

WHY WE NEED OUR LEFT AND RIGHT BRAIN IN SUPPLY CHAIN LEADERSHIP

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Welcoming the Right Brain to Supply Chain Leadership!

There is a need to explore the numerous ways that successful Supply Chain professionals in the regular course of their job performance are required to engage people across boundaries and to use influence in the absence of typical hierarchical authority. Successful Supply Chain Professionals are often required to lead both within their groups and organizations and outside of their organizations and groups using typically right brain leadership skills such as storytelling and pattern identification.

Nicholas Wade (1994) described Nobel Prize Winner, Roger Sperry description of the differences between Right and Left Brain: “There appears to be two modes of thinking represented rather separately in the left and right hemispheres respectively.” He described the left hemisphere as sequential, excelled at analysis and handled words. The right hemisphere reasoned holistically, recognized patterns, and interpreted emotions and nonverbal expressions.”

While the implicit tasks of supply chain are often described using typically sequential Left Brain terms and functions such as, Operations, Purchasing, Sourcing and Packaging. However in order to gain excellence at performing these tasks the Supply Chain Professional needs to be adept at using the right side of their brain to “recognize patterns, interpret emotions and nonverbal expressions.” The successful Supply Chain Professional is often very adept in their ability to engage people across boundaries and to “read” groups identify patterns. Successful Supply Chain Professionals are often good storytellers and are excellent at identifying ways in which complex systems interact.

Additionally, the concept of Supply Chain is the story of how goods and services move throughout and organization and the world. A demonstration of a successful supply chain is when the airplane flies and has all the right parts and people so it will not fall out of the sky. At the same time and all of the right cargo is on board and will arrive at the right customer at just the right moment in time. On the surface it looks like if you have the right computers and the right operations check lists this will automatically occur. But being able to negotiate through all of the levels of hierarchy involved (airplane maintenance, baggage handlers, ticket agents and computer operators) requires that the supply chain professional knows not only what to do – but exactly the right way to do it.

Consultant Richard Olivier (2000) states, “Logical and analytical abilities alone can no longer guarantee success. Successful business people must be able to combine the science of accounting and finance with the art of story.”

The story of how all that happens is found in the interactions among people who can have conversations that matter and agree on a common purpose.

Moving from Duckers' "Knowledge Worker."

According to Pink (2005), Columbia University Medical School aspiring doctors are being trained in "narrative medicine." They want these men and women to learn how to interpret the patient's story as the understanding of the story of the patient is primary to applying any diagnostic. At Yale Medical School art and drawing are included in the curricula as good doctors must learn how to be better observers.

How more so in Supply Chain where understanding and speaking to the story of a supplier may help clients to built stronger relationships? In Supply Chain we have to be strong observers of human patterns and subtitles to be able to ward of unfortunate circumstances. We need to notice if people are overworked and not performing. We need to see how difficult it will be for us to move forward if our systems between suppliers, customers and even consumer feedback are antiquated or ineffective.

Finding ways to communicate with suppliers, customers and even within our own organizations require that supply chain professionals have XXXXXX.

1. Why we need "beauty" in the Supply Chain
 - a. Engineers must figure how to get things to work. But of those things are not also pleasing to the eye or compelling to the soul, few will buy them (p. 34). Target sold 3 million Rashid's Gardo molded polypropylene designer wastebaskets (p. 33)
Virginia Postrel "aesthetic imperative" (p. 33). World class designers are offering their lines in Target.
 - b. People who enjoy their jobs do better work – the fun factor won't be ignored for long – particularly if we want to hold on to the younger generations.
2. Supply Chain is also both High Concept and High Touch
 - a. High Concept – involves the ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into a novel invention.
 - b. High Touch – involves the ability to emphasize, to understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one's self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian, in pursuit of a purpose and meaning.
3. Jobs being outsourced (we are often the ones outsourcing them)
 - a. Half of the Fortune 500 companies now outsource software work to India (p 37)
4. Supply Chain Opportunities are for High Concept and High Touch
5. Generations
 - a. "As people mature their cognitive patterns become less abstract (left brain orientation) and more concrete (right brain orientation) while results in a sharpened sense of reality, increased capacity for emotion and enhancement of their sense of connectedness" David Wolfe

- b. Paradox of Prosperity –as people get older and more prosperous they want to have more meaning in their lives. It is the stuff of literature and the experience I hear others speak of is that if they have all the money in the world and not happiness they die broke.

References

Pink, D. (2005). *A Whole New Mind*. Riverhead Books. NY.

Wade, N. (April 20, 1994). *The New York Times*. Roger Sperry, A Nobel Winner for Brain Studies, Dies at 80.”

Olivier, R. (October, 2000). *Fast Company Magazine*. “Interview of Richard Olivier.”