

FROM THE PAGES OF *LEADERS & LUMINARIES* E-MAGAZINE ...

## *Vintage Voice*

**31 superpowers that healthcare supply chain should, would love to have**  
*Pick your favorite and give yourself a codename or nickname!*

By Rick Dana Barlow

SCHAUMBURG, IL (November 4, 2024) – No disrespect or offense to Disney’s “Avengers” from Marvel Comics/Marvel Entertainment or Warner Bros. Discovery’s “Justice League” from DC Comics/DC Entertainment, but the healthcare industry and profession is chock full of “super” heroes (two words intentionally) without powers (but with some degree of tech and tenacity to carry out their missions of serving patients).



Maybe not nearly as Batman-, Iron Man-, Mister Fantastic- or Mr. Terrific-caliber tech, however.

Clinicians and frontline caregivers may be anointed “heroes” for helping patients heal through surgery and therapy, but it’s high time that the “back-office” support squad – supply chain in particular – earned props for their own derring-do in fortifying, equipping and gearing up others.

Clinicians and caregivers, by and large, help heal patients emotionally, mentally and physically through science fact, including diagnoses, prognoses and educated guesses via decision support systems and now artificial intelligence (AI)!

Supply chain, by and large, bolsters and buttresses clinicians and caregivers through facilitation, management training, math, negotiation, strategic thinking, tactical planning and execution and technology operation.

Arguably, clinicians and caregivers wield a special set of “superpowers” that involve anatomical engineering knowledge, bedside manner compassion, payer records tolerance and digital/mechanical technology manipulation (e.g., EHRs/EMRs, surgical robots, etc.).

Meanwhile, supply chain professionals work with a series of tools, including telephones (from today’s wireless smartphones to what came before), computers (e.g., databases, email, internet, etc.), transport vehicles (e.g., cars, trucks, vans, railroads, airplanes, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or “drones,” ships, etc.) and with a set of skills (e.g., navigation, negotiation, unrelenting charm for customer service) ... a very particular set of skills acquired over a very long career that began in the basement. Apologies to actor Liam Neeson because I know that line has been ... *taken*.

But what if supply chain pros were stocked (supply chain word ... cool, eh?) with some real superpowers (oxymoronic, yes, but just go with it for now), to carry out their duties, responsibilities and service levels more effectively and efficiently?

What kind or type of super-powers would be the most useful for a successful supply chain pro – not as a weapon, of course, but as a productivity tool? Let’s explore the options, shall we?

By personal choice, we’ll focus on 31 archetypes from actual superhero comic books (from the “Big 2” of Marvel and DC as well as the independents like Image, Dark Horse and others) but eschew anything to do with magic, cosmic/godlike manifestations, reality creation and warping, time manipulation and time travel. After all, we want to be *<ahem>* “realistic.”

Please note that this creative exercise is not designed to endorse Chic Anery, Skull Duggery or Tom Foolery, but in today’s labor-stressed market if you receive a CV from any or all of these three characters be sure to refer them to HR and call them in for an interview at least!

Shall we begin? No peeking to the end or scanning! This means you! Let's go!

**31. Flight.** Imagine not having to walk anywhere; use the stairs, elevator or escalator; invest in costly drones (and pilot training!) to scan high-impact vertical shelving in the warehouse. Certainly, environmental services and facilities management would be envious. That might be enough of an ROI. But when you need to get away from it all, and Calgon simply won't do for a dip in the bathtub, then just think of the view you'll have from so high up in the atmosphere. Just remember you have to breathe.

**30. Pyrokinesis.** Let's be honest. Controlling fire, by and large, is a guy thing. It's a convenient skill for when the heat goes out and/or you need to cook the prey after the hunt. Still, the laboratory will love you because you can ignite their Bunsen burners for experiments. Public relations will love you for your novelty performance during community and press tours, particularly as a welcome distraction if the media is sniffing around some perceived scandal. And if the CEO wants to host a goodwill fireside chat with staffed and contract employees? Well, you're his right-hand man with a left-hand as added value. Just be sure to light 'em up.

