

Thoughts From the APICS Convention

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It would be a tall task to explain in a few paragraphs everything someone could of experienced had they attended the APICS International Convention recently held in Kansas City. However I would like to say that if you've never been to APICS yearly gathering you should consider going, you would greatly enjoy it.

You get an opportunity to hear from people like Blake Mycoskie who is the CEO and founder of TOMS shoes. The term TOMS is actually short for "shoes of tomorrow" and what is taking the market by storm is this line of shoes that offer something unique. Buy one pair of shoes and TOMS will give a pair of shoes to a child in the third world who desperately needs it. Blake initially started this company as an afterthought but when people saw what could be accomplished in such a simple way the company began growing at an amazing rate. An unprotected foot will get cut up and have a pretty good chance of getting infected. Something simple like a set of shoes will save lives. If you need a pair of casual shoes in the near future you might consider a pair of TOMS.

One of the things that caught me by surprise was a presentation on fork truck free manufacturing operations. Most of us think fork trucks are absolutely necessary, turns out many companies are figuring out how to greatly reduce the number of fork trucks used in their operations. Replacing fork truck with other material handling equipment will save money and in some cases be more efficient and reduce labor costs. However that is not the driving issue. It seems that the more fork trucks removed from the floor, the fewer chances of workers being maimed or killed. Other equipment is not nearly as hazardous as our old friend the fork truck, I would have not known that had I not attended that lecture.

Sustainability is a concept that is growing in popularity throughout the manufacturing world. If you haven't heard about it you soon will. It's not about "saving the world" or avoiding global warming. It is about improving the bottom line. Green means a more competitive organization in the market place. John Replege CEO of Burt's Bees talked at great length about how they have greatly improve their financial position by simply applying the rules of sustainability. When companies find out how much they can save by simple changes in how they approach things they will be very interested.

One other experience that I got a lot out of is the interactive right brain/ left brain exercises. Our companies would really like us to think outside the box while we are developing processes and figuring out how to make our organizations more lean. But how is that ever going to happen unless we go to events like this that give us some experience at just those activities. It comes under the heading of you don't know what you just don't know. A convention is just the place to get the competitive edge.

The conference was built around a host of learning paths. You had the option of following any of the following subject disciplines: Global Supply Chain, Enterprise

Systems, Principles of Operations management, Sustainability/Green, Demand Management/Forecasting/S&OP, Lean, Inventory/Distribution/Auto-ID/Warehousing or Professional Advancement. You can stay in your path or jump from path to path, your choice.

The lunches and other various meals are supplied by APICS at no cost to you. It is surprising how meals serving thousands of people can be handled so smoothly. It's much easier than heading off the Mc'Donalds and you don't have to worry about finding a parking space for your car when you get back.

There are lots of events to spend time with people around the country or even from around the world. If you are a little shy like I am you find it surprisingly easy to strike up a conversation with a person who you didn't know. You won't have to do that exercise to many times before you will be an old pro at it. The easy ice-breaker is the same line we used to use in the Navy many years ago. "So, where are you from?" It's no more difficult than that.

I have been to the international convention twice and it would be great if the next time I go (whenever that is) that I could run into lots of other APICS people from Tucson. But in order for that to happen you and I need to sell the value of this experience to our companies. There are just so many things you can learn at an event like this that you won't get in just about any other format. So start working the issue now and sometime in the not to distant future I will see you there.