

Transcription of Interview with Dr. Donald J. Bowersox

STOCK: Good morning. My name is James Stock, the Frank Harvey Endowed Professor of Marketing at the University of South Florida. We are here today to conduct an interview with one of the luminaries in the academic discipline of Logistics and Supply chain management. The purposes of this interview are several. First and perhaps foremost is to get to know the personal side of one of the leading Logistics and Supply chain academics; a person who has had significant influence on their profession. We often read the person's books and journal articles, listen to their presentations at academic and/or professional meetings, and sometimes even have individual discussions with them at various events and venues. However, we rarely get to "know" the person beyond the professional aspects of their careers.

In the field of literature and art, for example, researchers often consider the "what, why, how, who, and when" of a particular book or painting, short story, poem and so on. They speculate on what might have motivated the writer or the artist to write the book or paint the painting, to determine the message or the story of the text or art, and the writer's or artist's perception of the contributions of their work. In the same way, through this and other interviews that will be conducted of leading business scholars, as Paul Harvey so often has expressed, we will attempt to get "the rest of the story!"

These videotaped interviews will hopefully serve as supporting material for various university courses where the works of these academicians may be discussed. They will be of significant impact in courses where history and theory are being examined, since these individuals contributed extensively to the history and theory.

Each interview is based on set of structured questions using an interview guide. Of course, the interviewee's responses are spontaneous and they may lead into other questions related to those responses. However, the general format for this and other interviews that will be conducted in the future will be similar.

It is hoped that audiences who view these interviews will get a broader and richer view of the people and events that have shaped their disciplines. We hope that you learn from what will be said and discussed during these interviews and be able to more fully appreciate and understand the significant contributions made by these luminaries in the field.

Let's begin by introducing our distinguished guest.

STOCK: Dr. Donald J. Bowersox is presently Distinguished University Professor and Dean Emeritus at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, although he now resides in retirement in Lady Lake, Florida. He graduated from Michigan State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Pre-Law and Divisional Social Science, and obtained a Masters of Arts in Business Administration, also from Michigan State University. He completed the “trifecta” when he obtained his Ph.D. in 1960 also from MSU, where he majored in Marketing and minored in Transportation, Economics and Management. His dissertation topic was titled “Evaluation of Alternative Solutions to the Food Distribution Center Location Problem.” Prior to assuming his academic career, Don was a pilot holding the rank of Captain in the United States Air Force. He was the Director of New Business Development for the Railway Express Agency and a Vice President and General Manager with the E. F. McDonald Company prior to assuming his first academic position as Associate Professor at MSU in 1967. He was promoted to Professor during his tenure there. All together, Don served at MSU for 40 years.

While at Michigan State, Don held various positions academically and administratively. He held the position of Professor of Marketing and Logistics from 1969 to 1989. He became the first person to hold the John H. McConnell Chaired University Professor of Business Administration in 1989 and held that distinction until his retirement. He was Assistant Dean of the MSU Business School Executive Development Program from 1998 to 1999. He then assumed the position of Dean of the Eli Broad College of Business and the Eli Broad Graduate School of Management from 2000 to 2001. Upon retirement in 2006, Don was awarded the title of Distinguished University Professor and Dean Emeritus from MSU.

During his career, Don has received numerous awards for achievement, including the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals Distinguished Service Award for outstanding achievement in logistics and supply chain management. He was one of the founding members of CSCMP in 1963 and was its second President. He has received the Armitage Medal from SOLE—The International Society of Logistics, and numerous other awards and recognitions. He has served as a member of the Editorial Boards of the *Journal of Business Logistics*, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *The International Journal of Logistics*

Management, Supply Chain Management Review, and several others. He has published more than 250 articles and 17 books and book chapters that have appeared in almost every major marketing, logistics and supply chain academic and professional publication. He was co-author of the first college textbook on physical distribution, which influenced literally thousands of logistics students in the US and throughout the world.

Don has made significant contributions to MSU and was the recipient of the Broad School Alumni Lifetime Achievement Award in 2002. He developed and directed (since 1967) the MSU “Logistics Management Executive Development Seminar” that has been recognized as one of the world’s premier executive education programs in logistics and supply chain management. During his tenure in MSU, more than 60 programs were presented, impacting literally thousands of business executives in North America and around the world. Also significant is that Don has served as dissertation chairperson for 27 doctoral students, many of whom have become leading educators and researchers in the disciplines of marketing and logistics. Examples include David Closs, Tom Mentzer, Tom Speh, Pat Daugherty, Peter Gilmour, and several others.

Throughout his career, Don has been a giver to his university, his students, the countless businesses that have interfaced with MSU, and to scholars throughout the globe. It is our distinct pleasure to get to know the personal side of this man so that we can more fully appreciate his significant professional contributions and achievements.

Early Childhood

STOCK: And Don, it’s been interesting that all those we’ve interviewed, they think back and say wow, we were able to do that much and it’s amazing. The folks that we’ve talked to including yourself have been so productive for so long. And as indicative in the introduction, we are trying to get to know a little more about you beyond what we’ve seen in your professional

writings. So let's start when you were child the typical question, when and where were you born?

BOWERSOX: Wow, that's a long time ago Jim, I was born in 1932 on July 27th in Youngstown, Ohio. The dwindling years of the great depression.

STOCK: And was there anything in your childhood that was significant in shaping your present personality?

BOWERSOX: Well, I certainly think there were many things. As I think back on it there was sort of a driving spirit in our household that all the boys and girls were going to go to school. My parents didn't have that opportunity and they'd been through a serious time during the depression. They were really focused on education.

STOCK: Was there a personality trait that drove you to succeed or perhaps alternatively, impeded your progress?

