HOW TO ACCELERATE YOUR CAREER IN SUPPLY CHAIN

By Rodney Apple, in partnership with APICS
INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on choosing supply chain management as your profession! Whether you’re still in school, just starting out in your career or already have several years of professional supply chain experience under your belt, you have made a very wise career decision.

Having recruited exclusively within the supply chain sector for 15 out of the last 20 years, including many years of experience working on the inside of several large multinational corporations in addition to running my own recruitment agency, I’ve gained a lot of insights into the world of supply chain hiring and career development.

Over the course of my career, I have closely followed the careers of hundreds of supply chain professionals whom I have recruited and with whom I continue to maintain relationships. One group that I’ve paid close attention to are the top performers. These are the folks who have managed to accelerate their careers in supply chain and outpace their peers.

In this white paper, I’ll share with you what these top performers have in common and tell you about techniques that top performers utilize to achieve rapid success in their careers. Whether you’re an experienced supply chain professional or a college student, I’m confident you’ll discover some new techniques and advice that can help you accelerate your career in supply chain.
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CHOOSING A CAREER WITHIN SUPPLY CHAIN – WHERE AND HOW TO BEGIN
Supply chain, more so than most other professions, offers an extremely broad and diverse range of career options, which makes it a very exciting place to build a career. Career opportunities span most industries and include core functional areas such as logistics, procurement, inventory planning, manufacturing and everything in between. You can choose to work in a corporate headquarters environment or within an operation such a distribution center or manufacturing plant. Or both.

When it comes to accelerating your career in supply chain, it’s very important to have a basic understanding of where to begin your career, because starting out on the right foot is much easier than starting out on the wrong foot. The sheer number of supply chain career options/paths, though, can make it rather difficult to decide where in the supply chain to begin your career.

To illustrate this, here are some of the most common questions I receive from supply chain students and new graduates:

How do I decide which functional area of the supply chain I should start out in?

What industries are the best to work in from a supply chain perspective?

Should I start out in a consulting or non-consulting role?

Should I work on the service provider side (3PL, carrier, etc.) or the shipper side (retail, consumer products, etc.)?

Should I work with a small company, medium-sized company or large corporation?

As you can see, there’s a litany of options and factors when it comes to choosing a career in supply chain. So how do I decide where to begin my career in supply chain, you ask?
**THE GOLDEN RULE**
The Golden Rule is not what you might be thinking or have frequently heard in the past, which is to “do what you love” or “follow your passion.” On the contrary, the Golden Rule is to obtain an understanding of the type of work you will likely be good at and would enjoy doing before you begin your career in supply chain.

If you can figure out the type of work you’d likely be good at and enjoy doing, your odds of being happy and successful in your first job will go way up. If you’re content and successful in your first job, your focus will be on learning and growing, delivering value and ultimately doing what it takes to get promoted.

On the contrary, if you don’t invest the time to figure this out, your odds of being content and successful in your first job go down because you may end up in a job you don’t like. If you aren’t happy in your first job, then your focus shifts to doing whatever it takes to find a new job—not an ideal situation to be in when launching your career.

With that being said, know that it’s very common to make mistakes when first entering the workforce. So don’t freak out if you find yourself in a job or company you don’t like. Instead, focus on turning this event into a learning experience and develop a course of action that leads you to greener pastures and a job you know you’ll enjoy. Sometimes you’ve got to learn from trial and error, and this is perfectly normal.

**START NETWORKING EARLY AND OFTEN**
The best way to learn about the type of work you would be good at and enjoy doing is to network with supply chain professionals. You can read about careers in supply chain all you like, but...

I suggest that you begin building your supply chain network early on, in college, as opposed to waiting until after you graduate. With the advent of social media platforms, particularly LinkedIn, it’s easier now than ever before to make connections with supply chain professionals. Your goal should be to connect with a broad group of supply chain professionals across numerous industries from companies that range from small shops to large corporations. A great place to start is to connect with alumni who work within the field of supply chain, APICS members who have already launched their careers, and supply chain employees who work within companies you admire and may want to target for employment.

