



SPBT Hot Topic

A white paper from the Society of Pharmaceutical and Biotech Trainers

What Is an SPBT Hot Topic?

A brief, informative white paper designed to educate members on an issue of importance to our industry. Articles will address challenges and provide tips and best practices for directors and other training professionals.

How are L&D departments shifting their focus away from new rep training—and toward developing skills of a more experienced sales force?

When sales forces were at their largest, the mission of learning and development organizations at life sciences companies was simple: get the new people trained. But during today's economic downturn, some L&D departments are facing an identity crisis. Without a constant influx of new hires to train, finding a purpose becomes more difficult for many training organizations, particularly those whose lifeblood was sales training.

In the current environment, many training heads are turning their focus toward rebuilding and retraining the skills of more experienced salespeople, including a growing number of burned-out reps faced with fewer opportunities for advancement and rewards.

More Bang for the Budget

What can L&D executives do to improve their training for experienced sales people?

Allergan, for example, is investing more of its current budget toward experienced rep training, compared with its investment just one to two years ago, says Jim Trunick, Senior Director of Corporate Training and Development. "As the value of experienced reps reflects greater customer and industry knowledge, we want to retain that value," Trunick says. "We aren't adding headcount against this effort, but rather more development programming."

To enhance its learning opportunities for experienced reps with more than 10 years of experience, Allergan has added what it calls an Executive Sales Summit. This event creates a customized learning environment for experienced reps to share best practices, learn new skills, and build their value as true sales professionals.

New hire training is still a priority, but its focus has changed over the last 18 months. "Due to managed care shifts, legislative/compliance issues, and product

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requirements, we've lengthened their initial training class time. Because we have hired more experienced salespeople, we are bringing the more advanced sales skills programs to them in the earlier stages of training," Trunick adds.

No Time to Waste

For many sales training heads, one of the greatest challenges for the next 12 months is adapting their existing training curriculum to the changing needs of the sales team and marketplace. "As the market and environment changes, we must acclimatize quickly," says Dawn Brehm, Vice President of Sales Training at GlaxoSmithKline, where she oversees Specialty, Pharmaceutical Training, and Managed Markets. "Shifting the key role of sales training from being heavily weighted toward new representative training to developing the skills of our current sales force to add value to an evolving customer will require new approaches."

While these are short-term challenges for life sciences companies, the long-range outlook is also a concern for many training leaders who wonder what the sales model might look like in 10 years. Some experts predict a future in which smaller, specialty sales teams are the norm, particularly as big pharma's blockbuster pipeline is predicted to remain dry for years to come. Another possibility is for companies to deliver fewer, but more satisfying, interactions with providers, perhaps using more clinically focused sales teams.

Better Business Skills Needed

It's true that federal and state regulations have restricted provider-representative interactions in many markets in recent years. But some of the access issues are the result of customer issues, not necessarily legislative concerns. "We're seeing more companies taking steps to develop the business acumen of their sales

forces, with a renewed emphasis on their more seasoned representatives," says SPBT Executive Director Brian Fagan. "Physician satisfaction is slipping, and it's almost certain that provider access will continue to decline. As a result, it's going to be increasingly important for each customer interaction to deliver value—not just service, but real value."

How L&D Leaders Can Target Experienced Reps

To enhance the development of your senior sales staff:

- Create a special event for your most tenured reps, such as those with five, seven, or 10 years of field experience. Develop a curriculum that stresses business, clinical, and service-related skills.
- Prioritize what needs to get done in the L&D department. "Find the most impactful ways to contribute and exceed expectations," says GSK's Brehm. "Training must be a catalyst for sharing best practices and finding ways to simplify our deliverables as the marketplace becomes more complicated."
- Create and follow a strategic plan, gain alignment with the business on what training activities will impact the organization, and deliver the tactics in unique ways using the best technology.
- Search out opportunities to beef up your department's training opportunities for tenured representatives with off-the-shelf, on-demand courses. Possible training topics include project management, managed care, and team selling.
- Work as a team to create synergies, increase skill sets, and develop internal expertise to add value in an environment in which companies are looking for lean departments. ●



The Society of Pharmaceutical and Biotech Trainers (SPBT) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to providing the resources and education trainers need to develop their knowledge, skills, and career. Membership is available to trainers in the pharmaceutical, biotech, medical device, and diagnostic industries. SPBT is a worldwide nonprofit organization aimed at supporting trainers at pharmaceutical, biotech, medical device, and diagnostic companies. SPBT was established in 1971 and originally named the National Society of Pharmaceutical Sales Trainers. Today, SPBT has a membership of more than 1,200 trainers employed by over 300 pharmaceutical, biotech, medical device, and diagnostic companies around the globe. Visit www.spbt.org for more information.