



What do passing a stick and logistics have in common?

By John A. Gentle, DLP

THE FAILURE OF OUR U.S. track relay teams in August at the Olympics is a great example of how superior athletes can fail to deliver world class results. They lacked leadership, were taught or self-taught poor/or different forms (processes), and they didn't practice nearly enough—they tried it a few times and thought they had it down.

Well, they had it down alright. The men dropped the baton on the second leg. The American women, seeing the men drop the baton, pledged not to do the same thing, but in the end and in the lead they failed to hand off the baton on the last leg. Not only was I distraught, but it took my wife several minutes to calm the dog down as I stomped around the house uttering various expletives.

How could this happen? When I ran track in high school we practiced relay handoffs over and over and over again. I can still remember the drills today: hand position down, not up, slap it up and in, and, of course, timing, timing, timing. What happened in Beijing was amazing and sad at the same time. How could this happen on the world stage? How could these talented runners fail to make a simple hand-off? Well, it happens every day, and it's happening in logistics and transportation all over the world as you read this column.

When I see this type of problem, it's a strong indication that management has assembled talented "individuals" who are only interested in themselves and can't even spell the word "teamwork." It indicates that this group does not understand what needs to happen; they aren't passionate about preventing failure; they're impatient and interested in the short term and low hanging fruit; and they do not understand that productivity and superior service only come from consistently effective, efficient, and exceptional performance.

If your logistics/transportation group is made up of self-centered individuals who are allowed to operate in a loosely defined or inconsistent process

and rely on heroics to win, then you and your team will soon be disqualified by your strong business partners.

Have you done your due diligence and contingency planning? When is the last time you audited your processes or asked your business partners if they have an ISO certification, or at least can show you their process audits/measurements? How close are you and your partners away from dropping the baton on the world stage and not only embarrassing yourselves but putting your company and customers at risk?

Shippers and 3PLs need to begin measuring themselves against the "Perfect Shipment" if they want to identify opportunities for improving their productivity. While there are a lot of elements

Dropping the baton in the world of transportation and logistics can not only disqualify your players and your company but it places your customers and suppliers at risk.

that could be measured, many shippers don't track and record all of the process tasks. Nevertheless, a good start would be to measure the compound percent-

age of the following elements for all shipments for a month:

- Tender data sent/accepted by shipper's first choice carrier without date and time changes.
- Tender was sent completely—no calls from carriers seeking additional information.
- Shipment was not turned back after it was initially accepted by the carrier.
- Shipment was picked up on correct date/time.
- Shipment was delivered on correct date/time.
- 3PL/carrier received payment for shipment on date specified in contract.
- 3PL/carrier was paid correctly the first time—no balance dues.

If we assume that every element was done correctly 97 percent of the time, then the compound performance percentage for the seven elements is barely over 80 percent. That's not very good. At 95 percent it's not even 70 percent.

Determine where the biggest challenge is for you and your carriers and begin chipping away at it today. No one wants to work with companies that cost them time and money; and on November 4th vote for a team that you believe can consistently deliver effective, efficient, and exceptional performance for America! ■

John A. Gentle is president of John A. Gentle & Associates, LLC, a logistics consulting firm specializing in contract/relationship management and regulatory compliance for shippers, carriers, brokers, and distribution centers. A recipient of several industry awards, he has more than 35 years of experience in transportation and logistics management. He can be reached at jag@RelaTranShips.com.