*nothing beats having a discussion with working supply chain professionals who are in the best position to give you real-world career insights.*
CONDUCT INFORMATION INTERVIEWS
As soon as you start making new online or in-person connections with supply chain professionals, make an effort to contact each new connection to conduct an “informational interview.” This is a great and easy way for you to learn more about the work they do, which can help you with the decision on where to begin your supply chain career. It’s also likely that you’ll receive a lot of invaluable career advice through this effort that can help with your career planning and launch. In addition, you may build some good professional relationships that could provide you with job leads to pursue.

Before you begin contacting members of your supply chain network, I recommend preparing a short script that details why you’re reaching out, along with a few career-related questions. Your goal is to learn more about why the person chose the career he or she is in now, and the type of work he or she does and does not enjoy doing. Ultimately, you want to secure some advice that will help you laser in on what type of internship and/or career opportunities to pursue as you work your way through college.

See an example of what this script might look like on the following page:
Dear Mr. Smith,

Thank you for accepting my LinkedIn invitation! I am honored to be a part of your professional network.

I am reaching out to you today because I am a supply chain student at <INSERT UNIVERSITY NAME> and am in the process of determining the type of supply chain career to pursue when I graduate in <INSERT GRADUATION DATE>.

I am hoping that you might be able to spare a few minutes of your time to provide some insights on the type of work you’ve been doing and what made you decide to pursue the area of supply chain you’re working in now. I believe this information will be very valuable to me as I begin to narrow down my career options.

Below are the questions I would like to speak with you about. Please let me know if you’re open to a 5-10 minute call on <INSERT YOUR AVAILABILITY>. If you don’t have time for a phone conversation, perhaps you could reply to this message with your answers and advice?

Thanks in advance for your time and help.
<INSERT YOUR NAME, EMAIL AND PHONE NUMBER>

Supply Chain Career Discovery Questions

• What motivated you to pursue the job or function you’re in now?

• Could you walk me through a typical work day in your current job as <INSERT JOB TITLE> at <INSERT COMPANY NAME>?

• What do you like the most and dislike the most about your current job and why?

• What does it take in terms of skills, qualifications and experience to be successful in the job you’re in now?

• If you had to hire someone for an entry-level position on your team or within your department, what would be the top-rated traits and skills you would seek, and why?

• If you had to make the decision over again as to where to begin your supply chain career, would you have made the same decision or would you have chosen another type of job? Why?

• Do you have any career advice to share for someone at my level?
I recommend that you survey as many supply chain professionals as necessary until you gain a better understanding of the type of work you would likely be good at and enjoy doing. This doesn’t mean you need to choose an exact job title to focus on. You mainly need to narrow your choices down to a few options so you can focus your energy on the right internship and/or job search efforts.

**NETWORK AT SUPPLY CHAIN ASSOCIATION MEETINGS AND CHAPTER EVENTS**

Kudos to you for joining APICS—the leading professional association for supply chain and operations management professionals. If you’re reading this, obviously you’re taking advantage of the content and benefits associated with being an APICS member.

Another excellent way to connect with supply chain professionals, and in turn get a better feel for the types of jobs and companies you may want to pursue, is to attend routine association chapter meetings and events. If you’re not familiar with the APICS chapter nearest you, you can search via the APICS website. As you mingle and meet new supply chain professionals, I encourage you to ask career-related questions like the questions outlined above.

**SELF-ASSESSMENTS**

Another option you may want to explore, especially if you’re having difficulty deciding where to begin your supply chain career, is to take a self-assessment. Self-assessments are designed to help you understand characteristics such as your strengths and weaknesses, the type of work you would most likely enjoy (and not enjoy), and your ideal work environment. Here’s an extensive list of self-assessment resources you can check out if you need more help determining what type of supply chain career to pursue.

**KEEP A PULSE ON SUPPLY CHAIN NEWS, CAREERS AND TRENDS**

I also encourage you to keep a strong pulse on current events, breaking news, blogs and trends within the supply chain profession, as this can be a great source of information to help you decide where to focus your career. In addition, this will give you some great real-world supply chain insights that can serve as handy conversation topics when you’re in networking mode.

