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Vintage Voice

Have Supply Chain – Will Travel

By Rick Dana Barlow

SCHAUMBURG, IL (November 1, 2026) – Older generations and fans of television show westerns likely will remember the 1957-1963 CBS TV and radio program, “Have Gun – Will Travel,” starring Richard Boone as Paladin, a “gentleman investigator” and gunfighter-for-hire in the Old West who helped people in need solve problems they had.

For hospitals and other healthcare organizations, Supply Chain also helps people in need – clinicians – deliver care for patients in need through access to essential products and services. While supply chain executives, leaders and professionals serve as “product and service investigators” to a degree, their “weapon” of choice likely is a desktop, laptop and/or mobile computer, smart phone, along with a pen and paper and a sparkling business personality.



Most, if not all, healthcare facilities have some type of supply chain operations, ranging from a single dedicated person to clinical and administrative department specialists to multidisciplinary and multifunctional teams of subject matter experts, depending on facility size and organizational composition.

One way administrative (including supply chain) and clinical professionals improve their knowledge and skills to benefit their customers? They travel to conferences and trade shows.

Unfortunately, when the economy nosedives, or confidence in the economy plunges, travel is one of the first budgetary items cut, followed closely by staff and service lines.

This mindset is like organizational flesh-eating bacteria.

Sure, staffers can attend “virtual” events, which exploded in popularity during the travel-restricted global pandemic years, and also research all kinds of stuff online and with artificial intelligence (AI) assisting. While exposing human assets to a serious and potentially deadly respiratory virus certainly qualified as justification for preventing travel to protect said staffers and ensure continuity of care, the ongoing travel restrictions, if not outright bans, beyond the health threat simply became too convenient a management crutch.

They remain too costly as well, from an intelligence perspective.

Sacrificing the opportunity to meet face-to-face, rub shoulders and shake hands with colleagues, competitors, friends and other professionals as well as physically touch products in the exhibit halls may have been necessary during the first three COVID-entangled years of this decade, but now it’s detrimental – to development, growth and service progression.

Supply Chain pros may not need to travel to conferences and trade shows on a monthly or even slightly less frequently, but two to three times a year not only will help them develop and grow, but also help them generate useful and valuable ideas for their employers, which can translate into revenue potential, expense reduction and customer service improvement from a patient care perspective, not necessarily in that order.

Attending conferences and trade shows is not as glamorous and leisurely as some might think. Staffers, by and large, aren’t partying all the time and enjoying touristy respites while their hard-working colleagues are slaving away for “The Man” back at the hospital. Granted, some do for a variety of reasons, but most take such travel opportunities respectfully and seriously. Instead, their eyes and minds are learning new ideas and mulling over new techniques and technologies to bring back to their organizations.

But it’s not enough to grant them the opportunity to attend a chapter or local and national meetings within their market segment or specialty to mingle with colleagues, competitors, corporate entities and customers.

Indeed, it’s incredibly valuable for supply chain pros to participate in and support events held and hosted by AHRMM, Bluegrass Business Media’s IDN Summit, SMI, ACHE, HFMA, FAH, GPOs, HCP, Share Moving Media’s IDN Insights and others – including Bellwether League Foundation’s BLFIRE!

What’s also incredibly valuable for supply chain pros to attend are those relevant events held and hosted by organizations on the periphery of their realm. Those include supply chain-themed shows *outside* of the healthcare space.

Why is this important?

Supply chain is supply chain all around, universally. Healthcare – particularly on the provider side – certainly adds in its share of nuances and quirks that other industries don't experience, let alone tolerate, but it's necessary for healthcare provider executives, leaders and pros to see supply chain from the perspectives in other industries.

The myth is that healthcare remains 10 years behind other industries when it comes to supply chain operations and management. However, if healthcare provider executives, leaders and pros actually interacted with those attending such events as MODEX, ProMat, LogiMat, SCOPE Supply Chain Leadership Summit and ISM World, among others, they'll learn truth. In fact, a few in the Bellwether Community already have done this.

They'll learn that other industries experience many of the same issues as healthcare providers deep within the bones and guts of supply chain operations, save for physician preference and influence and third-party payer controls, to name two healthcare-centric "idiosyncrasies." At best, healthcare providers may only be a few years behind other industries. Further, certainly, healthcare providers could adopt, implement and enjoy some of the tech on display at those other industry shows if only they had the budget to invest in them and could make a salient case for them and their impact on clinical service and patient care delivery.

As more healthcare provider organizations invest in artificial intelligence as a potential "silver bullet" solution, such investment should not come at the expense of investing in the authentic intelligence of their human assets, which can translate into more serious liabilities.

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