**29. Sonic scream.** You may harbor a charismatic and dramatic voice as it is versus a nasally, raspy, squeaky twang, but what if you could channel the sound of your voice as a kinetic force to move and open containers or to glide through the air on a sonic lift across campus to the off-site warehouse to check on a delivery? Just remember to control the intensity of your speech during contract negotiations that may turn verbally contentious.

**28. Super strength.** Who needs a crane, forklift or a tow truck to move pallets and vehicles when you can just use your muscles? Does environmental services need to clean that nook behind the MRI in radiology? All you have to do is slide it ever so carefully forward about an inch or two without disrupting the magnets and mechanics. Does the operating room need to relocate that surgical robot that doesn't have wheels? No problem! Call supply chain! The C-suite wants to redecorate and update its top-floor conference room, but that oversized mahogany table is just too heavy? No problem! Supply chain will move the table ... for a

dedicated seat at the opposite end of the CEO, of course. Do you honestly think they'll deny you?

**27. Self-adhesive extremities with enhanced agility.** Does someone need that box on the top shelf of the vertical storage unit in the warehouse, but there's no mechanical lift available? Just crawl up the wall to get what's needed. Sticky fingers, knees and toes, as well as having limber joints and muscles also could come in handy for multistory exterior maintenance and can be extremely helpful if the elevator goes out and you don't want to take the stairs – or you're claustrophobic!

**26. Super-speed.** You know what they say ... if you can do something accurately and well enough, you should be able to do it *faster*! Think Mach 1 or even light speed! Those who can move quickly seem to be able to vibrate their molecules enough to phase through solid matter like No. 18 (physical density) below, but it requires considerable energy ingestion to fuel your ability. Still, imagine taking five-digit inventory counts in mere seconds, restocking enterprise-wide PAR levels within minutes and obtaining that overnight emergency order running late within hours – even if remains on a cargo container ship clogging the Suez Canal on the other side of the world!

**25. Super-slow-motion.** Think of this ability as perhaps a twin of super-speed above. What elevates this sibling in this lower position closer to the top? With this power you likely don't need to consume as much energy as fuel. Further, you likely also aren't increasing blood flow and pressure because your touch simply slows people down to the point of standing still, not unlike "freezing time." Of course, you're also manipulating the melatonin and serotonin levels in people, thereby putting them at rest or asleep, which in a tense supply chain environment could be necessary and welcome – except that when you return to the awoken world the challenges with which you were wrestling remain unless they were solved by one or more of your other teammates on this list.

**24. CIPHERING/universal translation.** Yeah, yeah, AI theoretically should be able to bridge communication gaps between cultures, languages, species, digital coding and the like, but what if you didn't need a computer, a machine, a Babble subscription or a university linguist? If admissions, billing or clinicians simply cannot communicate with a patient, just call supply chain, the new "Great Communicator!" No need for folksy smarminess, just good old-fashioned

understanding of everyone and everything – even texts that don't use vowels, acronyms and if your co-workers mistakenly turn off auto spell-check, which can be your worst enemy anyway! What's the leading cause of and solution to life's problems today? Forget what Homer Simpson said! It's communication! This power alone will nullify "Cool Hand Luke" for the ages and redefine supply data standards once and for all!

**23. Invisibility.** Before you go all lascivious, please remember that this is a wholesome family-oriented opinion column that is part of a devoted and honorable nonprofit organization. That being said, this power would be helpful in gauging real customer reactions to service (for improvement, of course), evaluating staff production and vendor performance (imagine the candid small talk you would hear before contract negotiations begin and during breaks without resorting to a physical disguise like on that TV show, "Undercover Boss"), disappearing when you don't want to see a boss or difficult colleague.

**22. Photographic memory/reflexes.** Just think of the contract terms that could be stored in your head (Legal likely would feel threatened); product labels, GLNs, GTINs, UPCs (Bar coding? RFID? Pfft! Why?); imagine after only watching it once having the ability to drive a forklift, pilot a drone, back the vendor's semi-trailer into the warehouse dock perfectly, pinch hit operating the extremity MRI machine (okay, scratch that because you'd need clinical certification).

