



Logistical transparency

By John A. Gentle, DLP

DON'T YOU JUST HATE IT WHEN POLITICIANS or activists take a quote out of context and blow it out of proportion to make the other party look bad?

This practice can either be a conscious act, where someone intentionally knows that a comma, a selective phrase, or on conjunction with another part of the sentence actually changes the entire meaning. On the other hand, some organizations are so blinded by their distrust of the other group that they unconsciously interpret the words to mean something other than what the originator intended.

Because a national discourse on the art of political manipulation will soon overwhelm and frustrate us, I have chosen a simple way to illustrate how statements may either intentionally or unintentionally mislead the reader.

Last week I took my grandson, Joshua, to soccer practice. It was set for six o'clock. I noticed that about half of the kids were there on time and the others were late. After the practice we discussed what it meant to be on time. Josh suggested that being just a few minutes late wasn't a big deal—that there was a need for wiggle room.

We then talked about how “on-time” was defined—the criteria that determines whether the person is late or not late. It was decided that for practice, being early was not bad and that being five minutes late was considered okay as long as you had your shin guards and brought your ball. The same criteria, however, did not hold true for game day when the tolerance for being late was “zero,” and if you're late you didn't play the first half.

How does this apply to the “fitness for use” guidelines that we provide to our internal and external business partners relative to how we will measure their performance?

When you talk to carriers, are you defining the criteria for timed deliveries? Will it vary depending on whether the shipment goes to a warehouse or job site? Does it require the driver to call one hour in advance or present himself with his paperwork to the supervisor five minutes before the unload time?

Do your carriers understand that for trailer pools,

you will measure the percentage of the committed trailers to those empty, clean, operational, and available in your yard at some specific time of the day? Do they also know you are not going to count ‘as available’ trailers brought to your yard with ‘foreign material’ in them?

When we measure the DC for trailers loaded on time, do you say that the packing slip must be attached visibly to the last package on the trailer and it must be ready for pickup not later than the safe transit due-out time shown on the tender to the carrier?

Inventory managers can either be measured at month end when DCs instinctively withhold entering receiving reports; or more realistically, they can be measured against the average of daily inventories over a calendar month.

One of the most challenging and contentious issues for carriers and shippers is the commitment of shipping volumes and destination areas. Shippers bid

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specific three and five digit zip code volumes while carriers, anxious to minimize the distance and time between receiving and shipping points, bid favorably for those points and commit drivers and equipment to generate favorable earnings. How and when shippers send those carriers to those specific destinations and the criteria that are used to measure their commitment to the carrier is another matter.

If the commitment criteria is just a certain volume over 30 days, that is much different than a certain volume per calendar week, or per business week, or per business day.

Everyone understands the need for wiggle room. If you don't want to live and die with a specific number, use a “range.” Intentionally obfuscating the criteria has no place in the logistics community and is grossly unfair to your business partners.

I suggest that you review your data today. “Inventive criteria,” “elusive,” and “deceptive” should not be words used to describe how the industry perceives you and your programs. □

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