Ready for a successful career in supply chain and logistics? Here’s the only handbook you’ll need to get the best possible education, navigate your career choices, and prepare yourself for long-term success in a growing industry.

So, you’ve decided to explore a career in supply chain and logistics – that’s great news! Maybe you read about something called “supply chain” in your college course catalogue, or perhaps you know someone who is already working in the field. You could have just stumbled on the opportunity while researching online, or maybe you’ve always known you wanted to work in supply chain and logistics.

It doesn’t matter what path got you here; what does matter is that you’re exploring a career opportunity that’s growing by leaps and bounds. With global supply chains becoming more complicated and interconnected, companies need skilled workers, managers, and leaders to orchestrate them. Now is the perfect time for college students, job seekers, and career-changers to explore their options in this growing field.

In this career guide, you’ll learn exactly what supply chain and logistics professionals do, what job titles they hold, and what industries they work in. You’ll learn how to break into the field and start your career, and hear how working with a recruiter can help accelerate the job search process. Our ultimate goal is to help you learn something new, build confidence, and find a fulfilling career that fits your skills and future aspirations.
Part I: What is Supply Chain and Logistics?
Supply Chain and Logistics: An Overview

Incorporating all of the planning and management needed to get a product from the raw material stage to delivery to the end user, supply chain management encompasses supply and demand management within (and across) companies, according to the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP).

For their part, supply chain managers coordinate and collaborate with suppliers, intermediaries, third-party service providers, and customers. Logistics managers plan, implement, and control the efficient storage of goods, services, and related information between the point of origin and the point of consumption in order to meet customers’ requirements, as defined by CSCMP.

Typical logistics activities include:

- Inbound and outbound transportation management
- Fleet management
- Warehousing
- Materials handling
- Order fulfillment
- Logistics network design
- Inventory management
- Supply/demand planning
- Management of third-party logistics services providers (3PLs)

The definition of logistics doesn’t end there. The field also includes:

- Sourcing and procurement
- Production planning and scheduling
- Packaging and assembly
- Customer service

Because supply chain and logistics encompasses such a wide swath of skill sets and responsibilities, the field presents an interesting number of prospects for job seekers looking to leverage these opportunities.

Blockchain: Creating the Supply Chain of the Future

As the distributed database that holds records of digital data or events in a way that makes them tamper-resistant, blockchain has risen to the top in supply chain circles.

Here’s why blockchain is so important to supply chain:

- Every time a product moves within the supply chain, those moves are documented, thus producing a permanent “history” of the end-to-end journey.
- Supply chain partners can access, review, and add to the data, but they can’t alter that data.
- This makes blockchain an indisputable ledger that all companies can work from in a confident, secure manner.
- To sum it up, blockchain makes it easier for companies to collaborate and trade across borders and via the Internet.

As the world’s supply chains become even more complex and more intertwined, advanced technologies like blockchain will continue to rise to prominence. For example, diamond mining firm De Beers Group uses blockchain technology to track stones from the point they are mined and then right up to the point when they are sold to consumers. This ensures the company avoids “conflict” or “blood diamonds” and shows consumers that they are buying the genuine article.

De Beers Group isn’t alone. Many other companies are exploring blockchain technology and using it to develop more secure, visible supply chains. Because of this, you’ll want to make sure that you are up to speed on its use and relevance in supply chain and logistics. Ignore this step and you could find yourself behind the curve when it comes to new career opportunities and moves up the corporate ladder.
Managing the Entire Product Lifecycle

In categorizing supply chain managers and logistics professionals, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) uses “logistician” as the common job title. Working in nearly every industry, logisticians analyze and coordinate an organization’s supply chain—the system that moves a product from supplier to consumer. They manage the entire life cycle of a product, which includes how a product is acquired, allocated, and delivered.

