

If properly prepared, trained, and equipped, people – not solely technology – can be the strongest link in your supply chain.

ONE OF THE LAWS OF SUPPLY CHAIN I have learned is the law of people. Or as I like to put it: Just because you bought that new \$600 titanium driver doesn't make you Tiger Woods. People still have to make key supply chain decisions.

Technology is a great tool when it comes down to providing data to support decisions. Companies have sophisticated software that can compile and analyze bits of data at amazing speed. We can attach GPS tracking devices to cargo to know its location in real time. We created paperless distribution systems that allow for faster and more accurate shipping of products. But the success of logistics often comes down to someone making a good decision at the right time. To use another golf metaphor: Can that person make the right swing under pressure? The \$600 driver may help, but it's the skill and talent of the golfer that will determine the outcome.

I was reminded of the above during a night-operations tour of FedEx in Memphis. The operations center appears to be a scene from Tom Clancy novel. It is in a bunker for protection against weather. It has the latest power back-up systems. The operations floor is composed of wall-to-wall monitors – tracking planes and cargo in real time. The proprietary software can only be described as state-of-the-art and cutting-edge. Yet, when a critical decision needs to be made, it is not a piece of software making the call. A well-trained, knowledgeable person uses these tools to make the decision. The knowledge that is forged from the decision-maker's skill, training, and experience is the basis for proper judgment.

From my personal experience, the success or failure of a project often rests on key decisions made by people in the field. This is especially true for wind farm logistics where staying on schedule is critical to meet both budgets and construction timelines. The question that must be asked is: Does the field operative have the training, skill, and experience to make the critical decision? You need to have people who can "trust their swings" in critical moments. But for employees to do so, they require three keys to success:

1. Preparation — As the old saying goes: The better prepared I am, the luckier I get. There is no such thing as being overly prepared. Make sure your employees understand the scope, budget, and

timing of the projects. Prepare them on which decisions they can make and which decisions need to be deferred to a higher authority. Discuss contingencies with them and prepare them for the "what if."

2. Training — Are they trained in the skills they will need to be successful? This can vary from technical skills to interpersonal skills. I have witnessed very technically competent employees bring a project to a screeching halt due to miscommunication with a crane operator. Create, implement, and monitor training programs for your employees. And make sure they practice their skills.
3. Trust — After preparation and training, have confidence to let them play the game. They may fail. That's even expected from time to time. But failure is how they gain confidence and experience. Also, make sure that employees know that they can fail and you will still support them. There will surely be times where these failures are an indication that the right person is not doing the right job, but this tells you to make a change.

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I personally like to drive down the decision-making to the lowest possible level. This allows for agility in solving problems. And ultimately, the ability solve problems quickly is a key to excellent customer service. When running multiple distribution centers years ago, I delegated the shipping dock employees—the team that loaded trucks and prepared shipping documents—to make changes to shipping methods to meet order commitments if necessary. Don't call someone to ask for permission. Just do it. They were prepared and trained, and I made sure that we had their backs. The results were outstanding customer service and order fulfillment excellence. They may have not had the \$600 titanium driver, but they sure could play the game. And isn't that what this is all about? 🏏