



# Habits

## Understanding Their Role When Selling Lab Services

By Peter Francis  
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Those who sell laboratory services should learn about a part of our anatomy—a golf ball-sized lump of tissue in the center of our brain filled with multiple nuclei. It's a plural medical term called the basal ganglia. For many years, scientists didn't understand what this "thing" did, except for suspicions that it played a role in certain diseases like Parkinson's. As it turns out, in the early 1990s, researchers at MIT discovered the basal ganglia are essential to how we develop habits.

Among the many physician offices I have visited over the years, a few themes have consistently come up in our conversations. For example, when I ask, "Tell me a couple of things you like about your lab service," the client usually pauses. Their mind searches for answers. "Well... let me think. Off the top of my head, they have a good turnaround time, a convenient service center, and they're integrated with our EMR. Using the lab has become routine. Everything just seems to work relatively smoothly."

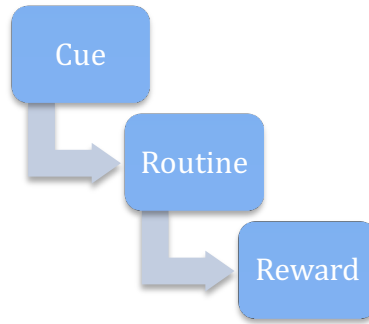
This kind of response directly pinpoints the root cause of *habits*. Habits are part of the larger concept of the status quo. As everyone knows, when lab services operate smoothly without too many irritating glitches, people naturally resist changing the status quo.

Let's do a deeper dive into how habits work.

### Habits: A Three-Step Process

Those MIT researchers identified a straightforward three-step neurological loop that underlies every habit. For instance, let's examine this process from a healthcare provider's point of view when ordering a lab test.

- **Step #1** is the *Cue*. The provider examines a patient and wants a lab result.
- **Step #2** is the *Routine*: select and create a test requisition; obtain the specimen (in-house or draw station); have the lab receive the specimen, report the result, and bill for their work.
- **Step #3** is the *Reward*: the provider receives a timely result.



That's it in a nutshell. But the Routine is the main one of the three that frustrates lab sales reps when they try to get a prospect to use their lab.

### **The Cue**

The Cue is simple: the provider evaluates a patient and orders lab testing. But from a sales rep's point of view, lab education is part of the Cue. Examples include:

- Educating the provider about a new in-house test, profile, or the creation of a custom panel
- Providing a disease testing algorithm (e.g., *C. difficile*, celiac, syphilis, HIV, *H. pylori*, etc.)
- A journal abstract discussing a disease and related lab testing

These suggestions demonstrate how using the Insight Selling technique (in contrast to the standard Solution Selling) enhances the credibility of the lab and the representative. It creates the perception that the lab is a *valued partner* rather than just a typical transactional service. Insight Selling emphasizes sharing relevant ideas to help the client, thereby strengthening the relationship and building rapport. This, in turn, fosters trust (the foundation for every effective salesperson). When trust is built, people tend to make emotional decisions, as emotion influences the sales process far more than logic. Successful reps boost emotion by making positive references to their lab and how it can enhance the doctor's and office's reputation, and most importantly, the healthcare of their patients. But I digress.

### **The Routine**

This is where the rubber meets the road and where competing marketers struggle to stand out. The issue is that you're dealing with people's "mental model": their assumptions, perceptions, opinions, and habits. To address this, it's crucial to understand your lab's operations and identify specific differences compared to your competitors'. This becomes your sales story, enabling you to reposition the incumbent lab. You look for disparities in size, culture, or practices that make it faster, better, or easier for the client and/or patient.

### **The Reward**

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

- Good turnaround time
- Quality results
- State-of-the-art methodology
- EMR lab integration

The office manager and other staff may also see Rewards through service rep visibility and efficient problem resolution.

### **Final Thoughts**

So, for your satisfied clients, the trusty ol' basal ganglia acts as your beloved "lump." But it behaves like a mischievous protagonist whenever you try to beat a competitor. Remember: Habits—which are part of the always-convenient excuse for maintaining the status quo—are your *main* competitors. If someone asks who you compete against, just say, "I compete against habits."

After thoroughly assessing competitors to identify gaps in the Cue, Routine, and Reward loop, a field representative should be able to classify their lab's differences and deliver a repositioning presentation that extends beyond standard offerings such as quality results, local patient service centers, and EMR-integrated results. You'll stand above the general milieu of lab reps as someone who knows their laboratory.

Your sales close can be asking a simple, direct question: "So, Betty, how can we change the office habit so we get *my* lab's requisition in a position to be the one selected?" Don't say another word.

*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. He is the author of over forty-five articles about laboratory sales. Visit the company's website at [www.clinlabsales.com](http://www.clinlabsales.com) for a complete listing of services.*