The easiest way to keep track of supply chain news and blogs is to set up an RSS news reader, which is a tool that scours the Internet to retrieve fresh posts on topics you specify. Once you set it up, you simply log in on your computer, tablet or phone to peruse news articles and blog posts. I’ve been using Feedly as my RSS news reader/organizer for the last couple years (since Google retired its news reader) and highly recommend it.
LANDING YOUR FIRST CAREER WITHIN SUPPLY CHAIN
**INTERNSHIPS**
Internships are critical in today’s ultra-competitive job market, especially if you desire to gain employment with a leading employer. If you truly want to accelerate your supply chain career, you need to obtain at least two internships so you can increase your odds of beating out the competition when you apply for full-time employment opportunities.

You also should strive to "overachieve" in your internships, because often these can lead to full-time employment with the same employer. Ideally, you should pursue internships that closely align with the type of job you plan to pursue full-time. Coming into your first permanent full-time job with some relevant real-world experience can help you hit the ground running and make a good first impression.

**SUPPLY CHAIN UNIVERSITIES, GPAS & ADVANCED DEGREES**
If you want to increase your odds of success in landing a strong internship and/or full-time employment with a leading employer, obtaining a bachelor’s degree from a top-ranked supply chain university, along with a strong GPA, can really help separate you from the competition.

While attending a top-ranked supply chain university can certainly open up a lot of career doors, especially with large companies that tend to aggressively recruit from these universities, don’t worry if you’re unable to attend one. Obtaining a four-year degree in supply chain, business, engineering or a related field is typically all you need to qualify for the majority of professional entry-level supply chain positions. Factor this in with some relevant internships and a strong GPA, and you’ll be in great shape when you graduate.

As for obtaining an advanced/graduate degree, this too can help increase your odds of success in landing a top internship or job with a leading employer. Sometimes undergraduates remain in college to complete their graduate degrees, and sometimes they go to a university to complete them after working for a few years. This is a personal decision that only you can make. I definitely recommend weighing all the pros and cons before making a big decision like this.
You should also determine whether you have a high probability of making a good return on investment (ROI) if you elect to obtain an advanced degree. For example, if you aspire to move up into an executive-level position, then obtaining a MBA is often a wise decision. On the other hand, it may not be necessary for staff-level roles and non-executive positions. Again, weigh the pros and cons to determine if an advanced degree will be worth the time and financial investment.

**SHARPEN YOUR ANALYTICAL CHOPS**

One of the most common job requirements or job preferences you’ll find on most entry-level supply chain openings is “proficiency with Microsoft Office applications.” You’ll definitely see this for analyst and engineer job openings, since Excel is a primary tool used for analysis. In addition, consulting firms often expect a high proficiency in PowerPoint since that’s a main what that they deliver the results of their projects.

Even if you plan to pursue a position where you’ll be focused more on coordinating and leading task-oriented efforts to support day-to-day operations, a solid proficiency in Excel can certainly give you a leg up over your competition and help aid you with making sound, data-backed business decisions. So I strongly encourage you to become as proficient as you can with Excel (and other database and analysis tools, if possible) before you graduate.

Another area where entry-level supply chain candidates tend to lack proficiency is understanding supply chain financials. I encourage you to take a financial course or two while in school so you can gain a basic understanding of the key financial levers within supply chain.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS**

As you can see, there are plenty of things you can do while in school to put yourself in a good position to accelerate your (future) career in supply chain. If you can at least determine the type of work you’ll likely excel at and enjoy doing before you graduate, you’ll be ahead of many of your peers who take the “I’ll figure things out after I graduate” approach.
Even so, college is a once-in-a-lifetime experience that you’ll want to look back on as some of the best years of your life. Don’t go overboard by thinking you must finalize all career-related decisions by the time you get to your senior year in college. While it helps to start your career off on a good foot in a position and company that you enjoy, sometimes it takes a “trial and error” approach before you figure things out.

**DEVELOPING AND EXECUTING A WINNING JOB SEARCH STRATEGY (PREVIOUS APICS WHITE PAPER AND WEBINAR)**

We have another related white paper and webinar that are dedicated to this topic, so if you’re seeking more job search advice and strategies, please log in to apics.org/careercoach and download the materials you need from this web page.
SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR CAREER SUCCESS
CAREER LADDERS: MYTH OR REALITY?
The theory of the career ladder is that you work your way up from the bottom toward (or to) the top within one employer. If you consistently performed well, you could count on a steady advancement or “climb” in salary, job title and responsibilities until you retired from the company.

