



The Resilience Mandate: Turning 2025's Chokepoint Volatility into 2026's Strategic Advantage

As we close a year defined by geopolitical tension and operational adaptation, this issue reflects on the defining supply chain challenge of 2025: the protracted transition from Red Sea disruption to a fragile "new normal" in Suez Canal routing.

The lessons learned this year are not merely about managing a single crisis. They have fundamentally reshaped the playbook for global logistics, elevating resilience, flexibility, and strategic communication from competitive advantages to non-negotiable operational requirements.

This analysis reviews the key pressures of the past year, assesses their lasting impact on the industry, and outlines the core capabilities freight forwarders must strengthen to lead their clients into a more agile and predictable 2026.

The 2025 Operating Reality: A Fragile Equilibrium

Rather than a clean recovery, the market spent the year in a protracted adjustment. Security concerns, while eased, kept risk premiums elevated and routing strategies fluid. Carriers cautiously blended Suez and Cape of Good Hope passages, creating a persistent state of operational flux characterized by:

- Unpredictable Transit Times: Variations of 10-14 days between services became common.
- Sensitive Spot Rates: Prices reacted sharply to news of route changes or port congestion.
- Network Reconfiguration Costs: Blank sailings and port shifts underscored the inefficiency of transition.

This environment solidified a critical shift: contingency planning is now continuous planning.

Industry Impact: Pressure Points Revealed

The year tested each link in the supply chain differently:

- For Freight Forwarders, complexity spiked. The core challenge became managing parallel routing options, insulating clients from extreme rate volatility, and maintaining transparent, proactive communication as the baseline for trust.
- For Shippers, lead-time uncertainty forced a sustained reassessment of inventory strategies, with many accepting higher safety stock as the cost of reliability.
- For Carriers, the mandate clearly moved from network optimization for cost to network design for flexibility.

The Forwarder's Playbook: From Reaction to Architecture

In response, leading forwarders evolved their roles, employing a layered strategy:

Tactical Agility (The 2025 Response):

- Maintaining active routing alternatives for key lanes.
- Implementing shorter quote validity periods to manage pricing risk.
- Embedding clear risk disclosures and scenario updates in client communications.

Strategic Reinvention (The 2026 Foundation):

- Designing for Optionality: Building service networks that intentionally avoid over-reliance on any single corridor, carrier, or alliance.
- Leading with Insight: Moving beyond tracking to predictive analytics, using data to model disruptions and recommend pre-emptive actions.
- Selling Solutions, Not Space: Positioning their value through risk-managed, advisory partnerships rather than transactional freight moves.

2026: Building on the Lessons

The transition phase of 2025 sets the stage for a more deliberate 2026.

- In the near term (Q1), expect residual volatility as annual contracts take effect. The priority is securing agreements that build in flexibility, such as agreed-upon alternative routing clauses or shared-risk surcharge mechanisms.
- For the longer term, competitive advantage will belong to those who institutionalize this year's lessons. This means making multi-scenario planning a standard quarterly exercise, investing in integrated visibility platforms, and cultivating a partner ecosystem built for agility.



The Path Forward

The disruptions of 2025 did not just test the industry's patience, they tested its adaptability. The freight forwarders poised to lead in 2026 are those who have stopped viewing volatility as an intermittent crisis and started treating it as a permanent variable in their operational design. By transforming resilience from a reactive cost into a proactive capability, they turn market uncertainty into a source of durable client trust and sustainable value.

Parallel paths, chosen together

AEL-Berkman Forwarding
Vicky Wang
Business Development Manager



In 2009, the aftershocks of the global financial crisis were still being felt. Markets were sluggish, and businesses across industries were moving forward with caution. It was against this challenging backdrop that AEL-Berkman Qingdao Branch set sail - choosing to move forward when the tide was against it. I was fortunate to join this energetic team at the very beginning, becoming part of the branch as it took its first steps.

I started my journey in Qingdao as an operations staff member, fully grounded in the day-to-day realities of the role. From checking documents and coordinating logistics connections to controlling every operational detail, I immersed myself in hands-on work, accumulating experience and refining my skills through repetition and practice. With dedication and persistence, I gradually grew into the role of Operations Supervisor, laying a solid professional foundation that would later support a major career transition.

In 2017, I decided to challenge myself once again, this time by moving into sales. It was an entirely new arena filled with uncertainty, but the encouragement and trust from my leaders gave me the courage to push through difficulties. The strong support from my operations colleagues also gave me confidence every step of the way. Drawing on years of operational experience, I have always upheld the principles of being responsible and customer-oriented, approaching every situation from the client's perspective. Whether optimizing logistics solutions or handling unexpected challenges, I strive to serve each customer with professionalism and sincerity. This persistence paid off, allowing me to become the Sales Champion of AEL-Berkman China Region for several consecutive years. The trust and recognition from client remain the most valuable rewards of my career.

To me, AEL-Berkman has never been just a platform for professional achievement, it feels more like a warm and supportive family. I often find myself reminiscing about the early days of working late into the night, followed by laughter, barbecue, and beers shared with colleagues. I also cherish the annual trips where we travel together with our children, watching them quickly become friends while we exchange parenting stories and everyday moments. These simple experiences brought life and warmth to our daily routines.

Over my 16 years with AEL-Berkman, I have not only gained professional recognition and achievements but also completed some of life's most important milestones—marriage and motherhood. The company has witnessed my transformation from a young professional to a seasoned employee, and eventually to a mother. This mutual growth is the most precious gift AEL-Berkman has given me. Looking ahead, I will carry this gratitude with me as I continue walking hand in hand with this family, moving together toward the next horizon.