



# Habits

## Understanding Their Role When Selling Lab Services

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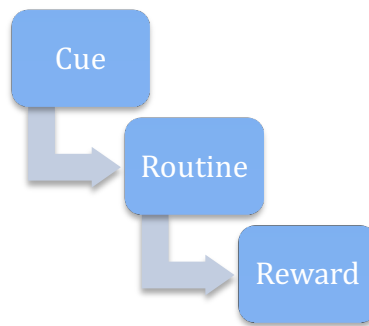
Those who sell laboratory services should become familiar with a part of our anatomy—a golf ball size lump of tissue in the center of our brain filled with multiple nuclei. It’s a plural medical word called the basal ganglia. For many years, scientists didn’t understand what this “thing” did, except for suspicions it played a role in certain diseases such as Parkinson’s. As it turns out, in the early 1990s, researchers at MIT discovered the basal ganglia are integral to how we develop habits. Habits? What does *that* have to do with selling a laboratory service? Stay with me.

Of the countless number of clients and prospects I have visited over four decades, several things have been consistent when it comes to conversations. One of the most conventional comments from an assistant preparing lab specimens is, “It’s easy to use XYZ Lab; I know what to do to get the specimens ready.” In other words, the basal ganglia have unleashed their prodigious powers.

### Three Step Process

In Charles Duhigg’s book, “Habits”, he writes about those MIT researchers and how they discovered a simple neurological loop consisting of three steps at the core of every habit. Let’s look at this process from the view of a healthcare provider ordering a lab test.

- **Step #1** is the *Cue*. This equates to the provider wanting a test result.
- **Step #2** is the *Routine*: creating a test requisition, referring the patient to a draw center or obtaining/preparing the specimen in-house, the lab receiving the specimen.
- **Step #3** is the *Reward*: the provider receives a quality result in a timely fashion.



This process becomes easily programmed and develops into the customer's status quo. As a side point, it is important to remember—presuming the client remains satisfied with their lab's service—the status quo is *the* most formidable competitor for any lab salesperson. But once it is understood how habits evolve via a loop system, a salesperson can use this cascading occurrence to help categorize the disparities of his/her lab that may well end up being perceived by the prospect as a better mousetrap. In other words, outsell the competition.

### The Cue

The Cue is straightforward—the provider examines a patient and wants lab testing. But, from a sales rep's position, within the Cue sits the topic of lab education. Examples are:

- An announcement of a new in-house test or profile (or available from the reference lab)
- A disease testing algorithm (e.g., *C. difficile*, celiac, syphilis, HIV, *H. pylori*, etc.)
- A certain methodology (e.g., PCR, EIA, MALDI-TOF, ion-exchange HPLC, etc.)
- A journal abstract outlining a clinical case and its diagnostic lab testing

This edification relates to the representative employing insight selling (vs. solution selling) that elevates the lab and the rep's credibility. It helps develop their respective status into being considered a valued partner versus a conventional, me-too transactional service. Insight selling substantiates the notion that sharing ideas helps to create the relationship and builds rapport.

### The Routine

In the sales profession, knowing your own lab's internal operations versus each competitor equates to the *sine qua non*. Your lab may have differences that make it faster, better, or more convenient for the client and patient. The rep needs to rhetorically ask the question: What does my lab do differently vs. the incumbent lab? To get ideas percolating, ponder the following areas:

- Different specimen collection supplies
- Location of a phlebotomy center (PSC)
- Average PSC patient wait-times
- On-line PSC appointments
- Home phlebotomy services
- Lab location
- Timely EMR integration
- Logistics (third party, pick-up & lab arrival time, STAT pick-ups, dry ice container)
- In-house test production/reporting schedule

- Quality control computer programs and procedures
- Billing (e.g., in-network insurance contracts, cash pay fees)
- Barcode printer
- Client/patient educational material
- Average phone hold times for client services and/or billing department

### **The Reward**

The habit's Reward primarily targets the end-user:

- Good turnaround time
- Quality results
- State-of-the-art methodology
- Report format (including interpretive comments)
- Expedient access to professional consultation
- Client-specific monthly data reports (e.g., test volumes, cancer diagnosis summary report)
- Biopsy report with glass slide photograph

The office manager may also tangentially sense Rewards based on minimal lab issues and quick problem resolution.

All the above bullet points are true-life illustrations that supported reps in gaining new business or—due to their absence or unacceptable alternative—contributed to losing accounts.

### **Final Thoughts**

So—the good ol' basal ganglia stand as our beloved “lump” for our satisfied clients. But it plays a devilish protagonist role when a sales rep tries to wrest business. Status quo and habits are massive competitors.

Notwithstanding ownership and political situations, the obvious challenge for a competing lab marketer involves convincing a satisfied doctor's office to disrupt their habits and try a different vendor. Following an in-depth competitor sleuthing expedition to uncover disparities within the Cue, Routine, and Reward loop, a field representative should feel confident he/she can give a substantive presentation that contrasts with the conventional topics of quality results, good customer service, and great turnaround time. After all, a rep's primary job is to sell *value* and give the clarion call that all labs are not a one-size-fits-all proposition.

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