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Sales Training, LLC**

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The Ultimate Lab Sales Machine

By Peter Francis

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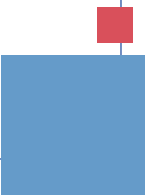
The Bavarian Motor Works (BMW) has a tag line that says, “the ultimate driving machine.” Indeed, their automobiles are usually highly rated in car magazines. So, what does this have to do with selling a lab service? Managers of successful salespeople may refer to their superstars as “machines” due to their consistent positive achievements. These marketing reps have been trained not only well, but also consistently. They have diligently reviewed the taught concepts, have documented specific strategies for each competitor, and have honed their tactical skills by role-playing with a colleague.

When it comes to hiring a field rep, labs typically favor candidates with the following backgrounds: (a) lab sales experience, (b) medical sales or (c) experience in a non-sales role but within the healthcare sector. Interestingly, and as incongruent as it may seem, the person’s background does not matter as much as someone with inherent abilities and an assiduous desire to succeed. For example, I fashioned my 48-year lab sales career from this category. I was a college music major, taught the subject for several years and had military experience. While my background was disparate from selling lab services, I studiously applied the company’s classroom education and field coaching, and I concentrated heavily on learning all I could about my competition.

Developing Situational Fluency

Clients appreciate lab representatives that keep them current with insights of relevant information and help them solve lab-related problems. Irrespective if it is with a current or prospective client, master class salespeople listen carefully, take notes and manifest a collaborative and value-driven approach to their job.

Collaboration requires a foundational selling competency called *situational fluency*. This phrase equates to an amalgam of knowledge and skills—constituents that establish an effective marketer due to his/her ability to easily and professionally transition within conversations under different circumstances.



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Let's examine the two primary areas of situational fluency, as well as their underpinnings.

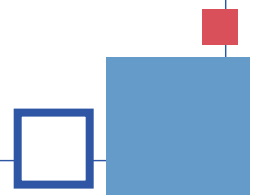
1. **Knowledge.** This bifurcates into situational knowledge and capability knowledge. Situational knowledge decodes to the awareness of everything about a client: hospital ownership ties, ACO status, industry trends, decision-makers and influencers, their competitors, competing labs, lab insurance contracts, tests of interest/common diseases, draw/no-draw, lab connectivity, their in-house testing capabilities, etc. Lab field employees who do not understand the client's business reduce their status to mere vendors—not the valued and collaborative support people they should be.

The second part, capability knowledge, entails a sophisticated cognizance of the rep's lab operations. This channels into multifarious topics: in-house test capabilities, test names and methodologies, connectivity solutions, logistics, supplies, in-network/out-of-network billing, client-specific monthly reports, marketing materials, etc. To further entangle the subject, it also involves the on-going pursuit of learning as many of these details about each competitor. The value of this equates to a basic and obvious human bias: people intrinsically make decisions based on differences. Therefore, it requires expansive capability knowledge on both sides of the equation—and then coupling this data (when talking to clients and prospects) with guiding questions and skillful presentations. This situation sits in contrast to someone who fecklessly depicts his/her lab as a basic, transactional service.

2. **Skills.** This apportions into selling skills and people skills. Let's first reject a common phrase: "He/she is a born salesman." Parents do not look adoringly at their sleeping newborn child in the crib and whisper, "Just look at her. We're going to be so proud of Mary as we watch her develop into a great salesperson." No, Mary is not preordained with omnipotent sales abilities.

Sales skills funnel down to three primary areas: (1) product knowledge, (2) questioning and (3) presentation. E.E. Cummings, the famous author and playwright once said, "Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question." Everyone in the sales profession should memorize this quote.

Probing skills come in three over-arching areas: (1) obtaining general client background data (including personal opinions), (2) allowing the client to describe any issues they experience with their lab and (3) using questions to guide the conversation to specific differences the lab has over the competition. If the client mentions a specific problem, using implication questions allows the client to think more seriously about the effects on their business (or personal effect) if the problem is not corrected.



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The second one, people skills, speaks for itself. The following are three fundamental components:

1. They understand themselves and how their behavior impacts others.
2. They have a collaborative, professional, and empathetic attitude.
3. They want to build business relationships based on trust, respect, and productive interactions.

Beyond Situational Fluency

With the above two broad classifications and their subparts in mind, it highlights the fact *everyone*—including those with previous lab and general sales experience—should have initial and recurring sales and operations training. By doing this, it:

1. Sets a standard by which to judge
2. Takes a proactive approach
3. Provides a safe environment to practice
4. Creates a positive company culture and reputation

The training efforts aim to shift the prospect from stating, “Our lab is fine—I’m not experiencing any issues” to, “Huh, I see what you’re talking about—this is something to consider.” It is the primary responsibility of the salesperson to adjust the customer’s opinion of a simple pick-up and delivery transactional lab by outlining their lab’s culture of high service levels and specific examples of value for its clients and their patients.

Summary

Field reps need to continually endeavor to advance in the situational fluency elements via self-improvement and through their employer’s tutelage. In short, it comes down to maturing into The Ultimate Lab Sales Machine: a person that markets *value* and circumvents promoting a lab with basic amenities. These reps live by the motto: “Our clients repay us with loyalty because I teach them something they value—not try to sell them something they already know.”

*Peter Francis is president of **Clinical Laboratory Sales Training, LLC**, a unique training and development company dedicated to helping laboratories increase their revenues and reputation through prepared, professional and productive representatives. Visit the company’s web site at www.clinlabsales.com for a complete listing of services.*