According to the BLS, employment of logisticians was projected to grow 7 percent from 2016 to 2026, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Employment growth will be driven by the need for logistics in the transportation of goods in a global economy.3

Supply Chain Opportunities by the Numbers

- Almost 10% of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), or $1.3 trillion dollars, is spent on supply chain management every year.
- According to Gartner, the average starting salary grew from $53,584 to $55,749 between 2015 and 2016, or a 4% increase.
- As of 2017, the median annual pay for a logistician in the United States was $74,590, or $35.86 per hour.
- There were 148,700 logistician jobs in 2016, and 10,300 new jobs will be produced between 2016 and 2026.
- The lowest 10 percent earned less than $44,820, and the highest 10 percent earned more than $120,120.
- In May 2017, the median annual wages for logisticians in the top industries in which they worked were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Median Annual Pay</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Federal government</td>
<td>$84,200</td>
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<td>Professional, scientific, and</td>
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<td>enterprises</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale trade</td>
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Part II: Getting Started
Breaking into Supply Chain

This is an exciting time to be exploring careers in supply chain and logistics. As you've already read in the first section of this guide, the world is literally your oyster right now. That's because the responsibilities of supply chain and logistics roles are evolving from simply shipping packages from point A to point B to more complex skills such as operations research, supply chain engineering, statistical process control, data analysis, and simulation. Even emotional intelligence — the ability to deal with emotions and handle interpersonal relationships — is seen as an important skill. According to Logistics Bureau, the skills and knowledge that job candidates need to succeed in different supply chain roles and industries include:

- Knowledge of logistics, supply chain management, and transportation
- Financial planning
- Forecasting
- Workflow optimization
- General management and business
- International business practices
- Knowledge of laws and regulations
- Mechanical skills
- Languages

Watch out for new positions and skills arriving in supply chain, Logistics Bureau points out. “As in other domains, data analysis and business intelligence requirements and opportunities are now on the rise,” the organization advises.

“Some positions may require high-level data analyst or data scientist skills. For others, you may be able to differentiate yourself positively by showing strong spreadsheet skills or experience using a commercial business intelligence software application elsewhere.”

College students that select a major that aligns with the specific supply chain that he or she is interested in can better position themselves for success. As more and more universities, colleges, and vocational programs incorporate supply chain into their curriculums, these educational opportunities are increasing exponentially.

If you’re picking a major or program of study, your choices include (but aren’t limited to):

- Associates in Logistics/Supply Chain Management Programs:
  An associate's degree program in logistics prepares students for entry-level careers in purchasing, inventory control, distribution, and more. Coursework provides students with a solid foundation in the various sectors of the logistics field.

- Bachelors in Logistics/Supply Chain Management Programs:
  A bachelor's degree program in logistics/supply chain management focuses on areas of global supply chain management, transportation, logistics, warehouse operations, demand planning and forecasting, inventory management, and manufacturing and procurement processes.

- Bachelors in Operations Management Programs:
  A bachelor's degree program in operations management provides students with the tools needed for success as a manager, including organization, motivation and hiring skills, as well as resource development.

- Masters in Logistics/Supply Chain Management Programs:
  A master's degree program in logistics and supply chain management prepares students for management positions in government, military, and the private sector.

Certifications, Special Requirements, and Specialized Courses

If you've already graduated from college and/or if you're already working in supply chain and looking for a new job, then you'll want to consider one (or more) of the supply chain certificate and certification courses available to you. Here are your choices:

- APICS Certified Supply Chain Professional (CSCP):
  Helps you demonstrate your knowledge and organizational skills for developing more streamlined operations.

- APICS Certified in Production and Inventory Management (CPIM):
  The premier certification for internal supply chain business operations.
• **APICS Supply Chain Operations Reference (SCOR-P) Endorsement:**
The Supply Chain Operations Reference (SCOR) model is a supply chain framework that links business processes, performance metrics, practices, and people skills into a unified structure.

• **ISM Certified Professional in Supply Management (CPSM):**
Recognized globally as a standard of excellence for professionals in procurement, supply management, and supply chain management.

• **ISM Certified Professional in Supplier Diversity (CPSD):**
Positions you as the expert organizations need to guide them toward intelligent and profitable supplier diversity decisions.