**21. Enhanced vision.** Think of this as a quartet: Force, heat, laser and X-ray. The first could be used to break bulk in the warehouse, open doors to transport exchange carts and move equipment, relocate horizontal and vertical racking without disassembly; the second could be used to sterilize devices and equipment, solder wiring, heat up the basement office or your lunch or late-night supper (make popcorn, too); the third could be used to open storage containers of any sort, tone it down a notch to function as a screen pointer for oral presentations; the fourth could be used to see inside containers for content, to see through walls to locate people (but not through clothes ... shame on you), to see in the dark when the power goes out, to assist/back up diagnostic imaging/radiology during a particular high-demand day or if a unit goes for repair. Be forewarned that neither Medicare, Medicaid or insurance companies will reimburse for your useful services.

**20. Invulnerability.** Finally, an answer to workers' comp woes. Nothing can harm you – whether it's a vertical shelf loaded with stock falling on you, someone in the warehouse not seeing you and hitting you with a forklift, surgeons and nurses screaming at you about backorders and stockouts, product and service vendor reps try to charge you more as CFOs order you to demand price cuts, or you accidentally get caught in the steam sterilizer for carts. The one downside? You'll likely live long enough to experience way too many budget cuts, layoffs, mergers and acquisitions. But look on the bright side: Such longevity may help qualify for induction into the Healthcare Supply Chain Leadership Hall of Fame!

**19. Body armor.** No, we're not referring to the hipster antiperspirant or deodorant (just Axe that out, will you?), but you'll likely need heavy doses with this power. We're referring to some type of covering over your clothing – or just your bare skin if you're feeling adventurous – that could be computerized, mechanical, robotic or even rocky, leaving you feeling invincible, if not fantastic! Sure, body armor grants you some of the other capabilities on this august list but if you'd rather be an ordinary human versus enhanced as a mutant or mutate while being able to plug into and access the chargemaster/charge data master (CDM), item master and other ERP modules 365/24/7 at will, then this is it. What's helpful is that at the day's end, you can leave the suit and reassure your spouse or significant other that you're not bringing work home with you – especially during PTO.

**18. Physical density.** Becoming intangible enough to float or walk on water or through floors and walls only reinforces the contract negotiation miracles you generate of obtaining 20% price cuts for products, reducing the budget 10% without labor skimming and letting all the daily pressure and tension pass. Going completely dense (not mental, by the way) in the opposite direction by increasing your mass means you're solid and nothing can move you – not even the slickery trickery of a sales gimmick. You just have to make sure you're on the structurally reinforced flooring where all the heavy equipment is located. Important safety tip: Steer clear of the MRI.

**17. Physical elasticity.** Super-stretchiness can come in handy as vendor reps and C-suite and departmental colleagues try to pull you in many different directions or throw something at you in a fit of frustration. You also don't have to yell down people-crowded or equipment-clogged hallways or high vertical shelving to retrieve something that you can reach for yourself. Plus, if you're having trouble

seeing the white board during a PPT presentation or hearing a speaker you just stretch your neck. And don't worry about those cafeteria lines because you'll be able to snag that last cup of tapioca pudding before that woman from HR places the spork on her tray.

**16. Teleportation.** Face it: You. Will. Never. Be. Late. For. A. Meeting. Again. You can sleep in until a minute before arriving at the office (call it high school and collegiate nirvana during the pandemic!) and don't have to worry about escaping the parking lot NASCAR circuit during shift changes. That surgeon needs a widget that's housed in a van 20 miles away but heading toward you? "Poof." Here you go, doc.

**15. Shapeshifting/transmogrification.** Please, no "Manimal" jokes from that NBC-TV show in 1983. Budgets were traumatized enough that year from the debut of DRGs. This one can be dangerous because you certainly don't want to misrepresent your boss, your sales rep or his or her boss for creatively nefarious purposes. (Well, you probably do but reread the first line above for Invisibility.) This power or skill can allow you to maneuver into inaccessible and tight places, enable you to engineer a facelift without surgery, weight reduction and muscle development without exercise, and become a stranger in your office when you just need some time to recoup and regroup after a tense product evaluation meeting.

**14. Size-changing.** This might be a sibling to shapeshifting in a way, but you retain your original look and can just grow as big and large as Godzilla or King Kong or as small as a gnat or microbe. This power or skill can allow you to maneuver into inaccessible and tight places on one hand as well but also give you a bird's eye view of real estate on the other without the gift of flight. Of course, you must acknowledge that gravity will affect you differently whether in your oversized or downsized self so you might need some assistance from your No. 6 teammate below.