BOWERSOX: Well there were a lot of days I thought my personality was impeding my progress. I was a stubborn little guy from what people tell me who wasn't the easiest to get along with all of the time. However, I remember myself always being in a great mood, in being cheerful, so I don't know if that stubborn has ended up being focused on goals and hanging on to get things finished. If there was a trait I would say that probably it was being focused.

STOCK: How would your parents, if we could talk to them now, describe you as a child? And why would they describe you that way?

BOWERSOX: I guess my mom would say I was cute; my father would laugh so I just feel I was a typical child with no particular traits that made me outstanding. I can't remember anything that impeded my behavior in anyway, so I guess typical would be the word I'd use.

STOCK: What did your parents do? What was your dad's profession and what did your mom do?

BOWERSOX: My dad was a typewriter repairman back in the days of the mechanical typewriter. The depression kind of changed his whole life. That's why we ended up moving from Youngstown to Lansing, Michigan. There is a little bit behind that story which I'm sure we are going to get to later. He never did get fully employed in a career again. After the depression he did various things like continue to repair typewriters but soon they became obsolete and he didn't have the knowledge or training to do electrical machines. He did a variety of things until age forced him to retire. My mother did sales work and she was very active in the democratic political party; she was a delegate to a couple of national conventions. The whole family seemed to be dedicated to Franklin D. Roosevelt's success that was the environment of the thirties.

STOCK: Don, do you have any specific memories from your childhood that you have not forgotten?

BOWERSOX: I thought about this question quite a bit. I believe the move to Lansing. My family had always lived, in Youngstown, Ohio, where my parents had met and where life had been good prior to the great depression. The move was rather traumatic. I remember I ended up going to kindergarten three times because of the move. That's probably what gave me a real heads-up on the academic world. What happened was one year I went because the kindergarten teacher babysat me, while my mother was working. The next year I went because they started school a year earlier in Ohio. The next year I went again because we were in Michigan where they start school a year later. I remember clearly I was probably the best kindergarten student around. I really had it mastered.

STOCK: That probably fits into one play, that everything I learn I learned it in kindergarten? You had it three times.

BOWERSOX: Probably does and I think I'm still using some of that material.

Grade School/High School

STOCK: Now, after you moved to Lansing tell us a little bit about your educational background in terms of secondary school education?

BOWERSOX: The move to Lansing I think is significant. Why Lansing? My father did get the chance to go back with Remington Rand after work picked up again for several years until the electrical typewriter more or less took over the landscape. He had a choice of three different locations to move to. We went to Lansing because there was a University there; it was all part of that drive for all of the children to get an education. The family selected Lansing based on that. That set the stage from day one. We were going to go to college and we were going to go to Michigan State and there was no other discussion in my family. Even to the point where later on I had an opportunity for a scholarship to another school and my father insisted I not take it because I was going to Michigan State. That was his plan. While he wasn't overly domineering in general, on that point he was uncompromising. I'm really proud of that because it turned out to be a good decision.

STOCK: So you went to junior high, middle school and high school in Lansing?

BOWERSOX: Yes.

STOCK: Did you have a favorite subject that you studied while you were in high school? And why was that your favorite subject?

BOWERSOX: I'm not sure I had a favorite subject but I did like history. History seemed to intrigue me because I had a couple of teachers who could really bring the subject to life and as such, I found it very interesting. However, I did standard college preparatory which consisted of four academics majors in our high school. But I think history was the one I've enjoyed the most.

STOCK: Did you play on any sports teams while you were in school?

BOWERSOX: Yea, I was the typical "going to be a star" in three sports. I ended up playing primarily baseball but I did play football and some basketball and run cross-country.

STOCK: And how about school clubs or other activities?

BOWERSOX: I was in a couple of different clubs. I remember in particular we had a club called “The Fur, Feather and Fin”. It was an outdoor sports club. We did hunting, fishing and canoe trips. It was a club I greatly enjoyed. I was also in a history club and probably in a few others for at least part of the time. I can’t remember them all.

STOCK: Did you participate in any kinds of student government activities while you were in School?

BOWERSOX: I did run for an office but I didn’t win. I was a campaign manager of a person who did win. I was involved in a little bit of student council. I was marginally involved.

STOCK: Was there a teacher or perhaps more than one that has a significant influence on you particularly on those high school years? And if so, who was that and what kind of influence did they have?

BOWERSOX: Yes, I had I think three teachers in the history area that I mentioned earlier. One, James Breslen, was a fabulous teacher. Another guy, John Young, was a very motivational person. He really stimulated us to want to go beyond. I had a teacher by the name of Milly Toogood who forced us in our senior year to write the identical paper we would be required to write during our freshmen year of college, footnotes and everything. I hated it then but I loved her a year later.

STOCK: How would you describe yourself, both academically and socially, as a high school student?

BOWERSOX: Far more social than academic. I would say that I was very active in high school socially. Academically I was average.

STOCK: Outside of school, there were any other kinds of activities that you were involved in?

BOWERSOX: I worked. I had a part time job most of the time I was in school. I worked in a drugstore and actually that’s where the potential scholarship came from to become a pharmacist. I was pretty convinced that that was the good road to take. My father felt it

was absolutely the wrong road to take. We had a few great debates over it but he prevailed and boy, am I thankful for that.

STOCK: Well, I'm sure you had been as successful in pharmacy as you were in the academic business.

BOWERSOX: I don't know, Jim I have trouble counting pills so I'm not so sure I would have.

STOCK: Did you receive any kinds of academic honors or sport honors while you were in school?

BOWERSOX: I won a letter for participating in baseball. I had no other outstanding awards.

STOCK: Now, an interested question in the year you were growing up, did you have any person that you idolized as a teen idol? Or was there a movie star or a business person or a politician and why?

BOWERSOX: Well, you know a big part of our lives was to go to Saturday football at Michigan State. During high school years their football program emerged and the University began to grow and so we had a few players on that team. I remember George Gerrie who was a small over-achiever once; an extremely good football player. I thought he was pretty special. I do not remember any other sports or business idols at the time. Ours was the decade before sports cards and we didn't really have the same attention as today on national sports. I really don't remember any other heroes.