• **SCPro Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP):**
A three-tiered program that assesses progressive knowledge and skills across integrated supply chain activities.

• **SOLE Certified Professional Logistian (CPL):**
Awarded to individuals of proven competence in logistics who pass an examination designed to test their broad knowledge of the entire logistics spectrum.

• **NCMA Certified Professional Contract Manager (CPCM):**
Contract professionals who have mastered the majority of the contract management competencies in the Contract Management Body of Knowledge (CMBOK), extensive business education and training, and a minimum of 5 years of experience can apply for the CPCM certification.

Available online and offline (or both), professional certification courses are a great way for individuals to advance their careers without having to attend a full-time degree program. They can help a veteran supply chain professional get up to speed on emerging concepts like blockchain, help a new entrant gain knowledge in a specific operational area, and give any candidate an edge in the job hunt process.

### Making the Successful Transition to Supply Chain

When Teddy Lee Knox of Zipline Logistics made the switch from marketing/sales to supply chain, she says she fell into supply chain while working in sales at her current company. "I went into a marketing career after college and I didn’t love it as much as I thought I would,” Knox told Industry Insights. “I liked working with people so I thought I should try sales. That’s when she saw an opportunity to work at Zipline Logistics.”

Fortunately, her new employer had a good training program so she was able to learn about logistics along the way. Then, she wound up working on the operation side of Zipline’s business. When asked to discuss how education and a strong professional support system helped her overcome the learning curve, Knox says her new employer helped her make the switch from sales to logistics.

“...My skill set allowed me to thrive on the logistics aspects of my sales job such as retaining and growing my clients,” Knox told Industry Insights. “My company noticed these skill sets in me and they were eager to help me make that move towards a logistics role through their in-house training program.”

### Supply Chain Internships (and How to Get One)

If you’re trying to decide whether a supply chain career is right for you, you might be wondering the best way to research different positions. For many, the most logical way to do that is by signing up for an internship. Here, Inbound Logistics outlines five top tips for landing an internship and leveraging it to your advantage:

1. Be focused and realistic, and don’t be afraid to ask for help.
2. Develop a plan that aligns with your personal strengths and professional goals.
3. Take the initiative. No one cares more about your career than you do.
4. Don’t get frustrated, never give up, work hard.
5. Supply chain jobs are not limited to one industry, so stretch your search parameters.8

Internships help you transfer the knowledge you learned in the classroom out into the workforce. They also help you gain experience and increase your marketability as a job candidate. Finally, internships can give you the soft skills (i.e., communication, problem-solving, leadership, etc.) you’ll need in today’s professional workplace.
How long have you been in your current role?
14 months, 3.5 years in the industry

What prompted you to choose a career in your industry?
My college professor taught a global supply chain management elective. From his instructional method and personal experience, I thought a career in this industry would be a great fit.

What obstacles, if any, have you had to overcome to get to where you are today?
I’ve had to lose my rigid career path and be open to change. By doing so, I’ve learned more in my career than when I gave myself a rigid path of things that I needed to accomplish.

What’s one thing that candidates should expect pursuing a career in this field?
Constant change. Supply chain’s are evolving and candidates must be able to adapt to these changes. Individuals must also become change agents in their positions.

What’s one thing that has surprised you in your career?
People are truly willing to help. All you have to do is seek out the help you need.

What did your career path look like starting out?
How has it changed?
Starting out I worked for a major technology company in their supply chain operations organization. I dealt with everything from procurement of goods, supplier management and consolidation, inventory analysis and metric review. I am currently undertaking international supply chain creation for a produce company. It’s a bit different from my previous experience; there are more laws dealing with food safety and compliance to factor in when constructing a supply chain.

What personality traits and/or characteristics do you believe are essential for success in this field?
Someone who can manage ambiguity, is detail oriented and has great critical thinking skills.

How should candidates know which certifications, if any, to pursue?
Candidates should decide where in the supply chain they want to work and find a certification that will enable them to achieve that goal.