**13. Light generation/manipulation/projection.** When the power goes out due to some weather-related crisis or a third-party contractor for the internet service provider or telephone company slices through the wrong wires, then you just charge up to ensure people can see where they're going and what they're doing as well as make sure the ERP system works for all! By manipulating light into solid constructs, you also can generate material handling tools and vehicles in the warehouse to move products and even make deliveries to outlying facilities.

**12. Force field generation/manipulation/projection.** With this power you would be the envy of infection prevention and SPD – and maybe surgical services! If the operating room sterile field may be compromised, have no fear! Call you! If sterile storage in SPD runs the risk of intrusion by a bacterial microbe, call you! And when those clinicians call you to complain about backorders and stockouts, just relax inside your protective bubble. You earn extra points if you can figure out how to tint it like car windows so no one can see you.

**11. Enhanced senses.** Imagine being able to feel or hear the heartbeat of people near you to ascertain if they might be fibbing (useful during contract negotiations or employee evaluations). You might be able to help someone determine if an implantable defibrillator is in their future. Of course, you'd also be able to smell the hygienic levels of colleagues (uh-oh, here comes that surgeon who bathes in Axe deodorant spray), unearth when the cafeteria serves liver tartar in au jus, and detect a dangerous gas leak or the presence of bacteria and mold in sterile areas that will save lives.

**10. Healing/regeneration.** Clinicians ironically would die to have this ability or power – first within themselves so that they could live longer to care for more patients, but also as something they could discharge or emit (e.g., blood, plasma, skin or stem cells, etc.) to heal patients and even regenerate limbs or organs in time, likely by accelerating growth or immune system. Certainly, there are others higher on the list below who could accomplish this a bit differently, but that's all part of being on a team.

**9. Precognition.** This ability or power alone simply would redefine strategic planning and crisis management to the point that failure would never be an option, unless you were too distracted by your smart phone or social media. As a precog, not unlike Philip K. Dick's "Minority Report," you'll know who's doing what, when, where and how, but not necessarily why unless you have No. 3 higher up the list below on your team. Being a precog also translates into the need for fewer management and organizational meetings, presentations and trips, which might be an attractive efficiency driver and time saver.

**8. Super-intelligence.** Humans may rely on computers to shape, refine and conjure up concepts and ideas for adoption and implementation. But what if your human mind redefined AI as "actual intelligence" that empowers and enables you to solve



any challenge or quandary with enhanced ingenuity coupled with empathy and ethics? When the battery runs down, or the power goes out you can more than compensate for the perceived loss (so long as you're awake or conscious). As a human computer and multifaceted, multifunctional engineer, you can create as many reliable solutions as you can articulate challenges not yet conceived. And your uncanny but unique ability can frustrate those of No. 9 above you on the list but just lower in the ranking.

**7. Technopathy.** Controlling and operating mechanical and digital machines mentally can be extremely useful – particularly if you can do more than one at a time in a cacophony of calculations and a symphony of services. And with cybersecurity taking center stage these days, you could serve as IT's Trojan horse! Just think if you could soar through the information highway in one of those "Tron" light cycles, eradicating hacker viruses left and right! Just watch out for any errant CrowdStrike programming! Microsoft surely will assist!

**6. Elemental/molecular control/management.** As an expense management expert, supply chain seemingly feels like it has to walk on water. But what if you can manipulate water, air, gravity and magnetic fields? What if you could rearrange the atomic structure of solids, liquids and gases of all types? SPD needs more steam or ozone for the sterilizer? Check! Need to take down a wall in the OR without interrupting sterility and recycle the materials for the mail room? Check! Need to freeze organs for transport to the OR? Check! The ground crew needs more rainwater for landscaping? Check! Perhaps that traditional surgical procedure, converted by the surgeon into a minimally invasive procedure could go completely noninvasive if the doctor tapped you to disintegrate the patient's cancerous tumor by changing it to harmless fat cells? You also could function as a human 3-D printer!