STOCK: Is there anything that people would find surprising about you to find out now, something about you when you were a teenager? Something what they might not expect?

BOWERSOX: I guess they would be surprised to know that I was serious about becoming a pharmacist. People who know me now would probably feel it is the last profession they would cast me in. I also think most of the people I went to school with didn't think I would end up as a professor. I guess those people would be surprised. I was pretty much a guy that was on his way to Oldsmobile where most of the people from my class went and

became very successful. I remember in my freshmen year of college, the first semester we had to see an advisor from our high school to tell them about our college experience. I'll never forget meeting the assistant principal. He looked at me and he said: what are you doing here? And I found that very humbling and inflating at the same time. So I don't think people expected that I would go to become a PhD. I'm not sure they were surprised I went to college but maybe graduating did surprise them.

College (undergraduate and graduate)

STOCK: Now you mentioned interested college from your parents and you ultimately attended Michigan State University; how were you able to attend college? Was it through scholarships, working, did your parents provide the funds or some combination of all of those?

BOWERSOX: Following World War II was a better time for the family than the early years, but there really wasn't a lot of money to support people going to college. My older brother had gone first; he'd been in the military while he went to medical school. I had not gone to the military first, I was right between World War II and the Korean War. I started college after high school. I remember my parents being very enthusiastic. As I recall, they helped me each year for four years by giving me tuition for winter term. I remember it cost \$ 18.95 to take all the credits you wanted in a term. I'd worked during the summer after high school driving a truck, that was my introduction to logistics, and I continued to work all the way through school. I was able to meet college expenses. I lived at home for 2 years after that I lived on campus for one year and then I got engaged and moved back home for my final year. I only lived about 5 miles from the campus and you could hitchhike in the morning. I rode with the same people every morning. I didn't even have to put my thumb up. I would meet them at a certain time because they were going to work or school and I'd ride to campus. At the end of the day I would meet them at their car and ride to within a block of my house.

STOCK: So the one year that you were on campus was that at the dormitory?

BOWERSOX: No, I joined Sigma Chi fraternity and I lived in an apartment with a couple of other students about a block from the fraternity house.

STOCK: Were you as excited as about going to college as you parents were having you go?

BOWERSOX: I was afraid; I hadn't taken my high school work academically as serious as I should have. To me passing was good enough and so I had to take a battery of entrance examinations and fortunately I had a good balance of high school education consisting of four primary academic disciplines. I did quite well on the test and I was challenged; I worked hard. I remember the end of my first year of college, the only thing I didn't have a C in was phys-ed and ROTC. In those two topics I got an A and a B. Everything else was a C. By time I graduated I was on the dean's list several times.

STOCK: How do you think your college experience, those four years of college, prepared you to be an academic?

BOWERSOX: Until my senior year not at all. I was in pre-law and on my way to law school. I was trying to be sure I had the grades for admission. That allowed me to enroll in some advanced political science classes. Somewhere, seminars with four or five students of which two or three were graduate students. We really had an opportunity to share our viewpoints. Two graduate students were working on PhD's. That gave me the first feeling that there was a life that I could relate to on the campus. Only at that time it was a passing thing because my future was law school. I was fairly committed, that's why I was a Political Science and Social Science Major.

STOCK: So how did you get to that point to decide to go for a PhD as opposed to law school or pharmacy or anything else?

BOWERSOX: Well, pharmacy was long gone by then, as a matter of fact I hadn't worked in the drugstore for years. The idea of graduate school really occurred much later after my time in the military. While in the service I had some experiences that drove me back to the campus and then I had a couple of things happen on the campus that changed my orientation.

Military Experience

STOCK: How did it come about that you went into the military?

BOWERSOX: Well, the Korean War was going full while I was in school. All of us in the military were in ROTC. If our grades dropped below a 2.0 for any one term we would reenter the military draft. That kept you focused. ROTC led to a commission in the Air Force. I was in the pilot training program so it was a five year military commitment after four years of college before I could do anything else. It turned out I was only in the Air Force for about three and a half years. When I graduated I went to pilot training. While I was in the pilot training program, the Korean War ended and so it wasn't necessary for me to go to Korea at that point.

STOCK: Can you tell us a little bit about that military experience, what you did, where were you stationed; other activity related to that military time that you had?

BOWERSOX: We started in San Antonio, Texas. We were moved from there to Columbus, Mississippi, then to Mission Field, Texas, then to San Angelo, Texas and next to Panama City, Florida. I completed my aviation training as a pilot of single and multi-engine, piston and jet. At that point I went to a radar controller school because full time flying assignments were not available. I was assigned to Tacoma, Washington where I served my military time. I also was assigned for six months to the Rand Corporation in Santa Monica, California. Working at Rand turned out to be just quite an eye opening experience. For most of the time I was in the 25th Air Defense Command. We provided 24 hour a day radar surveillance of the Northwest and the Dew line up across Alaska during the height of the cold war. It wasn't combat duty but it was an unusual peace time. We were sitting on the edge of potential war all the time.

STOCK: What was the most difficult part of your military experience?

BOWERSOX: Well, I think the most difficult was the maturing part. After you finished pilot training you are a pilot. The Air Force awards the wings and then they assign you to

go fly. When you are in business training, you slowly work into things. There is no slow when you are pilot in command with an airplane full of people and you're ordered to go somewhere. It was a quick emergency into real responsibility. In the air radar command we had some fairly interested moments. We had unidentified airplanes in our zones and some of the decisions that had to be made. These were pretty big decision for 22 to 23 year old kids.

STOCK: What do you think you learnt most from having that military background that perhaps you carried on even to this day in terms how you approach your profession and life in general?