While career ladders were very popular a few decades ago, it’s a lot less common these days for employees to stick around with one employer and work their way up from an entry-level to a senior level position. The business world has rapidly evolved over the years, and the expectation today is that you are fully in charge of managing your own career. It’s still possible to climb the career ladder with one employer, but a typical career path today could involve making several job changes across multiple employers, accepting a lateral move versus a promotion, experiencing relocations, or even striking it out on your own to start your own business.

Young supply chain professionals who are coming up through the ranks today must create and actively manage their own career plans by seeking out opportunities to develop their skills and experience, growing and nurturing their networks, and positioning themselves for internal promotions or external career advances.

CAREER PLANNING = CAREER ACCELERATION
From my perspective there are two types of employees:

1. **Proactive**: those who proactively manage their careers by developing a long-term career plan that focuses on where they want to arrive at the height of their career, as well as the steps they need to take along the way to reach this destination. They’re constantly seeking out opportunities to learn and enhance their skill sets and marketability, and they work on developing and growing their networks at all times.

2. **Reactive**: those who reactively manage their careers by not developing a career plan. They might work just as hard as anyone and focus on obtaining the next promotion, but they do not think or act strategically regarding their long-term career plans. When it comes to building and leveraging their networks, they do so only when they’re ready to make a career move or find themselves unemployed.

If you truly want to accelerate your career in supply chain, it’s imperative that you develop, implement and proactively manage your long-term career plan, ideally at the beginning of your professional career. The career planning process is very similar to setting goals. Without goals, you lack focus and direction when it comes to your career.
DEVELOPING YOUR CAREER PLAN (AKA CAREER GOALS)

Set Career Goals that Motivate You

Staying motivated is the key to achieving career goals. When you set career goals for yourself, they must be deemed as “important” and there must be “value” associated with achieving them. Focus first on establishing goals that match the highest priorities within your career—goals you know will create a strong sense of urgency to fulfill and will add value once achieved.

Be sure to write down each goal, why it’s important to you, and the value you expect to receive from achieving the goal. If you’ve found a professional mentor, it’s wise to share your career goals with this person. This can be a great way to generate inspiration when needed.

Set SMART Career Goals

In order for a career goal to be deemed qualified it needs to be a SMART goal. SMART stands for:

Specific: the career goal must be very well defined and describe in precise detail what it is you want to achieve.

Measurable: if your goals don’t include numbers, dates, amounts or percentages you won’t be able to track and measure your progress.

Achievable: avoid setting goals that are near impossible to achieve or you’ll be setting yourself up for disappointment and frustration. You should avoid setting goals that are too easy to achieve as well. The best approach is to set stretch goals – something that’s realistic and challenging.

Relevant: closely align your goals with the direction you want your career to go in as this will help maintain the proper focus you’ll need to stay ahead.

Timely: all career goals should have a deadline. Deadlines help to create a sense of urgency.

Write Down Your Career Goals!!

If you fail to write down your career goals, you simply won’t succeed (unless you get lucky). It’s imperative that you not only write down your career goals but that you keep them in a highly visible place such as your desk, office and/or glued to your laptop. Be sure to frame the goal positively: for example, “I will complete my APICS CPIM by 12/31/2015” versus “I will try to complete my APICS CPIM in 2015.” Finally, keep a to-do list that has your goals written at the top as a constant reminder.
Develop Career Action Steps
Career goals are focused on achieving a desired outcome by an established deadline. Action steps are the prioritized work tasks and milestones you need to achieve in order to obtain your goal by the established deadline. Write down these action steps. Better yet, embed them into your favorite task management system.

Review and Track your Progress
Working toward achieving your career goals is a steady, ongoing process that requires a lot of focus and commitment. I encourage you to set up recurring appointments/reminders on your calendar each week to track progress made toward achieving your goals. Sometimes you’ll need to make adjustments to your goals when unexpected events pop up in your life or career, so know that this okay and perfectly normal.