What advice do you have for young professionals looking to pursue a career in your field?
Find a mentor! I wouldn’t be where I am in my career without the mentors I sought out. I find that people, in the field of supply chain, are very happy to mentor young professionals starting out. This can be a great asset to have as you look to build your skill set and network through the industry.
How long have you been in your current role?
2.5 years

What prompted you to choose a career in your industry?
I was fortunate to fall into a career in supply chain. Post college, after living overseas, I wanted an opportunity to work with people from diverse backgrounds, to solve challenging problems and to continue learning and growing. I started as an inventory analyst and quickly learned the supply chain world is expansive and no two days are ever alike!

What obstacles, if any, have you had to overcome to get to where you are today?
Early in my career I was a demand planner. I desperately wanted the opportunity to be a supply chain manager, leading initiatives at a major consumer packaged goods company. I was told that I did not have the necessary qualifications – time spent working in a manufacturing plant and an industrial engineering background. Rather than take no for an answer, I partnered with a trusted mentor and gained senior leadership alignment to do a six month stretch assignment leading a major supply chain project, while still 100 percent covering my core role. That opportunity allowed me to highlight my skills and a year later, when a supply chain manager role came open, I was promoted with no questions around my qualifications. Bottom line: You may need to be creative in how you expand and highlight your skill set, but if you work hard and deliver results, the opportunities are great.

What’s one thing that candidates should expect pursuing a career in this field?
One quality I consider critical for success in supply chain is being resilient and adaptable. Despite best laid plans, unexpected challenges and detours will always pop up. Being adaptable and able to recover despite the unexpected is critical for success.

What’s one thing that has surprised you in your career?
Relationships matter. While you don’t have to know all the answers, knowing the right people to pull in at the right time will accelerate the success of your team and delivery of results.

What did your career path look like starting out? How has it changed?
I started as an individual contributor in the CPG world (inventory analyst, demand planner) and then moved into early supply chain leadership roles (capacity manager, strategy manager, senior manager logistics, distribution senior manager operations.) I’ve been fortunate to grow in roles up and down the supply chain – from developing new products to getting them to the store. I could not have planned this path if I’d tried – rather, the key was being curious, open to new challenges, results focused and willing to ask for what I needed to be successful.

What personality traits and/or characteristics do you believe are essential for success in this field?
Strong critical thinking, proactive planning and the ability to manage multiple competing demands are foundational for success in supply chain. Layer in the ability to collaborate well and build strong networks, be agile in your thinking and be curious, continually seek to learn and understand. Finally, be resilient and adaptable to change. Professionals with strengths in these areas traditionally do well in supply chain.

How should candidates know which certifications, if any, to pursue?
Organizations such as APICs and CSCMP have been instrumental in my career. Early on, these organizations provided me education on basic supply chain topics. Over time, the networks developed allowed me to find partners with new capabilities, identify talent to hire for my team and provide my direct reports with educational opportunities. Definitely get involved early.

What advice do you have for young professionals looking to pursue a career in your field?
The best person to drive where your career takes you is you. You will have various partners along the way (managers, mentors, peers, direct reports, etc.) but ultimately, you are the captain of your career path journey. After mastering your current role and delivering exceptional results, continue to learn and expand your scope as much as possible (while continuing to deliver strong results).

Any additional comments you’d like to provide us.
A career in supply chain is more than a series of jobs. For those with an appetite for challenges and the curiosity to continually learn, it is like a “choose your own adventure.” There are countless potential paths to keep you learning and growing. Additionally, the impact you have as part of the supply chain community is global. Supply chains are foundational for keeping the global economy humming.
Part III:
Your Supply Chain Career
What Kind of Job Will I Be Doing?