BOWERSOX: One thing is I learned was how to compete in a class in which they took literally the phrase: "Look at the person on your left and on your right because they probably are not going to be there if you finish". I think that statement may have originated in pilot training because it was true. It was rigorous training and you were expected to perform at 100 percent all of the time. The expectations were extremely high. It was very competitive, very maturing and probably a tremendous situation to develop leadership skills. It was a no excuse environment, either you performed or failed. It was a very useful period of my life.

STOCK: You mentioned earlier that your ultimately decision to go onto the academic arena had to do with both college as well as military experience. How did the military fit into that?

BOWERSOX: It was the assignment to the Rand Corporation. We had a technical advisor on our base from the Rand Corporation who was responsible for air defense training. Rand had a simulator that allowed us to create hypothetical attacks on the United States. That's my first experience with anything that dealt with computer generated activity. When the opportunity came to go to the Rand Corporation I was assigned as Air Force liaison to the group responsible for global training missions. I worked with a psychologist Dr. Jim Wickers. He talked to me about going to graduate school. His position was that the world really didn't need another lawyer. His passion was the academic world but it ran just off back. However, we had some rather rigorous simulation exercises that were much more that casual events. I learned about systems network theory working at the Rand Corporation. Systems integration was an emerging

science at that time, probably applied more to electrical engineering. Its potential applications in social science were pretty far out. There wasn't much written on it. We ran a lot of what appeared to be kind of crazy experiments. It was all part of building a database to use in simulation. It turned out to be one of those kinds of things where you wanted to go to work in the morning. The work was very exciting. It was a great six months.

STOCK: After your military experience and then the Rand experience while you were in there was that then what motivated you to go for your Masters degree?

BOWERSOX: This is how it materialized. Getting a Master's degree in business was suddenly becoming a very popular destination for people getting out of the military. The MBA was just emerging and one of my good friends was going to Stanford. I applied and was admitted to Stanford and was all set to go to when my wife informed me that we were going to have our second child. At that point I decided I would take her home. We had just spent three and a half years moving with one child from house trailer to apartment to a little motel room in Santa Monica. It was clear we should go back home so we could have the support of parents. I learned we could get an early discharge if we were admitted to a college so I applied to Michigan State. I went back to Michigan State for personal reasons, family reasons more than anything else. Otherwise I'd have been off to Stanford and life might have taken quite a different turn. But there I was back at Michigan State.

Career

STOCK: So during that time in Michigan State in the Master's program, did anything occur which said, you know, Don Bowersox should go on through a PhD?

BOWERSOX: It developed in the following way. Yes some things did occur. I was on my way to law school I applied for admission to the University of Michigan law school during my Master's program. Academics seemed relatively simple, I ended up getting the award for the highest scholarship in my Master's program. While I was in the program one of my

former high school class mates, a guy by the name of Larry Fowler who later became an attorney, introduced me to a couple of professors he'd met in business. I wanted to get a Graduate Assistantship so I met the two professors; Edward Smykay and Frank Mossman; who were doing research in what they called extended transportation. They were trying to figure out how to look at the impact of transportation beyond purely the freight rates. When we got together I told him all about system's network theory that I've been working on in the Air Force while at Rand Corporation. I began to work with them and hopefully contributed something. As they say the rest is history.

STOCK: So when you went through the PhD program because of your relationship with Smykay and Mossman that sort of pushed you into, at that time, the physical distribution arena.

BOWERSOX: It didn't quite develop that way. When I was working with them I also became deeply involved with Tom Staudt and Don Taylor. In fact, Don Taylor ultimately became my senior professor and I would say the number one person that guided me through my academic career. My fundamental major was in marketing. I was doing this work in distribution out of interest, at that time Physical Distribution didn't exist.

Michigan State University started the first course I attended as a student assistant. It was Physical Distribution 445 which to my knowledge was the first formal course. Mossman taught it and Smykay assisted. Smykay, a professor, and I a graduate assistant, helped coordinate. It was this class that resulted in our book being published a couple of years. So I was involved but my real major was marketing. It was at that point I got excited about a PhD. I was working in the inner circles of the University. I decided to make applications to some schools. I applied to Columbia and Indiana where I got accepted. Indiana offered me the best financial support package so I was on my way to Indiana. About that time Michigan State got a new grant to fund a research-based PhD student. The grant was funded by a consultant named George Ramlos, Ramlos was an early warehouse design consultant interested in extending warehousing research beyond the four walls of the building. At this point I had the transportation guys on one side, the warehousing guy on the other side and some money offered to stay at Michigan State University, so while I was supposed to go to Indiana, the night before we began to pack, by the way my wife was pregnant again for our third child, Tom Staudt came to our student apartment all exited.

He had sponsored me to Indiana where he'd gone to school so he was kind of a show when he said: "you've got to stay here to get your PhD". I've got him on one side and I've got a pregnant wife on the other side and the idea of moving to Indiana lasted about 30 seconds. I stayed at Michigan State for my third degree very unplanned. Along the way I decided law school was gone for good.

STOCK: Now as we look at your career tell us how you went about securing your first job in the academic sector? We know it occurred after having been in business, so how did that first position as associate professor develop. How did you go about securing your first academic position?

BOWERSOX: My academic career really started with the book on physical distribution. It was written during the time I was doing my doctoral dissertation. In the fall of 1960, I went to work for the Railroad Express Agency in New York. The book had been drafted at that point and was under review. It was a very difficult to get that book published by the way, so it took a long time between the time we had the manuscript ready to go until somebody actually published a book in this new but obscure field. I went to New York and started working in the fall while I was finishing my dissertation. When I graduated in December 1960, I was working in business. By the spring of 1962, the reorganization of REA was at a stand still. I was considering a different job when Tom Staudt called and asked if I would like to teach. In the spring of 1962 I joined Michigan State and taught for one term. In the early summer I had an offer to go with E. F. McDonald Company. Tom's advice was, the school at that time didn't have any graduates who were vice presidents of major corporations, I should go do that." I remember his words: "you can always come back here". So I left Michigan State a second time and went with the E.F. McDonald Company. That was a pretty fast transition. We moved back to East Lansing, Michigan and then to Dayton, Ohio within a six month period.

