

FROM THE PAGES OF *LEADERS & LUMINARIES* E-MAGAZINE ...

Vintage Voice

Top 16 pop songs that just might reflect the pandemic-afflicted healthcare supply chain

By Rick Dana Barlow

SCHAUMBURG, IL (December 18, 2023) – Year-end countdowns remain quite popular as each 12-month period rumbles to a close and why not? After all, it’s the end of the year when everyone prefers to tally their accomplishments, check off lists and create new plans for the coming year.

Year-end countdowns, lists, look-backs and observations can be educational, entertaining, informational and kindling for conversations through the holidays and beyond. From the top-10 lists of buzzwords, fads, films, foods, songs, technologies, tools and tricks of the trade, just about all can make for engaging reads.

For a year-end chuckle, what follows is a bit of quick-read random creativity to usher you through the holiday season while taking one last glance at an epic global event continuing to affect the industry and hopefully infusing you with discussion and energy to launch 2024 with a fresh perspective.

Without further ado, here is the countdown to the top 16 classic and contemporary pop songs (spanning the four decades bookmarked between 1980 and 2020 with one exception) whose title, message (overt or covert) or lyric(s) (at least one or two lines) could be applied to the healthcare supply chain during the

2020-mid-2023 COVID-19 global pandemic. Why 16? It's a tribute to parallel the number of years Bellwether League Foundation has been actively operating.

Each entry starts with the song title, followed by the artist and the year released, and then capped by pithy observations that link supply chain to the tune-at-large.

Got the premise? Let's move.

16. "Sign of the Times," by Harry Styles (2017) – With every calamity, every crisis, this becomes the battle cry to explain it all ... lather, rinse, repeat ... as we hesitatingly yearn to fly off the rails and do something different ... or differently?

15. "Sorry," by Justin Bieber (2015) – Just remove one repeated line throughout this entire song and the remaining lyrics seem to be the painfully repetitive response healthcare supply chain leaders and professionals felt they were giving their clinical customers. Unfortunately, they were just echoing what they heard from their suppliers. Ouch.

14. "Hurt," by Johnny Cash (2003) – The Man in Black tendered his acoustic version of the Nine Inch Nails song in a way that best represents the inner turmoil healthcare supply chain pros felt being pulled in so many directions by customers and suppliers alike. For you seasoned veterans familiar with pop culture in the toy world, think Stretch Armstrong, but without the fun.

13. "Out of Touch," by Hall & Oates (1984) – It didn't hurt that this pop duo recently emerged at legal loggerheads with each other, but the title, verses and chorus seem to represent a back-and-forth conversation between a healthcare supply chain leader and his or her distributor executive/sales rep when it comes to contract terms and, of course, pricing. Sidebar: Just wondering ... during contract negotiations, which of the two qualifies as the Maneater?

12. "A Thousand Miles," by Vanessa Carlton (2002) – This represents the plea of the surgical product sales rep who has endured the third-degree questioning, slogged through the vendor credentialing system and now ambles through the cluttered surgical services hallways looking for the department leader to ink the deal that should originate with the supply chain leader anyway.

11. “One Thing Leads to Another,” by The Fixx (1982) – If No. 13 represents the supply chain-distributor negotiation, then this one adds the healthcare supply chain leader sparring with clinicians over access to physician preference items (PPI), absent of a solidly established and respected value analysis process.

10. “Crazy,” by Patsy Cline (1961) – The title and several lyrics recontextualized to a business meeting between a provider and GPO or supplier make this the proverbial grandmommy of healthcare supply chain struggles. The title alone could be applied to what’s inside the mind of the healthcare supply chain leader receiving marching orders by the CFO to cut 30% from the budget within a quarter and without disrupting normal day-to-day operations and service. If the organization won’t give the pressurized supply chain executive a monetary raise or year-end bonus, how about a magic wand and a flask of irradiated pixie dust? Maybe Ziggy Stardust seven spaces ahead will have to do.

9. “Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow,” by Fleetwood Mac (1977) – Yes, this was President Bill Clinton’s 1992 campaign theme song that ushered in the disruptive healthcare reform movement spanning the decade, but it also can apply to the answer supply chain gives to endless questions from clinicians about when that desired product will appear on the shelf. While opportunistic and Pollyannaish, the refrain remains more wishful thinking than anything else and rewards procrastinators everywhere.

8. “What You Need,” by INXS (1985) – When nurses reach the exchange cart or supply closet on each nursing floor, this is what they want to hear from the supply chain tech while they’re gripping that kanban card and expressively pointing to both the empty front and back bins. Bonus points if that supply chain tech exudes and oozes the inherent sex appeal of the late lead singer Michael Hutchence.

7. “Look What You Made Me Do,” by Taylor Swift (2017) – If any musical list this year doesn’t have at least something for Swifties then it’s simply a “Travisty.” (Yes, by next year this dad pun will have grown stale, so groan now.) This one represents something of a double-edged sword in that it can be applied to the clinicians’ feelings about supply chain dropping the ball as well as to supply chain’s feelings about clinicians consistently complaining about supply chain dropping the ball – a travesty all around.

6. “Peace of Mind,” by Boston (1976) – This represents a bicentennial tune where the title, verses and chorus reflect the feelings, motivations, observations and want (the title alone) of just about every beleaguered healthcare supply chain leader and professional during day-to-day operations, exacerbated by the pandemic.

5. “Working for the Weekend,” by Loverboy (1981) – The title itself seems like a no-brainer to make this labor of love list, but if you focus only on the first two verses and ignore the chorus, you’ll likely see what ran through the supply chain leader’s mind as he or she faced the C-suite regularly during the pandemic throes.

4. “Falling Down,” by Duran Duran with special guest Justin Timberlake (2007) – This may be healthcare supply chain’s perception of clinician complaints about backorders and shortages that afflicted performance, but the haunting melody and a deep lyrical base serve as an overarching lament from an era we long to forget as much as one from which we yearn to learn ... and do better.

3. “Changes” by David Bowie (1972) – The title alone applies to healthcare supply chain pre-, peri- and post-pandemic, but the lines, “I still don't know what I was looking for,” “And my time was running wild,” “I watch the ripples change their size,” and “Changes are taking the pace I'm going through,” also perhaps make it the quintessential fight song of management and trenchwork everywhere. It also reinforces that trite oxymoronic management mantra, “the only constant is change.”

2. “Come Out and Play,” by The Offspring (1994) – One lyrical line represents how we needed to fight the virus ... “Gotta keep ’em separated”); the other lyrical line (and title) represents what many really wanted to do anyway (e.g., face-to-face meetings).

1. “Walkin’ On the Sun,” by Smash Mouth (1997) – With lines like “So don't delay, act now, supplies are running out,” and “You might as well be walking on the sun,” this is nothing short of healthcare supply chain’s contemporary musical anthem for the pandemic, encapsulating shelf space and stat demands for expedited deliveries.

There you have it. Hopefully, this generated a few chortles, chuckles or even a Danny Thomas-style spit-take during your morning coffee. Now what songs may have been overlooked? At least one musically gifted and talented Bellwether might offer a few suggestions. He's invited – as are you – to submit recommendations in the comments section or email rickdanabarlow@bellwetherleague.org for a Bellwether Community-recommended list to be distributed in the future.

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