

use your influence

RECENTLY I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO WATCH an energetic class of five-year-olds line up to go to the gym to play. Everyone had the same desire—to be the line leader. After some pushing, prodding, yelling and crying, the line leader was selected, and they set off on their trek. Not one of them realized it was the teacher who really gave them permission to lead, to start and to stop.

In retrospect, most of us haven't changed much with age. We're all still fighting to be the one who sets the pace. Yet, if we were to step out of our line and really look at the situation, we would understand that we didn't truly set the pace ... or choose the destination.

Leadership, especially good leadership, is often unseen. Good leaders give people an opportunity to do what they need to do and motivate them to act in ways that benefit everybody. Just like that teacher, he or she is empowering, but not overpowering.

Supply chain leadership is not so very different. Normally, we think of leaders in the supply chain as those companies that wield the most power. In the past, we referred to these organizations as "channel captains." Their bark was the command that rippled across the supply chain as others did their bidding. Yet, power is not the same as leadership.

Leadership in the supply chain has more to do with the ability to recognize the strategic implications of working with other companies to manage the flow of products, services and information from source to customer. Supply chain leaders are influencers. They understand the benefits of cooperation and work to achieve it. They understand how true management of their supply chain will benefit not only themselves, but everyone else within that chain.

So what does it take to influence a supply chain? Here are a few things to consider.

■ First, supply chain leaders understand the processes. So often we plunge ahead to make changes in our environment without fully understanding the upstream or downstream consequences of our action. Just consider how a simple IT request can lead to unexpected consequences.

Granted, mapping existing processes is not a lot of fun. But before improvements can be made, you have to understand the current state. What is the process

capable of producing? What outputs are critical? Where is there redundancy in the process? How can it be eliminated? How can you lead without first knowing the process of delivering value to the customer?

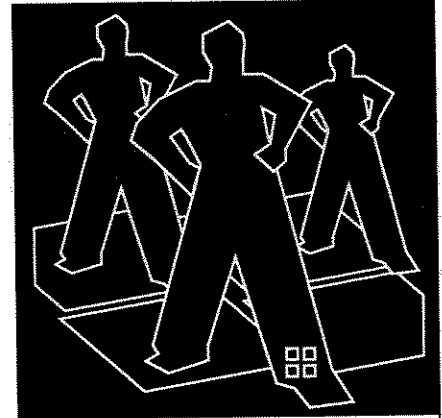
■ Second, leaders understand the industry. I'm sometimes surprised by how little suppliers actually know about their customers. We want them to buy more and to be successful, yet at times we fail to see how we contribute to their success or failure.

Supply chain leaders understand the thousand points of pain their customers and suppliers are going through. They understand the unique challenges that they face. They understand that what a customer wanted yesterday may be completely unrelated to what it will want tomorrow. Leaders look for ways to breach the barriers that stand in their path.

■ Third, supply chain leaders understand value. They understand where each of the parties in the supply chain adds value and how that value can be maximized. They understand that someday companies will truly compete "supply chain to supply chain," and that this day is fast approaching.

■ Finally, supply chain leaders not only understand the value proposition that everyone brings to the table, they know how to sell it. It is this skill that sets leaders apart. Leaders work with and through people to help them become far greater than the leaders themselves. It is no coincidence that Dale Carnegie had more than 30 millionaires working for him at the height of his career.

Want to be a leader in your supply chain? Educate yourself about the processes that are critical to your industry. Understand the value. Sell the value. Use your influence to help others succeed. □



Karl Manrodt, Ph.D., is assistant professor of logistics at Georgia Southern University. Comments or questions on this series can be addressed to kmanrodt@gasou.edu.