



Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

September 2009

Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse or DC

Strong leadership is key to successful WMS implementations

According to Frank Camean, president and CEO of 4SIGHT Supply Chain Group, a successful WMS implementation comes down to one thing: strong leadership. If you can find the right person to spearhead your WMS implementation, you can ensure its success. But get the wrong person in place, and it could end up costing you in the long run.

What should you look for in a WMS project leader? Whether you're looking internally in your DC or hiring an outside consultant to run the implementation, there are a few qualities you need a good project leader to possess, including:

- **Leadership ability.** First and foremost, Camean advises you find someone who demonstrates good leadership abilities. That means someone who has experience leading others and who can drive the project toward its completion. "The project manager needs to drive the vendors, the clients, third-party integrators, and project personnel to hold everyone accountable to the project tasks," Camean says. "If he is experienced and has leadership ability, he is in a much better position to set realistic expectations for the project."

- **Experience in supply chain implementation.** Camean says it's not enough to bring on a project manager who has experience or certification in popular project management software packages like Microsoft Project. It's better to bring in someone who has at least five to seven years of experience in actual supply chain implementations. "You want somebody who has lived and breathed implementations before," he says. "Once he's spent those years implementing

WMS solutions, he's experienced some of the pains, he's seen what has been successful. People get polished over the years." You can always teach someone Microsoft Project or hire an assistant to take care of those details, he adds, but you can't teach him how to live through an implementation.

- **Communication skills.** A good project leader must be able to communicate with a number of different stakeholders on the project team, therefore it is imperative that person has good communication skills, says Jeff Cook, senior vice president with Trans Tech Consulting. The project leader must know how to communicate well with all team members to ensure there aren't any communication breakdowns. Ideally, the leader will hold biweekly meetings with the team and communicate via telephone and email in between meetings.

- **Neutrality.** While representatives from a WMS vendor can be a valuable part of the implementation team, there is a danger in letting someone from the vendor lead the project, Cook says. You need to have someone who can truly prepare your team to run the new system, and they have to get buy-in from all team members before that can happen. A representative from the vendor might be more likely to make decisions to benefit the vendor rather than doing what's in the best interest of your DC.

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