

Takeaways from the 2019 American Supply Chain Summit



With so much happening in the industry, it should come as no surprise that the [2019 American Supply Chain Summit](#) was a vibrant event filled with exciting conversation and idea sharing. I had the honor of participating in this year's conference in Dallas, where I moderated a panel that included senior supply chain executives from Lockheed Martin, Lego, Dean Foods and others. In our session, titled "Building the Supply Chain Dream Team: Practices for Finding, Keeping and Growing Your Future Leaders," we discussed a number of trends and strategies shaping talent acquisition, including the developing of future supply chain leaders, retaining top talent, and recruiting impact-leaders.

A Changing Dynamic

Despite the historical patterns surrounding executive hiring in supply chain, the industry is seeing things in 2019 that were once taboo. For instance, executives are contemplating [counteroffers](#) and taking them when they see fit, impacting retention (and potentially damaging their industry reputations). The most surprising part of this trend is that executives are becoming less interested in compensation in favor of opportunities where they have a valued opinion, work collaboratively with functional partners, and have the ability to make a strong impact. Candidates are confidently seeking out opportunities at organizations where their opinions are being sought, their counsel valued, and where 'doing business the old way' is not how business gets done anymore. Instead, they seek companies that are progressive, not set in their ways, and where speed and efficiency are preferred over structure and bureaucracy.

At the same time, seasoned senior executives are seeking out the fresh perspectives of younger and less experienced talent. As a result, reverse mentoring is becoming increasingly popular. Junior executives are skipping promotions and quickly being placed in highly visible roles, especially when they have exceptional interpersonal skills and the ability to form influential relationships. Such talent is being further shaped through traditional training such as an MBA or skills development such as Six Sigma/Black Belt certifications, but also through executive coaching and industry associations increasingly led by younger talent. Often, these younger executives shadow more seasoned executives with a symbiotic learning relationship while understanding new ways to better connect with customers, suppliers, and other critical stakeholders.

Reconsidering Retention

An important discussion topic at the supply chain conference was the idea that modern retention strategy requires a different approach. Simply put, bonuses, equity awards, and dollar signs are just not effective anymore. Creating a *culture* that is conducive to bringing out the best in people is now king. Supply chain talent desires roles that align with their own personal values and can help them grow. They want to work at companies that they feel have a mission aligned with their own personal identity and values.

For companies seeking to hire, that translates to becoming a career steward and advocate. Supply Chain professionals want progressively challenging assignments where they can continue to build scope and encounter a variety of experiences, including stretch assignments, where they have high visibility to other senior leaders in the company. *Learning agility and the ability to influence* are highly coveted skills, and professionals grow in exciting ways when they encounter a new problem that requires a solutions-orientation.

That idea of learning agility is the single greatest retention tool available today. The conversations at the conference, both in the sessions and in the hallways, centered on the difficulty of finding good talent that can migrate across new functional areas (once considered outside of their comfort zone). By focusing on learning agility and soft-skills development, a company can attract the right talent and help their existing team grow incompetencies.

Taking Risks

A new supply chain employment environment requires looking at talent acquisition quite differently (and outside of an organization's typical comfort zone). However, it is the company's appetite for risks that will help them succeed where others will fail. With a shrinking talent pool and increasingly distinct preferences from prospective candidates, a different approach is required. Major companies are looking at individuals in other functional disciplines, such as CIOs with no fundamental supply chain experience, but because they are true leaders and have outstanding interpersonal skills, are increasingly being placed into senior supply chain leadership roles. Companies value that executive's fresh perspective in solving persistent problems using a different lens and tool kit while energizing staff to think creatively.

Reflecting on the 2019 American Supply Chain Summit

This year's supply chain conference was a rewarding experience on a number of levels. It was exciting to share views during our panel that saw a very active Q & A session. Additionally, meeting new senior leaders across a variety of industries shed light on both similarities and differences across the supply chain. Seeing how different companies and the ideas of supply chain leaders are applicable to solving each other's challenges was enlightening and proves how critical it is to collaborate across the supply chain community (and not solely within industry or category).

Read this next:

[The Rise and Reality of the Counteroffer in Executive Hiring](#)

[How Do We Prepare Millennials for Executive Leadership?](#)

[The Challenge of Hiring Executive Leaders in a Candidate-Driven Market](#)