As the world’s supply chains have evolved, so too has the role of the supply chain professional. Where in the past a new job candidate may have been a warehouse manager, transportation manager, or logistics manager, the job titles have since expanded. Here’s a laundry list of career opportunities (and their job duties) that are now categorized under supply chain management:

**Entry-Level**

**Inventory Clerk**
- Maintains a record of materials that are stored in a warehouse or distribution center
- Receives and counts items as they are placed into the firm’s inventory
- Compares item quantities that are physically present in the warehouse to that facility’s inventory records
- Labels the stock using radio frequency identification (RFID) tags, paper tags, or other type of labeling equipment

**Production Clerk**
- Helps company stick to production schedule by organizing and expediting the workflow
- Develops and shares production schedules
- Develops and distributes work orders to their respective departments
- Expedites the delivery or distribution of supplies in order to speed up the material flow

**Supply Chain & Logistics (SCL) Coordinator**
- Coordinates the order flow of all domestic and international shipments
- Utilizes the company’s warehouse management system (WMS) to oversee the movement and storage of goods in the facility
- Oversees the staging, scheduling, and documentation of all imported and exported goods
- Develops strong lines of communication with carriers, brokers, and freight forwarders

**Supply Chain & Logistics (SCL) Customer Service Rep**
- Handles inbound customer service calls and emails
- Helps customer solve their logistics, shipping, and fulfillment issues
- Serves as the “front line” between the company and its valued customers
- Uses a variety of computer programs including Microsoft Office and Excel, as well as online communication tools like chatrooms
Mid-Level

Import/Export Specialist
- Facilitates cross-border shipments
- Ensures that shipments adhere to customs regulations.
- Tracks and documents shipments
- Counsels companies on issues like tariffs, insurance, and quotas

Logistics Analyst
- Analyzes supply chain processes
- Identifies areas ripe for optimization and improvement
- Gathers, organizes, and shares logistics information
- Examines transportation costs and finds areas where they can be cut

Supply Chain and Logistics (SCL) Sourcing Specialist
- Facilitates an efficient product and service sourcing process for the organization
- Advises and consults with the company and works with upper-level staff members to develop efficient supply chain sourcing strategies
- Builds relationship with suppliers
- Negotiates costs and develops contracts/agreements that ultimately help their companies be more profitable and successful

Supply Chain and Logistics (SCL) Transportation Specialist
- Leads operations for organizations that provide transportation services
- Heads up strategic transportation initiatives for retail or wholesale fulfillment operations
- Selects carriers, transportation routes, and other key aspects of getting shipments from the warehouse dock door out to the customers’ locations
- Negotiates rates and terms with transportation providers (trucks, ocean carriers, and air freight providers)

Upper-Level

Purchasing Agent or Buyer
- Researches, evaluates and buys products
- Procure goods to either use in their firm’s everyday operations to sell to customers
- Does the legwork and research needed to be able to cost-effectively buy large quantities of products needed to fulfill the firm’s business model
- Creates purchase orders and negotiates price points

Distribution Manager
- Directly oversees the company’s storage and/or distribution operations
- Recruits and trains warehouse personnel
- Develops warehouse safety policies and procedures
- Enables the smooth flow of goods within the facility (from receipt of goods until the product leaves the facility)

Operations Manager
- Manages the overall operations for private or public companies
- Coordinates production, sales, and distribution
- Measures operational productivity
- Identifies potential cost reductions

Supply Chain Manager
- Procures parts and raw materials needed to produce the company’s goods
- Evaluates suppliers and negotiates contracts with vendors
- Controls inventory levels for cost effectiveness
- Negotiates shipping prices and transportation arrangements with contracted providers
Industries that Employ Supply Chain Professionals

If you’re wondering which industries are hiring supply chain and logistics professionals right now, the answer is “nearly all of them.” Whether you want to provide blockchain expertise to a healthcare organization, streamline an e-commerce company’s end-to-end supply chain, or help an oil and gas firm create a more environmentally-sustainable business approach, you have plenty of options in front of you.

And, thanks to advancements in digital technology and an increased focus on supply chain risk and globalization, supply chains are expanding in scope and the need for top talent has increased with it. With big data driving insights, many companies are seeking analysts with mathematical and data driven backgrounds to determine how to best use data to predict trends.9

This all points to even more opportunity for new and existing supply chain and logistics professionals who are exploring their career options.

