

# Supply Chain Leadership - What is it? How do I get it? Why do I need it?

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## Introduction

When the Supply Chain Leadership Institute first started providing seminars on supply chain leadership in 2002, the focus was not on companies that were doing supply chain management well but on leaders of the employees that were working in the supply chain. It is important to keep in mind up front that a leader does not lead an organization but rather the people that make up that organization. Therefore, with that logic, a supply chain leader leads the employees not the supply chain organization. Over time this concept has been adapted to describing supply chain industry companies and not the individuals that lead the employees. The focus of this paper is to discuss the qualities of world class supply chain leaders.

Every supply chain management professional journal of late has addressed the concept of supply chain leadership. The majority of these articles look at the top supply chain companies each year or the leading companies that are doing supply chain management well. The Logistics Bureau details critical skills for supply chain leaders (2016) but those skills are really technical skills for managing supply chains successfully. Deloitte states that supply chain leaders are companies that are successful in supply chain management in trying to define supply chain leadership but really described companies with leading supply chains [1-4].

“With organizations spending a large amount of money on their supply chains, the need for smart, strategic supply chain leaders is crucial. Whether it’s gathering business intelligence to help make better decisions, or building relationships with suppliers and stakeholders, supply chain leaders require a new set of skills above and beyond logistical knowledge” [5]. An APICS (now Association for Supply Chain Management (ASCM) study on supply chain leadership states, “Every supply chain professional is a potential supply chain leader, whether formally-where leader is part of a position title-or informally, as it pertains to his or her job responsibilities” (APICS, 2016) [6]. The same study asserts that there is no standard model for supply chain leadership. However, as early as 2002, the Supply Chain Leadership Institute was addressing the issue of supply chain leadership. In 2009, the first book on supply chain leadership was published that put forth a model for supply chain leaders [7].

Dictionary.com defines leadership as “the position or function of a leader, a person who guides or directs a group” (2019) [8]. The US Army defines a leaders as “anyone who by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility inspires and influences people to accomplish organizational goals....leaders motivate people both inside and outside the chain of command to pursue actions, focus thinking, and shape decisions for the greater good of the organization”(2006). Thus, the leaders lead the individuals that make up the supply chain organization.

How do you become a supply chain leader? What attributes should you work on developing to become a supply chain leader? The first step is to agree on a common definition of leadership. For the purpose of this paper we will modify the US Army’s definition from an old Field Manual to fit today’s business society. Leadership is the art of positively influencing people - by providing purpose, direction and motivation - while meeting the needs of the customer and improving the organization [9].

This definition provides some valuable aspects of leadership. The first is the concept of positively motivating people. This is critical as the concept of toxic leadership continues to rear its head. Leaders seek to provide a positive environment through the concept of providing employees with a purpose and positively motivating them to grow and improve. The last part of the definition is also critical in that leaders have to focus on taking care of the customers. This starts with taking care of the employees. The art of leadership also includes working to make the organization better by having employees that can step up and accomplish the mission of taking care of the customers.

There is nothing in that definition of leadership that references your own career. Leadership is not about your personal ego and aspirations. It is about the people that you lead and how you motivate them and influence them. It is really your choice -you can make a positive impact, or you can provide toxic leadership and negatively impact those around you and eventually your customers as well. The choice is yours.

## Fix Bayonet Leadership for Supply Chain Leaders

### Historical example of fix bayonets leadership

Should you choose to make a positive impact; how do you develop a Fix Bayonet Leadership mentality? In the American Civil War at the battle of Gettysburg, Colonel Joshua Chamberlain got his Soldiers to fix bayonets and charge downhill at a superior Confederate Army attack. Here is a brief account of what took place: “Late in the afternoon of July 2, 1863, on a boulder-strewn hillside in southern Pennsylvania, Union Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain dashed headlong into history, leading his 20th Maine Regiment in perhaps the most famous counterattack of the Civil War. The regiment’s sudden, desperate bayonet charge blunted the Confederate assault on Little Round Top and has been credited with saving Major General George Gordon Meade’s Army of the Potomac, winning the Battle of Gettysburg and setting the South on a long, irreversible path to defeat” (Brann, n.d.) [10].

On May 23, 1863, 120 three-year enlistees from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine Infantry were marched under guard into the regimental area of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine men were in a state of mutiny and refused to fight, angry because the bulk of the regiment -men with only two-year enlistments -had been discharged and sent home, and the regiment had been disbanded. The mutineers claimed they had only enlisted to fight

under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine flag, and if their flag went home, so should they. By law, however, the men still owed the Army another year of service.

