

The Manager's Tool Box

Sales managers need to refocus efforts on making their reps more successful than ever

By Nancy Martini

The pressure is really on. It's not enough to just sell the product—it's important to give your sales team the tools they need to succeed. And the key to doing that successfully is understanding that every physician, pharmacist and salesperson need slightly different tools. Targeted development can create immediate improvement in sales performance on an individual, group and organizational basis. How to do that? Know your team—each individual's strengths and natural behaviors—and use that data to target training and coaching.

There are unique challenges to making pharma sales. For example, your reps have only a few minutes to get their message across and gain credibility with doctors to establish a basis for the sale. It is easy to forget that you are not selling to an organization; you are selling to a person. You want your sales people to be equipped to build the relationships that will differentiate themselves and, therefore, the brand.

To drive consistent sales results requires knowing your sales people's selling strengths and weaknesses. Who will be successful at initiating contact with a new client, asking the investigative questions to build the relationship, presenting the product or dealing with objections? Give your sales team the knowledge they need to succeed and help them develop to the best of their abilities. What are their skills, abilities and drives?

Highly Customized Training

Most companies continue to invest in sales training, but gone are the days when companies conduct training as part of routine sales development. Today, there is a strong trend toward the evaluation of the money invested in sales training. Sales managers are responding to today's challenging business environment by asking more rigorous questions about how to evaluate the current and future potential of their sales reps.

To meet increased global demands, pharmaceutical companies are focused on achieving maximum performance from their sales teams to get their products to physicians

and hospitals as quickly as possible, and to improve productivity across all levels of their organization.

Scientifically proven data-based assessment tools can provide a very specific overview to determine each representative's current strengths and areas of growth, which are then addressed with customized training.

Most importantly, sales managers can learn to better address areas where sales representatives need specific help in the various stages of positioning for the sale.

Assessment tools can help a sales team to look in the mirror and challenge traditional thinking. It can improve their approach to prospective clients, how they interact with them and how that gain consensus to finalize the sale.

Customer Focused Selling

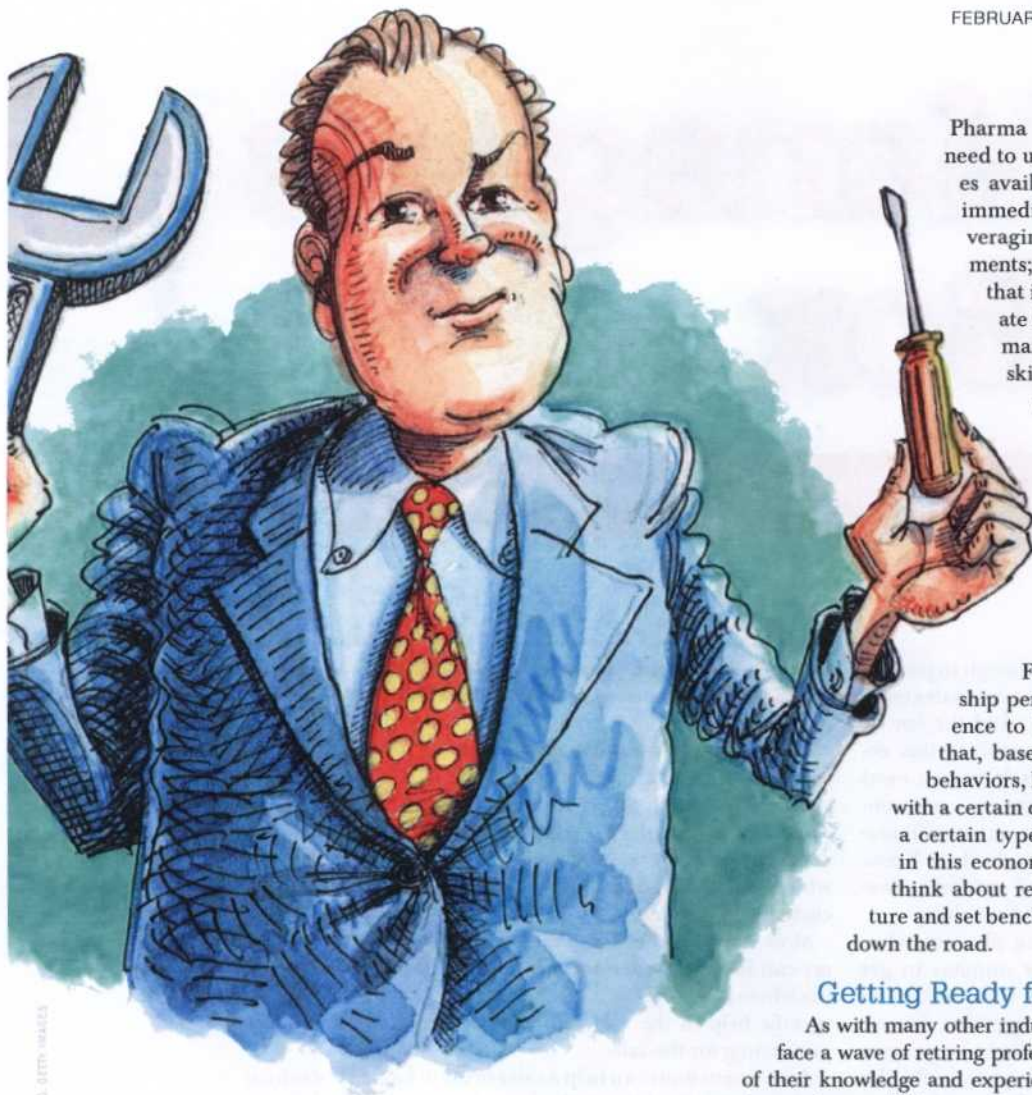
Building relationships and approaching selling from the customer's perspective is the best way to stay competitive. In most presentations, the sales team needs to shift the emphasis away from enumerating the various products and features and instead begin the discussion with what the client needs, and how they can help.