However, always strive to keep your goal deadlines in place. Pushing them back can lead to bad habits such as procrastination. If you do miss a deadline, then set aside some time to reevaluate what went wrong and put a corrective action plan in place.
OBTAINING PROMOTIONS
ESTABLISH STRONG RELATIONS WITH YOUR BOSS

First and foremost, you should establish a strong relationship with your direct supervisor—this person typically holds the keys to your promotion. Even if your direct supervisor isn’t the final decision maker on promotions, he or she will certainly have influence on these decisions. One of the most important things you can do is to gain a detailed understanding of the key deliverables that are expected of you in your job, as well as any metrics and KPIs that you are expected to track and improve. Ask your manager what you need to do to get to the next level and strive to be an overachiever. If possible, schedule a few update meetings throughout the year to go over how you’re tracking against your key deliverables and discuss any opportunities or problems.

Always strive to maintain a positive attitude, and never complain—this will do you no good. Be proactive versus reactive when it comes to communicating routine updates; you don’t want your boss having to ask you for something that’s normally expected of you. If you do get overwhelmed with work or a fire pops up that you can’t extinguish, be sure to alert your manager. It’s better to get help than to let something blow up that can make you as well as your manager look bad. Last but not least, make it your mission to make your boss look good and shine. When you contribute to the success of your manager, it gets noticed and can lead to faster promotions.

MAINTAIN A LIST OF YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

When it’s time to sit down with your manager to conduct an annual review, come fully prepared with a list of accomplishments documenting the value you delivered to the organization. Be sure you quantify the results for each major accomplishment (cost reduction savings, percentage points you improved against KPIs, etc.). Also keep any emails you receive from customers, clients, or executives so you can show off what others have said about your work.

Other important reasons for maintaining a list of accomplishments are to have good content for keeping your supply chain résumé updated, and to have plenty of good information to share when you go on your next job interview—whether it be for an internal position or with another company.
1. Go Above and Beyond

Overachievers are the ones who move up the career ladder the fastest. In addition to fulfilling the basic responsibilities you were hired for, always strive to go above and beyond. When your boss asks the team for a volunteer to work on a project or to knock out a difficult task, raise your hand and volunteer. This earns some respect points with your manager and every time you do it, you deposit more respect points into the bank. When an opportunity comes up for a promotion, you just might get the nod ahead of your peers simply for being an overachiever.
2. Training, Advanced Degrees and Certifications

Another great way to position yourself for a promotion is to advance your skills, abilities and knowledge by seeking out training and development opportunities. If your employer offers courses onsite, great—but if not, there are other ways to learn such as taking online courses, attending courses at your community college, and reading books and blogs.

As discussed earlier, working toward proficiency in Microsoft Office and other applications can open up the door to bigger and better opportunities. In addition to sharpening your data analysis skills, you should make an effort to gain an understanding of supply chain finance, project management tools and methodologies, supply chain software applications, and/or continuous improvement tools and methodologies.

At some point in your career, you may decide that you’d like to go back to college to obtain an advanced degree such as MS, MBA or even a PhD. Be sure to check with your employer to see if they offer tuition reimbursement. This could be an excellent way to obtain an additional degree at a deep discount.

Obtaining professional supply chain certifications can absolutely help make you more promotable to other employers. As an APICS member, you’re probably aware of the APICS certification offerings. If not, take the time to research them so you can decide which is best for your particular needs. As a supply chain recruiter, I can attest that having a CPIM or CSCP certification can really help advance your career—these are qualifications that employers commonly ask for these days.
DEVELOPING AND LEVERAGING YOUR SUPPLY CHAIN NETWORK
I’m sure you’ve heard the sayings, “It’s all about who you know” or “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.” These sayings are frequently used in the context of gaining employment. While these sayings aren’t 100% accurate (you still need to have the right skills and experience), there’s a lot of truth in them. “Employee referrals” are consistently ranked as the top source of employer hires based on every research study I’ve ever read on the topic.

Employee referrals go hand in hand with networking. This is one of the primary reasons it’s important to focus on building and growing your supply chain network throughout your career. You just never know when you might find yourself needing to find another job. Having a robust supply chain network in place can certainly help you open doors to career opportunities.

Not only can you reach out to your network to try and identify employment opportunities, but members of your network or outside your network can also reach out to you in regard to potential career opportunities. Better yet, you could be contacted by a leading employer about a dream position, and this in turn could take your career and lifestyle to brand-new heights. As a veteran supply chain recruiter, I can assure you that these types of events happen all the time.