**5. Self-duplication/replication.** This succeeds primarily if you're dedicated, devoted, effective, efficient, encouraging, enthusiastic, even-keeled, level-headed, organized, progressive, quick-thinking and well-liked by just about everyone. If you're in any way authoritative, domineering, egotistical, idiotic, ignorant, manic, small-minded, sophomoric and treacherous, then creating a complete staff of you to augment labor shortages might do more harm than good. Think of what happened to Michael Keaton in his 1996 film, "Multiplicity." Of course, you can save your organization lots of money by not hiring your additional selves as actual staff members, but as third-party

consultants booked as purchased services who don't need benefits because they all share yours!

**4. Energy absorption/projection.** Sustainability advocates and evangelists would be in seventh heaven with this ability. Imagine being able to recycle material or power by internalizing it, synthesizing it in some way and rechanneling it as something else. Get hit in the hallway by a runaway exchange cart? Just absorb the kinetic energy and then redirect it into the facility's power grid. Down an energy drink and discharge as intense heat to purify, if not sterilize, water for surgical instrument rinses. Administrators and clinicians screaming at you about backorders and stockouts? Just ingest the sound and rechannel to the patient transport van that may be out of gas.

**3. Telepathy.** Mindreading can be dangerous and intrusive, but also delectable and intoxicating. Mel Gibson in the 2000 film, "What Women Want" aside, this power could be used to outsmart and outwit those on the opposite side of contract negotiations and your bosses during evaluation time, but also to enhance your customer service fulfillment efforts. Not only will you know what nurses need before they tell you, but you'll also be able to locate with precision specifically above which dropped ceiling tiles they are stashing safety stock! And you'll never misplace IV pumps again. Alas, you'll have to resist the temptation to erase someone's mind, too.

**2. Telekinesis/psychokinesis.** Moving and manipulating organic and inorganic objects with your mind is probably the most dangerous from defensive and offensive viewpoints. Of course, all bets are off if a telepath were to wipe the mind of someone with this power. Depending on your mental endurance, fortitude and strength from training you should be able to lift and move just about anything within the four walls of a healthcare facility, if not the entire facility itself. That cargo container ship clogging the Suez Canal? No problem! Cargo containers trapped in port because labor strikes stalled activity at the docks? Got it covered! Flight delays at a key airport due to inclement weather? Semi-trailers and vans caught in rush-hour traffic on the tollways? You got this. Don't be surprised, however, if the consulting management efficiency expert recommends using the teleporter for the small stuff.

**1. Dimensional access/travel.** You're probably thinking right about now, "You gotta be kidding! This is No. 1?" From a relevant and useful perspective for supply chain, you betcha. Why? This power hails from one of the "independent" superheroes, a Superman-like character who, unlike Batman storing all his tech, tools and trophies in a cave or Superman in his Fortress of Solitude, stocks all of his stuff on neatly organized shelving space in a pocket dimension! What supply chain leader would *NOT* want easy and immediate access to unlimited real estate to house absolutely everything and anything at no cost? But you don't want your celestial storeroom to resemble that final scene in "Raiders of the Lost Ark." Of course, this is why authentic supply chain leaders need a team of superheroes, supply data standards and a superb tracking system.

*That's it folks! Did we overlook any abilities or powers? Might you have ordered the inventory a little differently? What's your favorite or preferred superpower? Email [rickdanabarlow@bellwetherleague.org](mailto:rickdanabarlow@bellwetherleague.org) and we'll share your super-heroic insights and thoughts.*

*Rick Dana Barlow serves as Co-Founder and Executive Director, Bellwether League Foundation, and Executive Editor of BLF's Leaders & Luminaries e-magazine. Barlow's column, Vintage Voice, is posted/published in Leaders & Luminaries and here. Barlow has nearly four decades of journalistic editorial experience, more than 30 years of which have been dedicated to covering a cornucopia of healthcare operational topics, including supply chain, sterile processing, surgical services, infection prevention, information technology, diagnostic imaging and radiology and laboratory for a variety of print and online media outlets. For more, visit Bellwether League Foundation's web site at <https://www.bellwetherleague.org/> and Barlow's online profile at <https://rickdanabarlow.wixsite.com/wingfootmedia>.*