



PODCAST

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A LOYALTY FORCE

Mike Capaldi In your opinion, what are the biggest hurdles that pharma sales people face today?

DUANE SPARKS From my experience, we're having some difficulty establishing trust with doctors and earning the right to get more of their time. It seems like we're being squeezed and getting less time rather than more. To go along with that, it's very important to use this time productively in order to get more time in the future. I'm also seeing that it's difficult to gain "appropriate commitments" from doctors. Those are the three things

that I think are the greatest challenges we are facing today in the pharma marketplace.

MC We've heard similar things pertaining to sales professionals' issues in this field. Additionally, doctors now have significantly limited the time available to see salespeople.

What's your advice for sales representatives on this issue?

DS In my opinion, the time limitations that we, as salespeople, are experiencing are a symptom of the problem. Think

of it this way: When customers (in this case, doctors) make a buying decision, there are a series of minor decisions that are made. Pharmaceutical and medical salespeople are selling appointments to meet with doctors. Appointments become the product, not pharmaceuticals. We normally think that we're selling a pharmaceutical or a medical product. We need to change our thinking here. The value of a meeting is what we are selling, and the price decision that the doctor makes is not about a product, but is about the time that they will give you.

The doctor will invest time based on the

MIKE CAPALDI, Associate Vice President for Sales Training and Leadership Development at **sanofi-aventis**, interviews **DUANE SPARKS**, Chairman and Founder of The Sales Board and creator and author of *Action Selling*, about the trends related to sales in the pharmaceutical field and how to transform a sales force into a loyalty force

perceived value of the meeting. It's just like any other buying decision: There's a cost/benefit, which has to be a good value. What we're suffering from is that armies of reps have used up the trust and goodwill of the doctors by all too frequently delivering low value meetings. The product comparison conversations that are taking place are tedious and boring to the doctor. Simply put, the meeting is devalued and the doctor is unwilling to pay a high price (in this case, time is the currency) for this.

MC How does what you're saying take into account that many reps are competing with generic medications that are very similar and a fraction of the cost to the patient?

DS I think that price competition has caused pharmaceutical companies to make some serious marketing and selling errors. Put yourself in

the doctor's position and imagine what it might be like to hear product discussions and comparisons every time you meet with a rep. Marketing has directed many sales forces to become "talking brochures." In response to the forces of price competition and the limits on the time available for the meeting, marketing has narrowed the discussion to a point where the customer is attaching a lower value to meeting with salespeople.

Unless the reps and the companies they represent are able to create a valuable experience for the doctor and patient, there is no credible reason why a doctor will use a more expensive brand. And if you can't deliver that value during the appointment, this cycle of not getting much of the doctors' time will continue.

MC What are you suggesting that we do to change this paradigm?

DS I'm going to take a big risk and tell you that,

from my experience, selling in the medical space is not as different as the companies and people who work in this market believe it is. Cloning of products and services has been around for a long time. And buyers — whether they are doctors or c-level executives in corporate America — value their time and only give it to people that they trust.

The battle for loyalty to a sales rep, company and product is waged in the prospect's mind — in this case, the doctor. You earn loyalty during every interaction that you have with the doctor. Pharma companies have to realize that loyalty is a company asset. The human connection that is made between rep and doctor either increases that loyalty or decreases that loyalty every time they meet.

Meetings need to be valuable and enjoyable to the customer. When meetings are centered on product features and benefits, they aren't fun and the meeting becomes a commodity. So the following is what needs to happen.

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The biggest problem that I see with today's pharma sales calls are that the doctor gets the feeling that the patient is left out of the equation far too often. I'll call what I'm going to describe as "Patient Centered Action Selling." With this approach, you discuss one patient at a time. You demonstrate your interest in serving a specific patient's needs. You show that you care about this patient as much as the doctor does.

We're not trying to win all of the patients in one meeting. We talk about a particular patient and get one sale made during each meeting. By doing this, you demonstrate your commitment to applying your product to the right situations. Every patient is different even though the diagnosis might wind up being the same.

The doctor needs to see you as a consultant. When this pattern is repeated over time, loyalty is forged one call at a time. In the end, you'll get a greater share of the doctor's time in the future, and your product will be prescribed more frequently.

MC What are the most important selling skills for the salesperson to have in order to increase the loyalty equation with a doctor?

DS There are five selling skills that I'll call "critical" to making the switch to selling like a consultant, building value into your meetings with a doctor and earning their trust and loyalty.

Managing the Doctor/Rep Relationship. This involves having a deep level of understanding about the minor decisions that all doctors naturally make and matching your sales process with the sequence of those decisions.

Sales Call Planning. Having a realistic plan for gaining a commitment from the doctor and developing a questioning plan for each call. Sales calls should not be pitches; that's not how a consultant behaves.

Questioning Skills. From our research, 68 percent of sales reps lack solid fundamentals of questioning. This is the most important tool in every rep's kit. Unfortunately, they're either improperly used or become rusty.

Presentation Skills. I don't mean spewing large quantities of data about your product. Doctors will want you to zero in on solutions to their patients' needs.