Negotiating Your Salary

Congratulations—you got a job offer! You made a great impact, had a successful interview, worked with a recruiter, or used another strategy to make it over the finish line. Now it’s time to negotiate your salary. Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

• Don’t rush in too soon. Make sure you understand all the details of the job offer.

• Understand your worth, based on your experience level, the organization’s size and budget, and your geographical location.

• Find out how much the job itself is worth. By researching related salaries, for example, you can be prepared to state your case and get a reasonable offer.

• Don’t just focus on salary alone. Be sure to factor in benefits too. A good health plan, for example, may be more valuable to you than a few thousand dollars in salary.

• When you sit down to negotiate, convey the value you’ll bring to the organization (versus talking about how much money you “need”).

• Ask for the offer summary in writing (including any revisions you may discuss on the phone or in person).

Remember that during the negotiation process your goal is to get paid appropriately for your experience and skills, while your employer will likely want to pay the lowest possible salary for the highest-value employee. You’ll have to meet somewhere in the middle, so put your best foot forward during this back-and-forth process and you’ll come out a winner.
Part IV:

Working with a Recruiter
From Start to Finish, We’re Your Partner

Also known as “headhunters,” recruiters can be your best friends in your job search. Not only do they have a finger on the pulse of the industry, but they know what types of candidates hiring companies are looking for. They also know what it takes to get noticed in today’s cluttered job market. These are all important advantages for supply chain and logistics professionals who are looking for the next great opportunity.

Here at Ajilon, we know that finding the right job is a lot of work for one person. So, it’s a huge advantage to have someone to support you and provide job resources through the process. We’ll take on many different roles to give you the edge you need.

For example, we’ll serve as:

• Your coach: Work with us to prepare for every step, from your resume to your interviewing skills.
• Your advocate: Get someone to vouch for you. To root for you. And to pitch you and your skills to top companies.
• Your ticket in: Want to work for a leading company? We can put you in front of the ones that need people like you.

We understand that even during times of historically-low unemployment rates, finding the right supply chain job is a process. But you don’t have to do it alone. We’ll work closely with you at every step to find a position that fits you.

Our recruiting professionals can help you land a job that matches the skills, experience, and interests you have today, and start to build a relationship with you to make sure you achieve everything you want in your career.

You can also use our network to improve yours. You’ve heard people say, “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.” Well, it’s really a bit of both. You bring what you know to the table. We’ll help with the “who” part. We know a lot of people at some great companies and professional associations. We can even get you access to resources and jobs before they’re ever posted.

Finally, it’s important that you know that this is a committed relationship. Even if you’re considering a temp assignment, Ajilon’s recruiting professionals will be there for you from start to finish. And “finish” happens whenever you want. Ideally, we’ll work with you for your entire career to make sure you always feel challenged, satisfied, and successful in your job.

No matter what role you’re looking for, a recruiter knows how to make you stand out. Here’s how simple the process is:

Tell us about you
Start by meeting with our recruiting professionals. Talk to them about what you can do and what you want to do, so they know what to look for in your next job.

Get ready to shine
Next, let’s make your resume stand out to hiring managers. Then, we’ll prep you for interviews so you’ll know how to dress and how to address tough questions.

Find the right fit
We’ll present you with jobs that fit your skills, goals, and personality. Ultimately, this is your choice, but we’ll give you the info you need to make the best decision.

Ready, set, get to work!
After you nail the interview and land the job, we’ll tell you what to expect on your first day and beyond. Any questions? You can always call us.

If you’re ready to take your supply chain and logistics job search to the next level and find the position of your dreams, contact us today to get started.
Sources


ABOUT AJILON

We are a leader in temporary and permanent recruitment and the placement of top talent. Our areas of specialty include organizational leadership and support positions in HR, non-clinical healthcare, office administration and more. With over 70 offices in North America, we have the resources and the technology to offer job seekers and employers greater flexibility, making it possible for us to work with them in the way that works best for them.

We seek to completely understand the short- and long-term goals of our clients and candidates — this enables us to consistently act in their best interests. Through our job market insight and niche industry expertise, we help job seekers and employers find their best fit.