A GREAT CTO EATS PROBLEMS FOR BREAKFAST

Forget the Shredded Wheat and Grape Nuts, the kale, apple and cucumber smoothie…What does a great CTO eat for breakfast. Problems! The willingness to embrace problems, to tackle them and solve them, is the driving force behind what we do every day, and we should start right away, at breakfast, without hesitation or procrastination.

Poet Robert Frost once wrote, "the best way around a problem is through it," and a great CTO accepts this as a mantra: he or she sees problems as opportunities to excel individually, to lead a team and to help move his or her organization forward. It's the hunger to understand root causes, and the root causes behind these root causes, that creates truly durable solutions.

Where would we be without problems? Imagine you've been playing soccer for almost the entire game. It's been a grueling match, a series of problems, and you've had to sprint up and down the field until your legs ache. One of your midfielders finds you and puts the ball ahead of you, and you're heading downfield toward two fullbacks and the opposing keeper. As you approach the top of the penalty box when, the ref blows the whistle, stops the game, pulls the opposing goalkeeper and his fullbacks from the field and motions for you to shoot at what is now an empty goal. How would you feel? If you're honest with yourself, you'd feel defeated. You'd feel you'd been robbed of what you'd earned. That your victory would be hollow. People who love what they do understand problems are endemic to progress – they are how we measure ourselves, how we recalibrate ourselves for further challenges. Without problems to solve, we are static.

Great leaders know taking these bulls by the horns is the best way to inspire and motivate teams. For true leaders, eating problems for breakfast is about taking responsibility. About ownership. About slaying your dragons smack in the middle of the village square to rally your community to

victory. This is how you demonstrate to your teams that you are taking responsibility not just for your particular duties, but for the success of your entire organization – you are setting a dynamic, three-dimensional example of making the organization's goals your personal goals.

Real leaders are problem solvers, not "problem reporters." They know they are always in the game, on the field, in the water…they refuse to remain on the sidelines or in the stands. They want to be in the center of the action, at the stove, under the hood…they want to be where the action is. they want to be part of that action, and they want to use it to effect real, accretive outcomes. They take charge, rather than criticizing the contribution of others which, ultimately, makes it impossible to take ownership of a team's successes as well as its failures. This can only damage your credibility and reputation. The remedy here is to devote yourself to taking on problems, to solving problems, to helping your teams solve their problems. Real leadership means rolling up your sleeves and getting to work.

This willingness to "get dirty," this stick-to-it-ive-ness, is what creates the culture at your organization: the more your individual team members see themselves as problem solvers, the more likely they are to take ownership of these problems. This in turn helps create a collaborative culture of problem-solving. What could be better for achieving mature solutions and growth? Culture is merely the stories you tell every day and, by inspiring individuals to become problem solvers, to take this type of day-to-day ownership, everyone begins to tell the same story. Everyone lands on the same page. Thus, the definition of culture becomes the responsibility of each individual – he or she feels responsible to make an ongoing, positive contribution to your organization's culture every day.

If you want to lead and inspire, you need to rethink breakfast! Wake up, crack those problems onto the griddle and get to work. I promise you it'll be a healthy start to a great day. And you and your team just might end up eating everyone else's lunch…