



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

Vintage Voice

Honor healthcare supply chain more frequently than one week a year

By Rick Dana Barlow

SCHAUMBURG, IL (September 23, 2025) – Eleven days from now will see a week dedicated to honoring and recognizing healthcare supply chain operations – as well it should.

The first full week in October (5-11) is devoted to National Health Care Supply Chain Week, a time to celebrate one of the hardest working professions and market segments in the healthcare industry. While it's a small, but welcome reward for one of the most essential and important departments, functions and people in the delivery of patient care and the running of healthcare organizations, it does deserve and need more recognition and support from the highest rungs of the ladder to the lowest.



When the economy starts to teeter and tilt, you learn from the government and media that the automobile and banking industries are too big to fail. When the government and media question the cultural, fiscal and long-term viability of healthcare, you learn that private and public insurance companies and related programs (e.g., Medicare and Medicaid) are too big to fail.

The healthcare supply chain market segment may not have reached \$1 billion in value (at least not yet), which means it's not as big as those other economic tentpoles, but it's certainly too important to fail.

Thankfully, as we've seen through many crises and disasters during the last 50 years, it likely won't. It will bend, it will buckle, but it always bounces back. The global pandemic overused the term "resilience," but that's the case here.

We launched Bellwether League Foundation and the Healthcare Supply Chain Leadership Hall of Fame nearly two decades ago because we recognized the essential nature of healthcare supply chain, and the painstakingly obvious void of acknowledging, accepting and trumpeting that truth to not only the healthcare industry but also to culture and society as a whole.

To date, this Vintage Voice column has striven to impress upon you, the Bellwether Community and any others who visit here, of that opinion, which should be fact. The headlines of the previous three columns illuminate the argument: "The undeniable lightness of being," June 2025; "Why Supply Chain is essential," April 2025; "Stretch your imagination in 2025," January 2025.

The overarching theme? To those who labor tirelessly in supply chain to provide the products and services that clinicians need to deliver and perform healthcare, it should be a clarion call to appreciate and be proud of what you do. Remember that administrators and clinicians don't (and likely won't) ever procure what they need. And if they do, they'll likely overpay for it because they are not contracting, negotiating and sourcing experts like you are in supply chain.

Maybe something as simple as a "thank you" might suffice? At least during the weekly celebration, but how about all year round? That's why we produced the lapel pin you see here. "TYSC" stands for "Thank You Supply Chain." We wanted to offer it as a way of showing how much you (should) mean to the industry and profession. We don't see it as a gimmick, but more of a vision, a mission, a cause.



Some may classify the secret and signature of success of supply chain executives, leaders, managers and professionals as how much money they saved, inventory turns achieved, satisfaction scores earned and/or other quantitative measures. Yet those are symptoms of a much larger cause. The innovators, leaders and pioneers extend well beyond quantity. Those are the folks who get inducted in or recognized by a hall of fame or get their names affixed to industry awards and scholarships. There are many more who remain (as yet) unrecognized and labor, toil and work among you. These are the people who come through for others ... consistently ... and can be relied upon whenever needed.

A famous superhero once said, "It's not who you are so much as what you do." Even more so, it's how you relate to others that determines what you do and shows who you are. That comes from experience achieved through progress along a bumpy, curvy, hilly, inclined, potholed, rocky road (no, not the ice cream flavor) on the pathway to success.

An effective method to measure your own success and contributions? Go on rounds. See how your customers treat you and your team. Personally thank them for what they do for patients. If they don't thank you back for how you fortify them (beyond just "support"), then shame on them.

The clinicians may be serving on the front lines, but they succeed in some large part to how they're buttressed by the back office. How do Disneyland and Walt Disney World entertain guests consistently? Back alleys and underground tunnels allow well-known and beloved characters to maneuver and travel quickly to generate all the gasps, smiles and bright faces throughout the parks.

Think of supply chain as the characters in a healthcare facility.

Next week, as your colleagues and compatriots (and customers and contractors) celebrate you and express their appreciation of you, don't forget to do the same for your deserving team and even yourself because you all make a difference together. You circulate the blood that is the lifeline of a healthcare facility or organization. You fortify the processes and professionals who make things happen.

Comedian Steven Wright is quoted as saying, "If you think nobody cares about you, try missing a couple of payments."

Apply that to supply chain this way: If you think your administrative and clinical colleagues don't care about you, try issuing a backorder or missing a shipment or running out of stock.

You're important. You're essential. When you head into next week, remember that fact. And then keep remembering throughout the year. You deserve it and have earned it.

Rick Dana Barlow serves as Co-Founder and Executive Director, Bellwether League Foundation, and Executive Editor of BLF's Leaders & Luminaries e-magazine. Barlow's column, Vintage Voice, is posted/published in Leaders & Luminaries and here. Barlow has nearly four decades of journalistic editorial experience, more than 30 years of which have been dedicated to covering a cornucopia of healthcare operational topics, including supply chain, sterile processing, surgical services, infection prevention, information technology, diagnostic imaging and radiology and laboratory for a variety of print and online media outlets. For more, visit Bellwether League Foundation's web site at <https://www.bellwetherleague.org/> and Barlow's online profile at <https://rickdanabarlow.wixsite.com/wingfootmedia>.