



Rapid Change Charges Up Pharma Sales Franchise During Phaseout

By Gail Snyder

Here's the scenario. You work as a manager or sales representative for one of the world's largest pharmaceutical and biotech companies. Your group or franchise specializes in selling and marketing drugs that focus on a particular medical condition. As time goes on, newer drugs for this condition begin to overtake your product and shrink your market share. Downsizing has already left managers with larger territories, hence more to do, and leadership

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informs you that in a little over a year, your franchise will be dissolved, but hopefully, a new position can be found for you within the organization. What do you do? Well, if you're this field manager, you stay with the group and achieve increasing sales on the ten-year-old product that competes in a declining market until they phase your franchise out.

WHAT?!

Faced with such circumstances most people would tend to start looking around for another position or at least slack off on their efforts, but using a process called Coaching for Rapid Change™, the managers and representatives of this franchise excelled in a less than ideal situation. As Jackie, field training manager, explains, "We knew that our people would have to get jobs in other areas, so their sales performance in the last year of the franchise was going to be very important. We needed to show success in a relatively short period of time, so motivation of both our managers and sales reps was a key driver."

With the support of ADI, a consultancy focused on helping organizations accelerate business performance, the group embraced Coaching for Rapid Change, an innovative

approach for shaping and improving behavior on a regular basis through real-time feedback and action—you might even call it deliberate, ongoing tweaking. With an emphasis on communicating specifically, concisely, and precisely, this approach creates circular, continuous change. It begins with deciding on the smallest change in behavior that will make the biggest impact on results and then putting it to the test. "We talked with managers, for instance, about what changes they wanted to see in their representatives," explains Jackie. "We found that the reps were walking out after delivering information and didn't really ask for any action on the physician's part. That's one behavior we wanted to change."

After a manager-to-rep discussion, the sales representatives began asking targeted physicians and customers to commit by doing such behaviors as placing the prescribing information next to the prescription pad or in the folders of patients indicated for the drug. Then the reps followed up with more frequent office visits or phone calls. "They really started asking for specific actions from the customer. We were attaining customer and manager change through the rapid change of the representatives," says Jackie. "It just flowed that way."

On biweekly and then monthly conference calls—the managers with their sales reps and then the managers with the management team—each caller was given 3 to 5 minutes to share what they were doing, how it was working, and the results so far. Then each conference caller was allowed the same brief amount of time for giving feedback following the 3-point criteria of talking about what you liked, what you need more clarification on, and what you yourself might do differently. With this technique, a moderator politely intervenes when a person exceeds his/her talk time, keeping the meetings brief, informative, and positive. "The managers, for example, take notes



during this opportunity to get ideas from each other. They go out and put some of the ideas into place, and then report back on the results during the next conference call,” says Jackie. She advises that setting the rules up front and then adhering to them is a crucial element of the meetings. “Be consistent, because if you slip up and let someone go on longer than the allotted time you are breaking your own rules and you run into difficulty,” she says. “This way nobody dominates the conversation, everybody gets an equal voice, and it’s without rank. It adds discipline to the meetings, so no one has to stand there and listen to feedback all afternoon.” The ability to conduct succinct meetings over the phone proves advantageous for everyone as long as they adhere to the guidelines of no cell phones or other interruptions during the call. This focused approach is also maintained in face-to-face meetings, resulting in more getting accomplished throughout the work week.

As Jackie states, “You always want to do the right thing for the patient and our job is to place the drug where it is always the right thing for the patient.” However, she acknowledges that in the pharmaceutical business, competitors sometimes introduce a product that edges your product out or beats your innovation to the market. It’s just a reality of the industry. In this case, remarkably, the franchise associates came out on top. “A behavioral goal that we were working for was keeping a 100 percent engaged workforce through a very difficult time of change and we did that,” she says. “We lost 1 out of 45 people in that 15-month period of time. Turnover went to zero. We lost no managers, although one manager was promoted and a manager in training took that position.”

Jackie attributes steadily rising sales and lack of attrition to an innovative and open leader who was willing to ask, “What can we



do to keep people in this franchise when every reason is that they should leave?” It was answered with the application of Coaching for Rapid Change. “And we did it!” says Jackie. “The managers stayed engaged because they were working at specific behaviors and saw success from those behaviors and the same can be said for the reps and the customers. The positive reinforcement that you get from seeing the customer do what you ask them to do is 20 times more than you get from a manager telling you ‘good job.’ They saw success, they saw action, and they saw their sales increase with those select physicians. It’s also quite a kick when the physicians respect you and the value you bring enough that they allow you to call on them weekly. That alone is a positive reinforcer.”

Currently all of the franchise reps and managers are being repositioned within the company. Jackie states that she will absolutely use the Coaching for Rapid Change approach in her new training role. She also believes the process is flexible enough to apply in areas other than sales because it enables any group to “Be precise, be concise, and then be done!”

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[About the Author]

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Gail Snyder is a staff writer for Aubrey Daniels International. For the past 27 years, she has worked with clients to share their stories of the impact the science of behavior has had on their people and their business. In addition, Gail was the editor of Performance Management Magazine from 1987 to 2004.

[About ADI]

Regardless of your industry or expertise, one thing remains constant: People power your business. Since 1978 Aubrey Daniels International (ADI) has been dedicated to accelerating the business and safety performance of companies worldwide by using positive, practical approaches grounded in the science of behavior and engineered to ensure long-term sustainability. ADI provides clients with the tools and methodologies to help move people toward positive, results-driven accomplishments. Our clients accelerate strategy execution while fostering employee engagement and positive accountability at all levels of their organization.

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