

Preface



Thanks for choosing this book.

We originally set out to write a book on the basic procedures of logistics, thinking we would break down the elements of good warehouse management into its most simple parts. There's value in creating a one-two-three step method of running distribution centers. We even talked about naming it after one of those “Dummy” books you see covering every subject known to humankind. But the more we spoke about our new book, the more we realized how the differences between an average logistics network and a great one were ...

... well, what exactly were they? How do you name them? We knew what we were talking about, quite clearly, when we discussed the techniques and nuances used to bring DCs into the *great* category. Yet there came a point when we realized we really spoke about many immeasurable things. The clues to this larger issue resided in the very words we used to describe the processes; we found ourselves using a lot of very non-mathematical terms — gut-feel, art form, intuitive, make it rock and roll, get the workers super-charged, set audacious goals, feels right, etc.

So we scrapped the original idea. Junked it. Our predecessors among the ranks of logistics authors wrote numerous books on the solid mechanics of distribution center and supply chain management, and indeed our publisher issued some of the best ones. Instead we decided to see if we could describe and define what exactly the best managers do to bring their DCs into a state of greatness. Hence *Zen* — “enlightenment ... by breaking through the boundaries of mundane, logical thought.” Writing this book presented a challenge, no doubt, but it also provided a lot of fun. We know we reside in a mathematical industry, with all the industrial engineers, warehouse management systems, rack alignment, and bin sizing, so it wasn't easy writing explanations of the ephemeral techniques and theories in a manner that's acceptable to our peers. It's a tough assignment, but as daunting as the task appeared, we thought we held some chips on our side of the logistics poker table.

When we totaled up our work experience, we realized we possessed over sixty years of knowledge between the two of us, and logistics is a life-long passion of ours. Between us we have served

as second shift corn curl maker, box car potato unloader, straight truck driver, supervisor, manager, superintendent, DC manager, director of distribution, director of logistics services, consultant, network director, vice president, and, most importantly, as key people responsible for performance improvement or trouble-shooting for distribution centers in major difficulty. In these roles we have served nonprofit and privately or publicly held commercial organizations, union and non-union, mid-markets and large, in all parts of the United States. We certainly haven't seen it all, but we've seen and learned from a large slice of the warehouse pie, so to speak.

Did we say most importantly we served as trouble-shooters? Well, we screwed up. *Most importantly* we both, as young guys, started out on the warehouse floor and worked our way up over the years. These experiences gave us firsthand views of all the different levels of a logistics organization, from janitorial right on up to the board of directors. We saw what a well-tuned organization could do. This ground-up experience also left us with a sense of how the average hourly worker feels. Perhaps this is a tad more important than the trouble-shooter assignments — the times we were in charge of the captain's bridge while the Titanic floundered, even though both of us always managed to save our endangered ships. Of course there were plenty of times when we thought the ship was going to sink with us on board.

The point is: intimate knowledge about all levels of logistics enabled our best solutions. And while many of our examples and illustrations are couched in a context of multi-location distribution operations, most are also entirely applicable to smaller network facilities, or to single site operations. We'll cover the devices and techniques we used during our trouble-shooting assignments, but when we thought over the common denominators of greatness, it was the working knowledge of the various stages of distribution that kept popping up as the keystones of great performance. Within these gems we found again and again how the greatest managers dominate their field by relying on a few clear and simple guidelines.

And those guidelines are what this book is really all about. We've identified 20 key Zen concepts that will enable you to master the art and science of warehouse management and turn your DC into a world-class operation.

Throughout the book, you'll notice several boxes of text. These are many of the little tricks we've picked up over the sixty-odd years of our experience. We hope you'll be able to use a few of them or, better, they might trigger ideas for your own network. Over the years, we've used all of these ideas, and most of them are still in place in the DCs we've touched.

Before we get started, we'd like to ask you to forgive what may seem at times to be our glibness in discussing serious matters. But there are already a number of scientific, mathematical (and somewhat dry) books about warehouse management and logistics available. Our "Zen" approach doesn't rely on the equations and detailed step-by-step processes that these books discuss, and we wanted the style of this book to reflect that difference. Also, we apologize for our use of the regal *we* throughout this text, but early in the writing of this tome it became clear we could save a lot of time by saying we rather than writing "Kelley did this" or "Hounsell did that."

And now, to kick things off, let's introduce the first Zen principle: **When considering the whole logistics field, one could say it's simply about Space and People.**