STOCK: We mentioned earlier in your introduction forty years at Michigan State, we'll talk specifically about some of those years in a few moments, but when you look back on that forty year time horizon, what do you consider to be the most significant accomplishment as a professional academic?

BOWERSOX: Oh wow, the forty years seemed to go fairly quick; it's just amazing how fast in retrospective those years did go. Upon arriving at Michigan State full time after having been in business again for over five years, I started forty years of continuous service. At first, I wasn't planning on really staying until I retired. Another event happened in my family. My wife became ill when I was deciding to return to teaching. Prior to this health condition I was planning on joining Ohio State University. I'd been offered a chair at Ohio State formerly held by Jim Heskett who went to Harvard. The appointment at Ohio State was a full rank chair. I was pretty excited. At the same time, Michigan State made me an offer to return as an Associate Professor. From a professional perspective, Ohio State was the superior offer; however my wife had MS and rapidly was declining physically. Naturally, the right thing to do was to put her back in the family context. So we went to East Lansing. Our plan was as soon as things got a little better, we would move on. Life didn't work out that way. I was promised a promotion within a year, at the end of the first year I remember Tom Staudt saying well, Bud La Londe is in line to get promoted and I can't get two promotions through in one year. He promised I would go up the next year. It worked out all right. The next year Bud went to Ohio State and took the chair. I stayed at Michigan State. What I accomplished over those forty was to make a lot of students miserable. I'm sure I bored a lot of people with my stories. I continued to work on that one book and developed it as it moved through a couple of different title configurations. It's still a leading logistics text. I'm proud to say that some parts of two or three chapters remain the same as the first book. I think my main accomplishment was helping to build the supply chain program at Michigan State University.

STOCK: When you look back and we talked about this very early as a youngster you said you were a stubborn person, do you think that was instrumental in having got as many things done and accomplishments as you did?

BOWERSOX: Well, I think it probably did. Between the combination of the military and the academic discipline it was persistence as opposed to stubbornness. I can't remember starting projects and not finishing them. They were not all outstanding, but they were finished on time.

STOCK: Do you have any regrets regarding your career path? And what you were able to achieve in those forty years that you spent at Michigan State?

BOWERSOX: Well, I regretted not going to law school. At one point I had earned a sabbatical, so I decided I would attend law school. By that time I was a full professor. I went out to lunch with an attorney in East Lansing who was also a CPA. I shared my dream with him. He looked at me and he said I've always thought you were nuts, but now I know you are. He said you are my role model, if I could do what you are doing I'd quit being an attorney. So I didn't go to law school, I think there were some aspects of research that maybe could have pushed the field faster. I think that no matter what you accomplish, if you make a realistic evaluation, there is always a gap.

STOCK: Do you think you achieved most of what you wanted to accomplish? If not, what else would you liked to have done?

BOWERSOX: I think yes, although I found myself writing another different kind of book. My wife is convinced that I never will stop and I guess work is kind of in my blood. I read a tremendous amount; I have a lot of ideas, but not quite the same ambition. I'm kind of working my way into retirement right now.

STOCK: In those early years was where there any individuals that served as a mentor or mentors for you and how did they influence you in those early days?

BOWERSOX: Yes, the very beginnings of my career when I had my first assistantship during my master's program my work with a gentleman by the name of Art Warner. Art was interested in real estate and he taught me a lot about facility location. Tom Staudt and Don Taylor in combination because they were a one two punch. Tom in a motivational sense and Don in a research sense. And one of the great honors of my career was being included as an author in the Staudt and Taylor "Managerial Marketing" text. I believe to this day it represents a pace setting book. It truly dealt with managerial marketing and I helped through one revision and then we allowed it to die.

STOCK: To what extent have you conducted your professional life with a personal code or mission statement or belief system? And how has that influenced how you have conducted your professional life?

BOWERSOX: I sincerely believe that a number of us, and I include you, have felt for a long time that there is a missing discipline in business; it's Supply Chain Management. Supply Chain Management represents the integration of the operative areas of business into a cross functional and cross organizational arrangement. Today, I think there is growing recognition that we do have a discipline, it has frameworks, it has principals, it is capable of prediction, and it can be used for research.

STOCK: An interesting question, what would have been your ideal job? If you could have had any job in those forty years what would have been?

BOWERSOX: Well, I had a couple of chances as the years went on to leave and go to industry or consulting. I had an offer to become the Director of Global Logistics for GM. I decided to stay in the academic profession. Over the years I have got the feeling that that's where I was destined to be. I'm surprised I stayed at Michigan State all those years. It wasn't by design. I considered leaving for other academic jobs a few times, to Indiana, to Columbia, to Harvard, and each time I finally decided to stay at Michigan State University. The final offer came from Tennessee. But by that time I had children, family and a place in Northern Michigan on a lake, and life style became important. Then Michigan State developed a chair and that sealed the deal.

Family

STOCK: Let's turn back, we talked about your early family that is your parents, talk about your family now and growing up, do you have children? If so, how many and what ages/sexes?

BOWERSOX: How long is this tape? Ok. Well, in my life I lost my first wife a few years after we moved back to East Lansing. She and I had three children, two girls and a boy. A few years later I got re married. Unfortunately, that marriage didn't work out well with

one major overriding exception. We had two wonderful sons. So that adds up to five. A few years ago I got re-married to a wonderful lady who had four children. So we have nine. My two older sons are in the supply chain field. I've a daughter who is a marketing consultant and one who is a high school teacher and department chairman. My youngest son is a student at Michigan State. I have four stepchildren, one of whom is with Disney's on Ice as a stage producer, another one has been a skater with Disney for ten years, one of them is in Culinary school in Treasure City and the other one is going to the University of South Florida. So we've got quite a clan.