A leading bioscience company realized the enormous market potential of their breakthrough medical procedure, and decided to launch a commercial division to market it to patients nationwide through referrals from physicians, hospitals and clinics.

After using assessment tools to determine where the team's selling skills' strengths and weaknesses were, combined with customized sales training based on those assessments, the company had a 44 percent increase in sales dollars and a 38 percent increase in patient enrollment.

Teach teams to ask the investigative questions—what features are the doctors' patients most interested in? What do





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they really want from the company, aside from just the drugs? And did the salespeople provide those things? Knowing why they make the sale is just as important as making the sale because that is how they will be able to repeat success.

Sales managers are the number-one leverage point that an organization has to turn the insight and value of assessments and sales training into actual sales results. Companies that excel invest in their sales leaders. Along with data and sales training, a trend we are seeing is an increase in equipping sales managers with more effective coaching skills.

Building a Competitive Advantage

The reinforcement and relationship building and coaching that a sales rep receives from their manager may be the number-one competitive edge a sales organization has for attracting and retaining top talent, which translates directly into better performance and stronger sales results. Customized coaching programs designed for sales managers can help them improve their use of data, as well as hone their own coaching, managing and leadership skills.

Pharma and biotech companies need to utilize the tools and resources available to accomplish results immediately. Today, that means leveraging the data in sales assessments; providing sales training that is relevant and has immediate impact; and equipping sales managers with the coaching skills to maximize the sales performance of the entire team.

It's not just about hitting the numbers this quarter or even this year. Now is the best time to strategically develop a sales force that consistently will hit sales goals into the future.

From a customer relationship perspective, it makes a difference to be able to say objectively that, based on this person's natural behaviors, he might be best at working with a certain client portfolio and building a certain type of relationship. However, in this economy, it is also imperative to think about retention, to plan for the future and set benchmarks for ideal candidates down the road.

Getting Ready for the Future

As with many other industries, pharmaceuticals will face a wave of retiring professionals, along with the loss of their knowledge and experience, over the course of the next several years. This represents a challenge and an opportunity for companies. By identifying the ideal types of candidates that companies will need in the future, sales managers have a unique opportunity to build a path to future sales success and to take advantage of a wealth of shared wisdom that the company already possesses.

Individual needs and personal style are the most underestimated and most important dimensions of the selling process. The ability to interpret a prospect's or current client's needs and behaviors and adapt the selling approach is crucial, especially in the face of increasing competition and economic pressures.

Each sales prospect has unique motivations, and the challenge for pharma companies is to understand those motivations and take advantage of them. When sales managers help their team understand their natural behaviors with clients, this in turn allows managers to better manage and place people in positions to drive sales success, identify the ideal recruits, and improve retention and motivation through individualized coaching and incentives.

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