Chamberlain had orders to shoot the mutineers if they refused duty. Fortunately for the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine, Chamberlain was born and grew up in Brewer, the twin city to Bangor across the Penobscot River where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine regiment was recruited. The mutineers were not just soldiers but also Chamberlain's childhood neighbors. Instead of shooting them, Chamberlain wisely distributed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine veterans evenly to fill out the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's ranks and integrate experienced soldiers among the untested 20<sup>th</sup> Maine....On Little Round Top the 120 experienced combat veterans from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine brought the 20<sup>th</sup>'s ranks up to 386 infantrymen and helped hold Chamberlain's wobbling line together.... When their ammunition had almost run out, Chamberlain decided to fix bayonets and charge down into the two Alabama regiments...Chamberlain claimed later that one word -Bayonet! -was enough" (Brann, n.d.) [10].

From this little vignette demonstrates the influencing of the members of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine. Primarily through the treatment of the "mutineers" of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maine, Colonel Chamberlain earned the respect and loyalty of the Soldiers by treating them with respect and treating them as he would want to be treated. He also, through his actions, motivated them to want to do the right thing. How do you develop fix bayonet leadership skills and provide the positive attitude in your organization to get your employees to point that they are willing to "fix bayonets" in order to make your organization successful?

### Achieving "Fix Bayonets" Leadership in Your Organization

The first step is to get to know your employees. How do you do that? During my Military career, I accomplished this by sitting down with all of my employees one-on-one and learning what their background was, what experiences that they had that could impact the success of our operations and learn about their families. Why should I care about their families? What happens at home impacts what happens at the office. The more I could learn about what motivated my employees the better I could motivate them. There is no one size fits all motivation for employees. The better you know your employees, the better you are prepared to modify how you work to positively influence and motivate them.

The next step is to observe other leaders -leadership is not taught; it must be modeled for others to emulate. How do those leaders act, respond, talk, and interact with their employees? Talk to other leaders -what has worked for them and what has not worked? I learned more from what did not work than from ideas that did not work. Research into leadership styles and leadership skills continues to develop lists of what leaders do or don't do and continue to try to compare leadership and management. Simply, you lead people and you manage things and organizations. This lesson was imparted on me as a young ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) cadet while an undergrad student. Inherent in leadership are some attributes that world class leaders. These attributes are the subject of several books and presentations of the Supply Chain Leadership Center ([www.supplychainresearch.com](http://www.supplychainresearch.com)).

### Attributes of supply chain leaders

Here are some of the most important attributes that you need to master to become a supply chain leader:

- Loyalty/Respect/Character
- Ethics/Honesty
- A3 - Attitude/Aptitude/Accountability
- D4-Devotion, Dedication, Determination, Discipline
- E4 - Employee Retention/ Employee Recognition/ Example/

### Expectations/Enthusiasm

- R2 - Responsibility/Reliability
- S3 - Self Confidence/Self Knowledge and Self Development
- H5-Humor/Humility/Heart/Happiness/Health
- I4-Integrity/Inspiration/Initiative/Interest in Employees
- P4-Planning, Professional Pride, Perseverance, Passion, People

You will notice that the attributes are arranged to spell leadership. This is intentional but at the same time should not be confused with the relative importance of the attributes. If this list was in order of importance, the first attributes would be integrity and honesty - without these, a leader cannot be effective at any level.

The first step in developing fix bayonets leadership to motivate your employees is to establish a high level of respect. Respect is key to any leader. Respect must be given in order to be received. Respect is not a given -it must be earned every day. There are two types of respect. The first is the respect that goes with a title or position. While in the Army, every new promotion came with a new level of professional respect. However, more important for leadership success is personal respect. That level of respect that you earn by treating others with personal respect. Every major religion in the world contains the idea of treating others the way you want to be treated. Following this guidance will go a long way in earning the respect of your employees. Respect is a two-way street and the only way to develop respect is to provide respect to your employees. When respect is coupled with the other attributes of leadership, you will not only earn the respect of your employees but will provide the motivation to go the extra mile to take care of the customers.

### Conclusion

The leader that fosters a high level of respect, treats his/her employees the way he/she wants to be treated; acts ethically and provides positive motivation to his/her employees will create an environment where the employees achieve excellence and move their supply chain organization to new levels of customer service.

Employees and other leaders are watching you to see your leadership style. What example are you setting for others to emulate? Are you showing respect, dedication, attitude, ethics and integrity that others want to emulate, or have you become the example of how not to lead? The choice is yours and yours alone. Set the right example and others will want to join your team and be part of your organization.

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