There are plenty of other good reasons for growing your network: gaining access to other supply chain professionals to conduct benchmarking studies, seeking out expert advice for a problem or project you’re working on, identifying potential suppliers or customers, gaining insights into various supply chain topics that you’re studying, and keeping tabs on trends and news happenings that are taking place within the supply chain marketplace, among them.

As for when you should start building your network, the sooner the better! If you’re still in college but haven’t started building your network yet, I highly recommend that you get started right away. At a minimum, you need to build and optimize a profile on LinkedIn—it’s by far the top social media platform for business professionals. Start by connecting with your classmates and professors, along with alumni and friends. Once you get the hang out of how to connect with others on LinkedIn, it will become second nature.

While LinkedIn is a great online platform for building out your network, there are plenty of other sources that you should tap into as well to meet new connections, such as supply chain association meetings. As an APICS member, you should conduct some research on the APICS website to identify potential local chapter networking events to attend—plant or warehouse tours or workshops, for example.
BUILDING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS
While developing a strong network of supply chain professionals throughout your career is important, building meaningful relationships with supply chain professionals and others with whom you work is even more important. I like to think of business relationships as the “glue” that holds companies together, because people are the most important asset of any company—and without them, companies cannot survive.

Your goal should be to develop mutually beneficial relationships that provide value and help, when needed, to one another. Relationships you should focus on building throughout your career include your immediate peers and coworkers, employees, customers, suppliers, vendors, your manager(s), senior leadership within the supply chain, your HR partner and anyone else you feel would benefit from knowing you or whom you would benefit from knowing.

Successful supply chain practitioners focus on building and developing relationships with a broad group of professionals. They rely on these individuals for advice, insights, support, feedback and career guidance throughout the course of their careers. When you focus on growing your supply chain network and building meaningful business relationships, you put yourself in a position to accelerate your career while helping others do the same.

SEEKING OUT MENTORSHIPS
One of the best ways to accelerate your career in supply chain is to engage with a mentor—or even multiple mentors. Mentors can provide you with invaluable career advice, help you achieve your goals and remove obstacles that can get in the way of your success.

If your company happens to have a formal mentorship program, I strongly encourage you to look into joining. If there is no program, you should try to identify and engage someone within your organization to serve as a mentor.

Junior Mentor
I suggest that you start by analyzing your short-term career goals. Where do you want to be within the next one to three years? From here, try to identify someone within the organization who’s doing the same type of work you’d like to do in the next one to three years. If you can find someone who has worked in your position before, even better—he or she should be able to relate well with your
current position. Make sure your mentor is someone you admire and respect; these types of people are typically good at providing much-needed inspiration. Your mentor should be able to help you navigate within the organization, provide tips for how to perform better in your job, and ultimately help you discover what you need to accomplish to make it to the next level.

**Senior Mentor**

You should also seek out someone higher up to serve as a mentor, ideally someone who is doing the type of job you’d like be doing within the next five to 10 years. This person will likely be in a management position, and therefore will have more experience and relationships within the company.

I recommend scheduling routine meetings with this mentor every few months to address any challenges you’re facing and to discuss matters such as your job performance and goals. You should strive to obtain advice on how to advance to his or her level, and incorporate this advice into your longer-term career goals and activity plans. A mentor at this level should be a great listener who will offer words of wisdom that encourage you and challenge you to do your very best. Ideally, this mentor could eventually help facilitate some introductions to key decision makers and ultimately put you on a good path to success.
TRAITS OF TOP SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMERS (EXERCISE)
Have you ever wondered why certain employees move up more quickly than others do? What do these “movers and shakers” have that no one else has? What makes them so special?

Having spent the last 15 years of my career recruiting within the supply chain sector for numerous companies from Fortune 15 to startup, I’ve been in a unique position to work side by side with hundreds of supply chain professionals ranging from entry-level to C-level.

Over the years, I’ve picked up on the traits that are shared among top supply chain performers. This is how I developed the list below (and please note that the list isn’t in any particular order).

