



# Moving on up



With so many pharmaceutical companies undergoing some sort of restructuring plans as a result of mergers, acquisitions or simply cost-cutting measures, field force worries immediately turn to job security. Apodi's Tony Swift discusses valuable ways to ensure your job isn't one under scrutiny the next time the axe is wielded and how to progress in the new pharmaceutical world.

In the past a competent sales representative could look forward to a long and secure career in the same or similar role, often with the same company. For the more ambitious representative it was also possible to climb a well-defined ladder towards seniority – as field trainer, sales manager, sales director and beyond.

However, much has changed. Sales representative positions have reduced dramatically and the ladder to seniority appears far more difficult to climb. Job security and traditional long-term career planning is disappearing into oblivion. The situation is just as precarious for those half way up the ladder, in first or second-line management roles, and restructuring is affecting job security and career planning throughout companies in the industry.

These seismic changes are not temporary. We are seeing a transition to a new world order in the pharmaceutical industry where:

- Traditional career paths are disappearing
- Management roles are fewer and are just as susceptible to restructuring
- Employees can no longer rely on the organisation to develop their careers – career and personal development is an **individual's** responsibility
- The company needs to provide support and experiences to individuals to learn new ways of adding value to the customer and the company itself
- Creative expertise to address the new NHS is in huge demand by pharmaceutical companies. This presents an enormous opportunity for representatives and managers who may currently be worried about their long-term future in the industry.

## Personal development

I recently interviewed a number of successful pharmaceutical industry executives to assess how they addressed the issue of personal development. Almost all of them stated that they could not have solely relied on the organisations they had worked for to either fully develop their skills or, indeed, their career.

In the majority of cases these successful individuals had made a decision to take personal charge of their careers. By keeping abreast of changes in the industry, anticipating new developments and consistently reviewing and updating their skills and relationships, when changes did occur in the industry or company, they were often well placed to take advantage of the new opportunities these presented.

At Apodi, our resourcing division sees first-hand the changing dynamics of the marketplace. Quality market

access and key account managers are much in demand and are, at times, very difficult to recruit. There are also lots of sales representatives looking for jobs, with many believing they now have to look outside the industry to secure their future. However, representatives who are aware of the changing dynamics and have adapted their skills are now often successfully obtaining those market access and KAM roles.

## Taking charge

One conversation with a successful executive led to a more in-depth discussion about what sales representatives can do if they want a long-term career in the pharmaceutical industry. The executive detailed the steps he had taken, and I believe this serves as an interesting case study for those unsure about their prospects in the industry. He said: "It quickly became apparent

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to me that to take charge of my career I had to focus on a number of key areas.” To summarise, these were:

- To develop a clear view of the future of the industry and the likely impact of this on an existing position and potential future roles
- Be successful in a current role – believe that new opportunities will only arise following success
- Find a systematic way of increasing knowledge, skills and relationships – do this to differentiate yourself from colleagues.

### The future

In a previous article, *Leading the way – Pharmaceutical Field*, September 2011, I mentioned a couple of quotes. One was from a leading member of the NHS responding to how pharmaceutical companies could more actively engage with the health service. They said: “Don’t just bring pills and gadgets in the future, bring us value added solutions that drive the QIPP agenda with a documented and robust cost/benefit analysis.”

The other, by Sir Ian Carruthers, NHS Chief Executive Innovation Review Team, stated: “The pharmaceutical industry needs to think more in terms of working in partnership with the NHS rather than just sending in the sales force... the NHS needs your disruptive contribution to help NHS reform, but too few companies are coming forward.”

Despite such prominent views from the NHS, many companies are still sending out sales representatives with a very limited agenda – primarily delivering some key messages about a particular product. Indeed, some observers believe that the pharmaceutical sales representative is one of the world’s most underutilised

resources! And, given the limited ambitions of each visit, it is perhaps not surprising that HCPs are continuing to reduce access.

To counter this, companies are deploying key account managers whose role is to provide value over and above the ‘noise’ associated with a traditional rep visit. We believe there will be a gradual merging of the functions of sales representative and KAM in the future. This means that everyone representing a company in the field will need to operate to KAM principles and provide significantly more value than before. Indeed, our research shows that historically excellent representatives have effectively operated to KAM principles, irrespective of the training and direction received from head office.

### Current success

Whilst each sales representative has key performance indicators (KPIs) to meet – often merely call rates, we believe that individuals need to focus on providing added value to their customers and their companies irrespective of their targets. By taking a more strategic view, identifying the key stakeholders, delivering and developing solutions with the help of their company’s marketing, medical and promotional functions, representatives will become a more valued partner to both parties.

Representatives can only do this if they are experts in their products, the therapy area concerned, the care pathway and the local healthcare economy. Additionally, they will need knowledge of best practice and potential solutions.

Unfortunately, to some this may be perceived as going ‘beyond brief’ and will sometimes result in knockbacks. However, we believe the risks attached to this are far less than continuing with the limited role noted above. The risks

of a representative failing to distinguish themselves and failing to provide real value will leave them susceptible at times of restructuring, and with fewer skills needed to attract jobs in the new healthcare economy.

### Using initiative

Fundamental to taking charge of your career is to take responsibility for personal development. A colleague told me about how he had done this successfully with a process that included the following:

#### A) Yearly audit – produce an annual plan that addresses the following:

- I am currently known for...
- Next year I want to be known for...
- My personal development last year included...
- I currently differentiate myself from my colleagues by...

#### B) Quarterly plan – each quarter produce an action plan:

- I aim to develop a more in-depth knowledge of the product, therapy area, care pathway and local healthcare economy by...
- I will develop closer relationships with key stakeholders in my company by...
- I will develop closer relationships with key customers by...
- I will develop a better understanding of best practice and consider the most appropriate solutions for my customers’ problems by...

#### C) Quarterly assessment – assess the potential to drive value into internal/external customers against the following parameters:

- Do I demonstrate more than financial value to key accounts?
- Have I increased the number of internal/external relationships where I add real value?
- Do I possess specialist knowledge that I can share with colleagues/customers to add value?
- Have I influenced any changes to the benefit of the company or customers?

This learning and knowledge was primarily delivered through personal research using books, magazines and the internet. My colleague also constantly suggested projects that he could work on, even in his own time, that he felt could transform the value

## Quick Read

- Pharma sales representatives could previously map out their careers within the industry.
- But restructuring and new sales models have brought seismic changes – particularly towards career development.
- Individuals should no longer rely on internal career training and development schemes. They should take the initiative to improve their own talents to stand out from colleagues and add extra security to their job.
- To do this, create quarterly and annual plans and assessments to increase knowledge and skills
- Pharma companies are searching for sales reps to provide new and innovative ways to promote value – using KAM principles can help you become this person and map a way to progress within the industry.

being provided to customers. Many of these were rejected, particularly initially, but eventually he developed close enough relationships with people in the company who recognised the value these projects might create. These projects were a very valuable learning tool and a superb way of displaying his talents.

### In summary

Pharmaceutical companies are looking for new and innovative ways of providing value to customers. As decision making within the NHS increasingly shifts to those regularly interacting with the end user (patients), the opportunity for primary care representatives to adopt a more customer-centric approach based on KAM principles grows exponentially.

The advantages of this may lead to less complicated field force structures, reduced costs and additional value added for customers. With such developments, companies will be in a better position to assist each individual in developing their careers to meet the demands of the new healthcare economy.

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