Gaining Commitment. Every meeting should end in a commitment. The key is to determine that commitment that you'd like to gain before you meet and accomplish this during the time that you have with the doctor.

When these specific skills are improved, you'll see a remarkable improvement in a rep's ability to gain trust and loyalty from doctors. They'll get more time, too.

MC Since the size of sales forces are being cut these days, what's the most efficient way to teach these skills and get reps to use them in the field?

DS I'm going out on a limb again. The fact is, 90 percent of sales training fails to produce a measurable improvement in performance. Sales training is a multibillion-dollar business, and I can't think of another sizable industry with a failure rate like that. The problem is that training programs have not been constructed properly and rarely transfer into changed behavior.

Fortunately, my company has created a proven formula for the transfer of skill to the field. When it's used in the recommended way, it works every time.

In a nutshell, the following is what I've learned about transfer.

- Transfer requires multiple tools, and they need to work together in a system. Each tool needs to have an appropriate level of measurement and management accountability.

■ Second, you'll need a well documented sales process to follow. You just can't reinforce what you can't see. And, you need to focus on the Critical Selling Skills that I mentioned earlier.

■ Third, the process of transfer is usually seen as something that you do after training, such as reinforcement methods. My experience is that the transfer process begins before the learning experience, and it permeates the entire learning process. This includes preparing students to learn and preparing the environment that they will go back to. The field management that salespeople work with have to be experts on the skills that they're teaching in order to support it.

■ Fourth, motivation is a huge factor in learning. Salespeople have to want to practice the skills that they are learning. They need to be completely "sold" on the training. This sale is no different than any other; it has to be based on the fact that students see their needs being met and the investment of their time providing them with a return. If they don't see this, transfer won't happen.

Finally, if you want loyal customers who will gladly give you their time, you need loyal employees. Loyalty is a valuable asset for any company. It's not earned through a loyalty program; it's earned on every sales interaction that your sales force has with the doctor. When they do it well, your sales force becomes a loyalty force.

MC If someone wanted more information on how to build a loyalty-building sales force, where would they go?

DS I would suggest that they visit our Web site at www.ActionSelling.com. I have written a book on loyalty, *How to Turn to Your Sales Force into a Loyalty Force*, which is also available on our Web site. **FP**



MIKE CAPALDI is based in the Bridgewater, N.J., headquarters of sanofi-aventis, and he is in his 10th year with the organization. Responsible for all training and development of nearly 10,000 field and headquarter-based employees, he has directed the implementation of all phases of training for groups including sales professionals, sales leadership, field medical, account management and brand management teams.



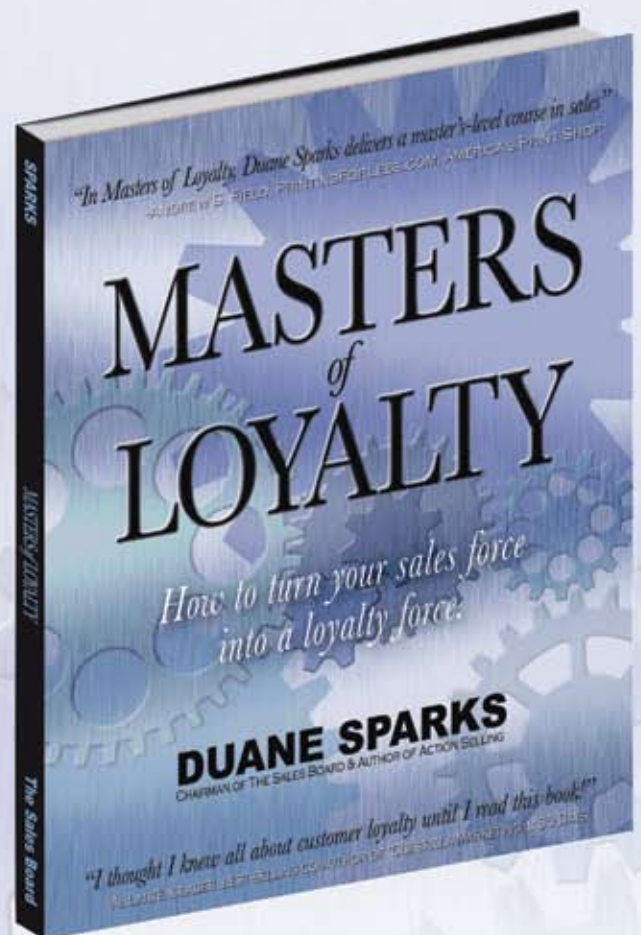
DUANE SPARKS is chairman of The Sales Board, a Minneapolis-based sales methodology and training firm that has trained and certified more than 400,000 salespeople from more than 3,500 groups in the system and skills of Action Selling. Mr. Sparks is author and creator of the Action Selling Sales Training system. Action Selling helps companies create a culture of sustained business growth in any industry through its research-proven selling process: an easy-to-follow road map that shows salespeople how to consistently win the sale, shorten sales cycles, protect margins and cultivate loyal customers.

How to Turn Your Sales Force Into .. A Loyalty Force



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