STOCK: And as a parent to a number of children, what was your main goal as a parent raising those children?

BOWERSOX: Much like my father, with a little less insistence on graduate education but to get fully prepared for life. Everybody in our family either is going to school part time or full time or has degrees.

STOCK: Now when your children were growing up if I were to ask them if they were here to describe you as a parent, what would they tell me?

BOWERSOX: Loveable, generous, charming and probably in all seriousness fairly stubborn on certain rules. For example, I've never been a great believer in my kids going to stay in other people homes. I had a lot of battles with my kids. I didn't care how many friends they invited to come to our home. I wanted my kids' home and in bed every night. I guess they'll say when I get my mind set on something I'm very persistent. However, I think they know where the love is.

STOCK: Now we talked about your parents several times, in what ways do you think they influenced you the most?

BOWERSOX: I think the very most was encouraging persistence until you accomplish something. They also were good at building confidence. I've so often seen personal confidence lacking in young people. My position is "yes you can do it". You can make that speech or you can be in that club or you can be anything you want to be. Saying you can't is only an alibi for not putting out the effort to do it.

STOCK: Now from time to time you mentioned brothers and sisters; how many do you have and what are they doing at the moment?

BOWERSOX: Well, my oldest brother is deceased, he was a physician. He was the first to graduate from High school and go to college in the history of our family. He went all the way and became a gynecologist. Then I have an older sister, she married a World War II veteran, an amputee, she did not go to college. Then I have a younger brother who is now a trustee of Lake Sumter Junior College.

STOCK: Now you are mentioning in some of your travels in the military, your wife and small child, a pregnancy which had influenced going back to Michigan, how did you and your first wife meet?

BOWERSOX: We met during my senior year at Michigan State University. She was from the same high school. She was a freshman at Michigan State and I met her quite by accident at a party during Christmas holiday. She knew all about me but being three years older I could not remember her. However, from that time on I saw a lot of her.

STOCK: Was she supportive of your moving to career?

BOWERSOX: Absolutely, she was very supportive all those years in the military moving around and during graduate school. I'll never forget the day we went to Ohio State University Medical School where she got diagnosed as having MS. It was a great disappointment after so many years of school and training.

General Historical Questions

STOCK: Now when you look at, you said you had interested in history all the way from secondary school going on and into college and I know you've taught the history seminar at Michigan State in the past and so on. Looking back in history, if you could live in any era of history that you could select, what era would you live in? And why?

BOWERSOX: Where I would like to be able to live is in the decades right ahead of us; say the next thirty to fifty years. We are going to really face the most challenging problems. I'd love to be part of that technology rich and challenging environment. People in supply chain management are going to make a real difference.

STOCK: If you could meet any historical person, from the past or present, who would that be and why? Maybe talk to them, sit down and chat with them, like we are doing now.

BOWERSOX: That's a tough question, there are many people, but I would like to be able to sit and talk to George Patton. I believe the true Patton story has never really been told. There are certain characteristics of his leadership style that I would enjoy pursuing further. I think he had most of the people fooled most of the time. I've been intrigued by him, I've read a lot about him and there are many other people but you said one.

STOCK: Well certainly Patton knew a lot of military history which did him well in combat.

BOWERSOX: He had a sense of commitment to the images of achievement that he was able to visualize and then feel almost an ordained right to proceed, which to me was a passion few people could deny. The worst thing that happened was making the movie Patton. I think it told the wrong story about Patton.

STOCK: Again a historical question, if you could be anyone from the past, who would have been?

BOWERSOX: Well I have a tendency to want to be humorous about this but I wouldn't. I don't think I can name a specific person that I would like to have been.

General Information and Perspectives

STOCK: Now in terms of people looking at Don Bowersox, how do you think people will remember you? What would be the things that when they hear Don Bowersox's name what would come to mind?

BOWERSOX: For people who don't know me well, what might come to mind would be the work that's been done in the evolution of physical distribution to logistics to supply chain. I think they see me in an academic context. For people that know me, I hope they will remember me more as a person who cared about a lot of things. Anybody who stays in academia for forty years has got to like students and like being around them and working with them. I have worked with people who have done some wonderful things in life. The fact I had a small part in their early development stands out. I like to think about the PhD students and there have been some fantastic ones. There are also former students who went into business. When you teach undergraduates you teach a lot of people and I would like to think that those people remember me as somebody that made time and added value most of the time.

STOCK: What do you like to do in your spare time? You have a little more time now, but as you were in those forty years, what did you do outside the academic arena?

BOWERSOX: Well, I have a really pathetic golf game which I totally enjoy. I think the fact that I enjoy it so much actually makes it more pathetic as time goes on. I've been pretty active in sport. I like tennis sports events and am a very close follower of specific teams. I help Tom Isso recruit at Michigan State. I have a great admiration and interest in his basketball program. I read a lot. I don't get excited about browsing around the Internet. I'm still writing. And I have given some thought to writing outside my field. I've done some research on a story based in Australia which would be a novel.

STOCK: But it won't be called The Precipice.

BOWERSOX: I hope not. Although Nicholas J. LaHowchic and I wrote "Start Pulling Your Chain: Leading Responsive Supply Chain Transformation." That book will be out in January.

STOCK: Now as a youngster in your family home and as you grew up, was religion at all important on your family or influential?

BOWERSOX: Sure. My parents, my mother was a Catholic, my father was a Protestant. I was raised a Catholic, I married a Protestant and am now a member of the Presbyterian

Church. My wife is active in the church; we are regular attendees and enjoy it. Is a very important part of life. A few moments of reflection are where you learn to be humble.

