

# ATLANTA BUSINESS CHRONICLE

## Former FedEx Canada president moves into UPS' backyard as head of Atlanta logistics company



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Welcome to Atlanta Business Chronicle's "Meet the C-Suite," where each week we will feature one of the city's most high-profile c-level executives.

This week meet American Global Logistics Chairman and CEO Jon Slangerup, who replaced Jim Briles July 27 as the head of the company July 27.

Atlanta Business Chronicle reported Aug. 1 American Global Logistics recently raised \$16 million. [Click here for more.](#)

**Name:** Jon Slangerup

**Company:** American Global Logistics (AGL)

**Title:** Chairman and Chief Executive Officer

**Headquarters:** Atlanta

**Background:** The bulk of my career has been in logistics which is a field that I really enjoy because it's so dynamic. I spent 20 years at FedEx where I advanced through the ranks to eventually become the president of FedEx Canada. Until last year, I also served as the CEO of the Port of Long Beach which was an amazing experience, and a wonderful preview to joining AGL.

**First job:** My very first official job was as an Avionics Technician for the U.S. Navy.

**Education:** I have a bachelor of science in aeronautics and a master of science in business administration from Embry-Riddle University.

**Residence:** Los Angeles and Atlanta



American Global Logistics Chairman and CEO Jon Slangerup

### Business Strategy

**How's business:** AGL is in great shape. Our business has grown tremendously over the past ten years and I expect that growth to continue. AGL has systematically invested in technology and customer service resources that have secured our position in the industry and, more importantly, allow us to deliver truly unique solutions to our customers. That makes for a pretty unique value proposition in a high opportunity field.

**Biggest challenge for your business:** Supply chains are inherently complex and ever-changing, so ensuring that AGL remains nimble and yet sophisticated enough to

provide our customers the solutions they need, when they need them will always be our biggest challenge.

**What's going to change at your company in the next year:** As I mentioned earlier, AGL has always been heavily invested in technology. Providing our customers unprecedented visibility into their supply chain with easy-to-use, cloud-based technology is a key component of what we do and it's incredibly powerful for the companies we serve. In the next year, we're taking our technology even further to be able to deliver our customized solutions even faster than we do today.

**Company goal yet to be achieved:** AGL has established a very solid customer base in some key areas but as we move forward we're going to focus on creating a better balance in the mix of our business lines so that we can mitigate the volatility we see in certain areas, particularly in the ocean freight business which is subject to extreme swings

### Management philosophy

**Guiding principles for good management:** Without question my guiding principle for good management is to put people first. Do that and they'll take care of customers and the business as if they were their own.

**Best way to keep competitive edge:** That, too, comes back to the people: hiring the right individuals for the right roles, giving them the best training possible and making sure they have the tools they need to deliver. Businesses that invest in their people are the ones that withstand the test of time and

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hold positions of industry leadership. I've seen that repeatedly throughout my career and, unfortunately, I've seen the converse, as well – organizations that don't devote resources to employee development and training are typically the ones that struggle to maintain a competitive edge.

**Why people like working for you:** I've always been very engaged with my teams, at all levels and I tend to treat everyone as a colleague, not a subordinate. I think people see that very quickly and respond to it in a very genuine, positive way.

**Most inspiring entrepreneur:** I'd have to say Fred W. Smith, the founder of FedEx because he truly is a visionary leader. I had the opportunity to work with Fred directly and learned a great deal from him about safeguarding and holding true to a company's core values and philosophy. Despite the incredible growth and size of FedEx, Fred always insisted on adherence to the company's philosophy – a key pillar of which was that people come first. And, as a direct result of that discipline, literally hundreds of thousands of people have benefited – I find that incredibly inspiring.

## Judgment calls

**Best business decision:** I don't know that I can pinpoint a "best" business decision but I think decisions that I've made outside of the physical walls of the CEO suite are typically the best ones. What I mean by that is that I think it's very short-sighted, and even risky, for a CEO to make certain decisions without having the input of people in different roles, at different levels of the organization. In many cases this isn't possible, nor is it practical, but I see a lot of CEOs who isolate themselves from the frontline or neglect to solicit their opinions, and I think that's a shame because those are often the folks who provide the most insightful and direct perspective into what's going on and what needs to be done.

**Hardest lesson learned and how you learned it:** About a third of the way into my tenure at FedEx I had risen to the role of a Managing Director. I was managing a fairly large group of people and achieving strong results, so things were great, at least so I

thought. Unfortunately, I was behaving in a very insular way and acted in a very "us against the world" manner which, in my mind was a motivator for my team, but in reality, conveyed a pretty adversarial message to the rest of the company. Of course, I thought that because my results were good, everything was fine. However, during review time, the VP for whom I worked gave me a very negative performance review, as he should have. The reason for the review, of course, was that I was not a team player, a comment which really shook me to the core, mostly because it was so contrary to the way I saw myself. It was so difficult to hear what my boss had to say, but it became a truly transformative time for me because it motivated me to learn how to be an inclusive team player, how delicate and critical organizational culture is, and how to really step outside of my own universe. In retrospect, my boss's honest and critical feedback changed the trajectory of my career, for which I will always be grateful.

**Toughest business decision:** After FedEx I was running a company that had expanded in a fairly short period of time and was doing very well. Unexpectedly, a much larger company gave us a pre-emptive offer for purchase. I really didn't want to sell to them, I wanted to continue on our trajectory. I felt we still a lot of potential to meet and was afraid that the new company would cherry-pick components of the organization and ultimately decimate it. Unfortunately, our Board of Directors was swayed by the offer, and, regretfully I quit the fight and ultimately went along with their decision. Six months after the acquisition, 90% of the company's employees were fired and the stock plummeted by over 99% because, as I had feared, the new company abandoned the core strategy and ripped the organization apart. They destroyed the business. My failure to sway the Board toward another direction is one I've always regretted, and what happened to the employees of that company haunts me to this day.

**Biggest missed opportunity:** The biggest missed opportunity of my career was agreeing to sell a company to a group of investors rather than taking it public on the NASDAQ.

During the years following the sale, the industry that business was in skyrocketed which, of course, means everyone involved would have benefitted financially tremendously.

## True confessions

**Like best about job:** I love developing teams and helping individuals grow within their jobs. I've been known for my focus on teamwork and Team development, both of which are all about knowing how to help individuals be as effective as they can be. Being part of helping people reach their goals is incredibly rewarding. And, ultimately, individual success leads to business success so I actually consider myself very fortunate to do something I love.

**Like least about job:** I really dislike being constrained in any way because constraint leads to stagnation and ultimately to failure. But, I strongly believe that you can take those who would otherwise constrain you along for the ride by showing them the solutions and possibilities which unlock the opportunities that exist in any situation.

**Pet peeve:** I truly dislike hearing people complain about problems without offering constructive solutions. I hate hearing "No," or "I don't know," without a follow-up or a suggestion as to how we might move forward. In business, I think this is a real deal-breaker.

**First choice for a new career:** I would be the lead singer for a heavy metal band.

## Predilections

**Most influential book:** The Servant as Leader by Robert K. Greenleaf – which early on in my career helped me to understand the difference between leading and managing, and served as the basis of my embracing servant leadership as a core personal philosophy.

**Favorite cause:** Environmental Health and Sustainability.

**Favorite restaurant:** In Atlanta, my favorite restaurant is Aria.

**Favorite way to spend free time:** White Water Rafting with my family in West Virginia.

**Favorite music:** Hard Rock.