Outrun the bear approach: Rethinking Supply Chains for a World of Constant Disruption

Outrun the Bear™ Approach: Rethinking Supply Chains for a World of Constant Disruption

1. The Metaphor That Matters: Supply Chains and the Bear

There's an old survival adage: "You don't have to outrun the bear. You just have to outrun the others." In supply chains, it's not about perfection, it's about reflexes. Today's "bear" is a relentless parade of disruptions: tariffs, pandemics, labor shortages, natural disasters, and more. These aren't outliers—they are the norm.

In this environment, competitive advantage belongs to those who move faster and smarter than the rest. As recent studies confirm, agility matters more than perfection, and insight only matters if it leads to action. The organizations that thrive aren't necessarily the best planners but rather the ones who have a first-responder mindset—because when you have an "outrun the bear mindset," *there are no good times. Only bad times and worse times.*

2. The Problem: Most Companies Are Still Standing Still

Despite countless wake-up calls, many supply chains remain locked into legacy assumptions. Their supply chain networks were designed for stability. Their decisions reflect a slower, more predictable world. The result? A dangerous lag between signal and response.

Examples include:
- Sourcing changes without re-optimizing delivery routes
- Advanced analytics used for dashboards, not decisions
- Quarterly planning cycles that ignore real-time volatility
- Disruption responses made only after damage is done

What looks like a forecasting problem is often a behavioral one. *Insight without action is noise.* Inflexible systems turn minor disruptions into major setbacks.

3. The Four Core Reflexes of the Outrun the Bear Model

NT Logistics' Outrun the Bear™ model reframes crisis as a catalyst. We don't just report data—we act on it. We don't just prepare for disruption—we outrun it. These four reflexes are designed to turn insight into action:

Reflex #1--Know Your Cost! Know Your Cost! Know Your Cost!

- Many companies make freight decisions without a clear view of cost-to-serve—treating shipping like a fixed expense rather than a strategic input.
- Understanding your cost basis isn't optional—it's foundational. Knowing your inbound, outbound, and delivery costs helps inform smarter decisions and avoid painful surprises.

- *If fuel costs $125 to earn $50 at work, you're not working—you're bleeding. Freight without cost visibility is just as dangerous.*

Case Study Example

- **Problem:** A NT Logistics client was running multiple deliveries per week to the same accounts without realizing how much it was eroding margin.
- **Solution:** NT helped them analyze true cost-to-serve by location and frequency, revealing clear inefficiencies.
- **Result:** The company consolidated routes, reduced delivery frequency, and dramatically lowered cost-per-case—without sacrificing service. Once they knew their cost, they could act on it.

Reflex #2—Use Insights that Trigger Action

- Without action, insight is just observation
- What matters most? How quickly you respond, the cost of missed opportunities, and the delay between recognizing a problem and acting on it.

Case Study Example

- **Problem:** A pharma company had high delivery frequency to low-volume customers but no clear service tiers.
- **Solution:** NT performed a five-year shipment analysis and implemented A–E customer tiering based on volume and need.
- **Result:** 29% reduction in delivery count, 14% boost in pallet utilization, and 11% mileage savings. *Data became direction.*

Reflex #3--Cost-to-Serve Sequencing

- Don't just re-price—rethink how you deliver.
- Revisit periodically, as few businesses are static.
- Match cost-to-serve insights with delivery timing, volume, and customer tiering.

Case Study Example

- **Problem:** A company's direct-store deliveries were frequent but inefficient, increasing cost-per-case.
- **Solution:** NT re-sequenced delivery routes by volume and geography, introduced order minimums, and optimized stops.

- **Result:** Fewer miles. Lower costs. Better asset use. Same great service—thanks to smarter sequencing.

Reflex #4--Build Adaptive Muscle

- Crisis is coming. Make speed a habit.
- Create adaptive operations to flex as conditions change.
- Plan purposeful pause points in workflows.

Case Study Example

- **Problem:** A national food manufacturer's suppliers weren't adjusting delivered pricing, even as freight markets shifted.
- **Solution:** NT helped its customer shift to a managed inbound freight model, challenging old assumptions about delivered pricing.
- **Result:** Over $1.25 million in savings and stronger supply chain agility. That's not just reaction—it's operational muscle.

Why Outrun the Bear Approach Works

Outrun the Bear™ is not a risk framework. It's an adaptive framework. While others assess, we act. While others plan, we pivot. This approach is built from NT's real-world playbook—and it reflects what shippers truly face.

Final Thought: You Don't Have to Outrun the Bear. Just Everyone Else.

You don't have to be perfect. You just have to be prepared. By embedding analytics that drive behavior, operational flexibility, and crisis-readiness into your business, you gain more than resilience—you gain the advantage.

The bear is coming. Let's make sure you're faster than the rest.