STOCK: Now you look all of this things, family, church, acquaintances, career and so forth, what do you think are the main lessons you've learned in your life?

BOWERSOX: Everything, every single thing you do impacts somebody in some way. You want to make those impacts as positive as you can but you can't always control them. You have to understand fairness. I believe church can help you understand why it is important to be honest when you impact people. It is necessary to tell them the truth. Truth may hurt but there are soft ways to tell the truth and harsh ways. I believe keeping things as open as you can is important.

STOCK: Now again looking of all the experiences that you've had whether there are from marriage or education whatever, were there any significant "turning points" in your life? What would you consider the "turning points" that have occurred in your life time?

BOWERSOX: Well, clearly experiencing the joy of accomplishment in undergraduate school. Going from a solid C student to a couple of years on the Dean's list and graduating with a sufficient overall GPA to getting into good graduate schools represented a turning point. The Air Force was clearly a turning point because of the reasons I expressed earlier and the ability to carry forward knowledge gained in graduate school. The decision to stay at Michigan State, and my first wife's sickness was a turning point. My second marriage was a turning point. Realizing that my second marriage failure was really ok because we did part friends and we do have two wonderful sons. Sincerely, finding someone that I'm totally happy with. You never stop hitting turning points in life.

STOCK: Now those doctoral students that you shared and obviously many others that you were involved with beyond your chairing their dissertation, what advice would you give recent PhD's in our discipline?

BOWERSOX: I think today's graduate needs to confirm commitment to basic education. When I think about people who have really made a difference over the years, they were all committed to being great teachers first and researchers second. The people who have

accomplished the most are typically quite humble people. They really do not get carried away with all the awards they may receive. They are more concerned with how Scott or Pat are doing at their new jobs. There is nothing less happy than a PhD who doesn't like to teach and doesn't like students. These are miserable people and we've all worked with and for them. So I would advise students who seek PhD degrees to be sure you really want a career dedicated to giving and service because the pay, while adequate, is not overwhelming. The challenge to get into things that take you away from your primary mission is overwhelming and you have to constantly reconfirm why you are there. So if you don't really want to work with young people, go into industry.

STOCK: Which lead us into our next question, what do you think are the most significant ways that, you know, our marketplace has changed as it impacts the academic arena?

BOWERSOX: I think the most serious part of it is the age old challenge to publish or perish. We must publish; we must publish certain articles in certain journals that are peer reviewed in order to progress in the profession. While I was Dean I tried really hard to get a new category of professorship establish for PhD tenure track professors who were great teachers but mediocre researchers. We were able to get a professor practice for people coming in from industry, but we were never able to get a professor of teaching. Some of the great teachers I've known are users not generators of research. I think the profession has gotten to the point where we are placing too much attention to research that does not really generate new knowledge. Some research meets a test of significance either statically or shows a level of mathematical sophistication that doesn't have much to do with developing the discipline. Much of such research gets published in journals that only academics read. I believe there are some good professors who have taught for many years. Many of their students have enjoyed successful careers in business. These teachers don't get fair recognition in their business schools because they didn't accomplish five refereed articles a year for three consecutive years to make the next academic rank. That really bothers me tremendously.

STOCK: Now some very specific questions Don and one we've sort of look at in terms of staying in Michigan State for forty year, but while you where there one of the things that you've

mentioned very briefly and I mentioned in the introduction was the founding of the National Council of Physical Distribution Management (NCPDM) way back in 1963. How did you become part of that effort that began forty some years ago now and also did you envision that the organization would be what it is now back then?

BOWERSOX: NCPDM actually occurred before I joined Michigan State full time. NCPDM was formed when I was in New York with the Railway Express. In the early years it was an evangelistic effort. I remember Ed Smykay and I sitting in the lobby of a Hotel in Grand Rapids, Michigan waiting to catch the traffic manager of a big chemical company coming back in after his night out to dinner to invite him to come to campus and speak. I remember meeting Grosvenor Plowman and who was one of the real early industrial pioneers and Bruce Riggs, both gentlemen now deceased talking about the concepts of physical distribution. I remember being asked to speak at Delta Nu Alpha in New York and the New York Traffic Club to talk about this new concept of “Total Cost.” The American Management Association agreed to sponsor a seminar on the subject at Saranac Lake, New York. It was at the airport following the seminar that thirteen of us decided to form NCPDM. Two of us were academics, Ed Smykay and I; the others were all practitioners. We agreed to have another meeting to be held in St. Louis. Later that year we formed the organization. The first several years we had two meetings a year at the Kellogg Center at Michigan State. We talked the university officials into allowing us to use a meeting room without charge. By the time we actually founded the organization our membership was expanding. We didn’t have an end game, we just were trying to form and get legitimacy at our own institutions. It worked, slowly but surely, but after four decades Supply Chain Logistics has become quite a global force.

STOCK: Now we’ve talked about being a co-author on the earliest physical distribution book and a question related you mentioned it was difficult to get a publisher, tell us a little bit about that process because there were no books obviously at that time, there was no history of sales.

BOWERSOX: No competitors, no history of sales, no classes, except ours at Michigan State. Went to all the publishing companies and we were turned down by everyone except one guy at Macmillan. He was interested but got turned down two or three times by his company before they finally agreed to publish our first book. We convinced them the book

would sell great in the business markets. Macmillan published two different cover colors, one had a book jacket. The blue cover was the academic edition and red cover was marketed as the business edition. The original book was published as “Physical Distribution Management” two times and then as “Logistics Management” five times. Next year we will publish the third edition of “Supply Chain, Logistics Management.” So its survived all those years.

STOCK: Having been a textbook writer myself it’s a lifelong and its almost constant revision process.

BOWERSOX: We probably would have done better if you hadn’t written that competitive book.

