and in answering I began by observing that in certain cases or circumstances his opinion would be right, but that in the present case there ‘appeared’ or ‘seemed to me’ some difference, etc. The conversation I engaged in went more pleasantly; the modest way in which I proposed my opinions procured them a readier reception and less contradiction; I had less mortification when I was found to be in the wrong, and I more easily prevailed with others to give up their mistakes and join with me when I happened to be in the right.”—Benjamin Franklin

“One kind word can warm three winter months.”—Japanese Proverb

“I can live for two months on a good compliment.”—Mark Twain

“I regard apologizing as the most magical, healing, restorative gesture human beings can make. It is the centerpiece of my work with executives who want to get better.”

*—Marshall Goldsmith, *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful**

***“I am ... hundreds of times
better ... here because of the
support system. It’s like you are working
in an organism; you are not a single cell when you
are out there practicing.”***—Dr. Nina Schwenk, comparing Mayo
Clinic to her prior assignment, quoted in Chapter 3, “Practicing Team Medicine,”
from Leonard Berry & Kent Seltman’s *Management Lessons From Mayo Clinic* (Dr.
William Mayo formally introduced de facto team medicine—“medicine as a co-
operative science”—in 1910. Team medicine is arguably the centerpiece of Mayo’s
exceptional record; those who don’t get with the program are disciplined or even
dismissed—including prominent M.D.s.)

***“When I was in medical school, I spent hundreds of
hours looking into a microscope—a skill I never
needed to know or ever use. Yet I didn’t
have a single class that
taught me communication or
teamwork skills—something
I need every day I walk into
the hospital.”***—Peter Pronovost, *Safe Patients, Smart
Hospitals* (Pronovost, a Johns Hopkins M.D., is the creator of the “checklist”
approach to improved patient safety, made famous in Atul Gawande’s book *The
Checklist Manifesto*. Pronovost is responsible for saving many thousands of lives.)