I encourage you to take out your pen and make a note of which traits from the list you share—and which ones you don’t. This should give you some additional opportunities to work on as you continue to progress with your career.

**What traits do top supply chain performers share?**

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<td>- They have built and continue to build strong networks and relationships</td>
<td>- They have used mentors and serve as mentors</td>
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<td>- They are active in supply chain associations</td>
<td>- They are great communicators, both written and oral</td>
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<td>- They inspire and motivate others</td>
<td>- They are excellent leaders</td>
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<td>- They are charismatic</td>
<td>- They are always focused on delivering results</td>
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<td>- They never make excuses</td>
<td>- They know when and how to push back</td>
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<td>- They are always learning and growing</td>
<td>- They are voracious readers</td>
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<td>They maintain a positive attitude</td>
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<td>They are process-driven</td>
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<td>They go the extra mile and are overachievers</td>
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<td>They keep the “career door” open no matter how happy they are in their current position</td>
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<td>They are on LinkedIn</td>
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<td>They possess a high level of integrity</td>
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<td>They are team players</td>
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<td>They are innovative</td>
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<td>They have strong analytical skills</td>
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<td>They have a global business perspective</td>
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<td>They know how to engage their audience, from hourly to the boardroom</td>
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<td>They take calculated risks</td>
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<td>They are disciplined</td>
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They have strong attention to detail
They focus on solving problems and continuous improvement
They are visionaries
They are never happy with the status quo
They are KPI-/metrics driven
They never complain
They are technically savvy
They challenge assumptions and encourage risk
They closely monitor employee performance
They facilitate synergy among business partners
They typically possess advanced degrees and/or supply chain certifications
They know how to engage their audience, from hourly to the boardroom
They have a point to have fun on the job
They have excellent planning and organizational skills
They have strong execution skills
They seek out feedback and advice from others
They are strong influencers and negotiators
They think systematically
They reward performance
They project high emotional intelligence (EQ)
They are very effective decision makers
They are always genuine
They smile and have a good sense of humor

TRAINS OF TOP SUPPLY CHAIN PERFORMERS
When it comes to your supply chain career, you—and only you—are in charge. Every major decision you make can have a positive or negative impact on your career, and you’ll have numerous career-related decisions to make from when you’re in college until you retire. While this may sound a bit daunting, the good news is that you have an abundant amount of resources to tap into to help you make wise career decisions.

From the time you launch your career until you end your career, it’s imperative that you take a proactive versus a reactive approach to managing your career. Think and act strategically about your career and get good at goal setting, organization and planning. Forming good habits and routines early on will set you up for success throughout each stage of your career.

Seek out as much career advice as you possibly can through the networks you build, the relationships you build and the mentors you engage. Take intelligent risks and don’t be afraid of failing or making mistakes—especially early in your career. Every successful business person will tell you that they’ve failed and made plenty of mistakes throughout their career, and this is what made them stronger and more successful.

While it’s always important to achieve results and deliver value in each and every job you hold, it’s also important to have a strong network of contacts and relationships because your experience and background can only take you so far. It’s “who you know” that can help lead you to your career destinations and open up doors of opportunity.

Make an effort to seek out and associate with top supply chain performers with the goal of discovering what they did, and continue to do, that allowed them to accelerate their careers in supply chain. You will discover that they do things differently—and these are the traits you want to emulate.

Last but not least, be sure to have fun with your career and don’t take things too seriously. We work most of our adult lives, so why not make the best of it by striving to end up in a job and company that brings happiness? If you can make this happen, then accelerating your career in supply chain will come easy.

To your success!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rodney Apple is the founder and president of SCM Talent Group, LLC — a national supply chain recruiting and executive search firm that recruits across the end-to-end supply chain discipline. For nearly 10 years, Rodney worked at the corporate headquarters for The Coca-Cola Company and The Home Depot, where he led professional and executive recruiting for their global supply chain organizations. To date, Rodney has successfully filled over 1,000 professional- to executive level supply chain positions for clients ranging from Fortune 15 to startup. Rodney also authors “The Supply Chain Talent Blog,” where he shares advice on job search strategy, résumé optimization, interviewing tips, career development, hiring and more. For more information, please visit scmtalent.com.

Visit apics.org/careercoach to find his first white paper.
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