STOCK: Why do you think you’ve got into textbook writing? Because you’ve done a number of books over the years as well as a number of articles, but often times academics typically stay with article writing as opposed to getting into textbooks.

BOWERSOX: First off when we wrote the first book, it was still considered academically respectable to write textbooks. To have a textbook in a new and emerging field was considered especially good. So we got a lot of academic credit for writing that book. Our school was behind the initiative and therefore it did us a lot of good. I’ve actually written one book a lot of times as opposed to a lot of books. If you look at almost all my other books except the Staudt-Taylor edition, they are research books. These books that are not textbooks but books reporting research we did at Michigan State under various grants.

STOCK: When you look at all those people how have made significant contributions in the physical distribution then logistics now supply chain management much broader field excluding yourself, who do you think, and maybe more than one, has probably impacted that discipline the most?

BOWERSOX: That’s a tough question, Jim. I don’t know how you’ve done generally with this question when asking people because it seems that no matter what they say they will make somebody very unhappy. Focusing on academics for just a few moments, I would have to say Jim Heskett, Bud La Londe; I think Doug Lambert and you made a major

contribution in the field by taking it to another level. I think of persons who worked hard in the early years, Carl Rupenthal at Stanford and Ernie Williams at Columbia, they opened the forum for many of us to talk. Most people don't know that Grosvenor Plowman was a PhD and while at US Steel, opened the door for a lot of things to happen. I could go on naming people. However, I don't think individuals alone have built the discipline we have to work with today. It's been the combined contributions of many, many different people. But all those people built on things that Mossman and Smykay first developed. They probably understood a lot they never had the chance to say because they didn't have an audience to speak to.

STOCK: Now you talked earlier and have mentioned to us a few times in terms of living in the future in the next thirty to fifty years because of the impact of the discipline; where do you think the future is for supply chain management?

BOWERSOX: Today, we have absolutely no excuse about lack of technology. You know for years we worried about the fact that technology was always trailing what we thought we needed. Today, if we didn't get any new technology for the next ten years we couldn't really fully deploy what's out there now. This technology provides an opportunity to change the time context. Instead of doing everything in the anticipation of based on forecasting we are dealing in a connected world. The 21st century world has global optic fiber connectivity. Such connectivity introduces many new great things. It also magnifies a lot of problems we have. I will give you one example, we have societies contributing actively to global commerce today that ten years ago didn't have electricity. These societies didn't know there was an external world. Today they are living a style of life that's become characteristic of the developed world. We have an opportunity to exploit connectivity in a way that can eliminate tremendous amounts of waste.

STOCK: Well sounds like that most of us who have been in the profession for some time, we'd love to know what we know now, but be as young as we were when we got our PhD's.

BOWERSOX: I think that's a very good way to sum the challenge. However, most of what we know now is obsolete; the challenge is to keep learning.

STOCK: Well what do you think about supply chain development? What do you believe is the most important single issue facing supply chain academics and then practitioners today?

BOWERSOX: **I think the challenge is larger than the academics and the practitioners. I think it's got a lot to do with understanding that only a fraction of the world's population is enjoying the standard of living that's possible in this day and age. These people cannot be content knowing they are living with poverty, sickness and disease. I believe we truly have to tackle the problems of the planet. First, with making sure that people can live in harmony by being properly taken care of and second by taking care of the planet.**

STOCK: Now it's interesting being in the marketing department in combination with logistics and now supply chain management, think back to Philip Kotler making a reputation based upon several articles but the one that he is probably most famous for is broadening the concept of marketing. Do you think it is time for an academic article on broadening the concept of supply chain management?

BOWERSOX: **While I think such an article may not be well received, it's timely. We have to start scoping what might be before we can change what is. In the last chapter of our new book, we address some of the critical future issues.**

STOCK: Now personally, do you think as academics we have a definition of supply chain management today?

BOWERSOX: **I don't think we have the final or terminal definition of Supply Chain Management. Over the years I expect it to continue to expand as we get more insight. I think the thing that's driving the discipline now more than any other thing is the realization that integrated management truly offers synergistic results. Some of these are old thoughts. However, I believe that the information capability of today is providing new insight, particularly as integration results in collaboration between independent organizations in the supply chain.**

STOCK: Final question, I think you probably touched on this and this maybe is a fairly easy one, in terms of the future of supply chain management, where do you think the two or three most significant development will be in supply chain management?

BOWERSOX: One is clearly going to be a refinement of the Internet; an Internet which is fundamentally for business and research and not a social networking environment. One that is able to provide much more security, allowing us to safely move data and convert such data into information while it's being moved. A second, I think we will make advances in nanotechnology, nano being very small and technology being concerned with product composition. I've coined the word Nanogenome technology, at one point we didn't think we could chart the human DNA. Within months download from the Internet how to build a human body. Well, I think we will learn how to decompose components or miniaturized components or parts of products similar to what has taken place in films, pictures and videos. I don't think we will eliminate physical substance but I think we will learn miniaturization to the extent that we will be able to increase density and reduce the size of products and postpone customization. The result would be the adaptability to load as much as five times more products in a trailer. Finally, I believe we are going to have a significant reforming of anti-trust laws. We are going to learn that collaboration is not bad and that some people can do certain things extremely well and other things not very well at all. There is no reason why we can't form an effort of cooperating people that represent and work in different organizations.

Closing Comments

STOCK: Well Don, I appreciate your insight and comments when we touch upon your breadth and depth of experiences, but hopefully through our conversations as we mentioned in introducing this video people would see a bit more about Don Bowersox and who he is and was and why he did some of the things he did. Throughout all of these interviews that we will do, hopefully we will get a vision for what has been, what it is now, and what would be in the future. So thank you for your time.

BOWERSOX: Well, thank you for the effort you are making Jim. Be sure you get yourself on one of these tapes.