

Operational Excellence- Smith Uses Technology for His Supply Chain

Originally published in Mississippi Business Journal

Some people call it fate or luck. Others may consider it God's providence. Regardless, it is interesting to me to see how our lives and careers are often shaped by unforeseen twists and turns. Ed Smith, Chief Supply Chain and Contracts Management Officer for the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC), has been actively involved in the field of supply chain management in healthcare for over 27 years. Smith has become a nationally recognized leader in his field, but his career path would certainly have been hard to predict.

Ed was a standout football player in high school. His plan was to go off to college on a football scholarship. However, he sustained a serious injury to his shoulder his senior year which ended his football career. With his ability to get a scholarship gone, Ed took a job out of high school working on a river barge. Over the course of three years, he had worked his way up to being a second mate and saved up enough money to pay for college. However, before he started, his father's house burned down and it was underinsured. Ed used his college savings to help his father rebuild his house. Since he no longer had his savings, Ed went on to school and took a job as a shipping clerk at a local hospital to pay for school. As they say, "the rest is history." From his first job as a minimum wage shipping clerk, Ed has gone on to become an industry thought leader in supply chain management.

Smith was an early adopter of the use of technology to improve supply chain management. His employer recognized his talents, and he was rapidly promoted into leadership positions. He has served in supply chain related leadership positions with hospitals, healthcare cooperatives, and physician groups. During his career, he has lived in Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, and Maryland. Ed is a leader within his profession and is President of the Society of Healthcare Supply Chain Management, a subsidiary affiliate of the Mississippi Hospital Association. He also serves as an advisor and part of the speaking faculty for the World Health Congress and the Association of Healthcare Resource and Materials Management.

One of the big focal points for UMMC is developing its Supplier Diversity Program. The purpose of this program is to support and provide opportunities for quality local vendors. UMMC has a large annual budget, and to the extent that some of these dollars can recirculate in the local economy, it is a huge win. Smith's father was a small businessperson, so he has a particular passion for seeing local businesses grow and thrive. Through his leadership roles, Smith has been a strong advocate for such innovative programs.

Given his extensive responsibilities over the years, I wanted to know more about his leadership philosophies. As a supply chain manager in healthcare, he has always viewed his role as a servant to support of his "customers," the nurses, surgeons, and medical staff. He strives to find out what he can do to make their jobs easier. He leads his team with the motto, "It may not be our fault, but it is our challenge." I really like that motto. It is easy to point fingers and place blame. It takes courage to take responsibility and address problems head on.

Smith also shared insightful points about recruiting. While credentials and pedigrees are great, he likes to hire for attitude. He noted, "I believe you can teach skills, but attitude is often hard to

change.” This may sound simple, but he also encourages his team to smile. I am always amazed what a gift a smile can be, particularly in a difficult circumstance.

One of the challenges of leadership is to address the fear of failure. I agree with leadership expert John Maxwell who encourages us to “fail forward.” Smith likes to encourage his team to not fear failure. I like the comment that Ed made to me, “failure is the tuition at the school of learning.” When a problem occurs, he analyzes whether there was “a good plan that was poorly executed, good execution of a poor plan, or both poor execution and a poor plan.” Unless you undertake this kind of analysis, you are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. Finally, Smith shared the wisdom that, “to grow in any industry, you have to network.” He shared that he believes that it is important to read industry journals, attend key conferences, and to always be learning. When I look at the long list of organizations and leadership roles that Ed has participated in, I am convinced that he “practices what he preaches” on this point.

I am excited about the passion that Ed has for making a difference in this state. The Supplier Diversity Program that UMMC is pioneering has the potential to help many local entrepreneurs and become a model for other organizations who share an interest in developing the local economy.

Quick Facts:

Ed Smith, Chief Supply Chain and Contracts Management Officer for the University of Mississippi Medical Center

First Job: “My first job was working as a deck hand on a river barge.”

Favorite Business Books: *Built To Last* (Jim Collins); *Wooden on Leadership* (John Wooden)

Proudest Moment as a Leader: “I have enjoyed tremendous support from the leadership at UMMC. I am most proud of the accomplishments that my team has made in making industry recognized advancements in supply chain management.”

(c) [Martin E. Willoughby, Jr. 2011](#)