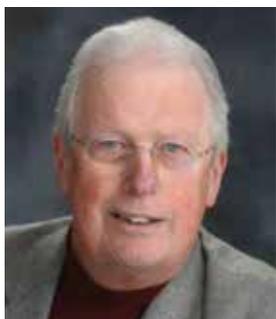


Creating an Open Sales Environment

The value in using leadership skills instead of the typical sales tactics to achieve success



By Patrick T. Malone

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I recently read a posting on the Harvard Business Review Blog Network by Joseph Grenny entitled “4 Ways Leaders Can Create a Candid Culture.” I have long believed that the most successful distribution reps use leadership skills instead of the typical sales tactics to achieve and maintain their level of success. That led me to consider the four action steps in Grenny’s post in terms of creating an open sales environment. I pass my observations on for your consideration.

Praise publicly

My research has shown the most successful distribution reps have more successful practices than the average rep. That just doesn’t happen by accident. Those reps actively engage in helping their hospitals become more successful, and that doesn’t occur without individuals within that practice going above and beyond the norm.

There are many opportunities for the rep to acknowledge, in a very public way, when someone in that practice has done something to improve the practice and aide in the success of that rep. Letting that person know you appreciate their efforts is nice, but doing it publically, at a lunch-and-learn or in front of their peers, is nicer still.

Prime the pump

Too often in our interactions we seek only positive feedback and attempt to avoid the negatives. This may sound strange, but giving your customers permission to complain creates a comfortable relationship that leads to a sustainable competitive advantage.

A prime example might be the current saline solution price increases. Acknowledging both the current production shortages and the increasing costs for the available product is a good start, but even better is to acknowledge the accompanying



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emotion, i.e. “that’s frustrating for everyone.” The average rep is going into a call hoping the client doesn’t ask, while the successful rep is actually encouraging that discussion.

Lead by teaching

Animal health manufacturers and many reps believe that teaching is limited to a recitation of the features (what it is) and the functions (what it does or does better). While that is an important and essential part of education, the real payoff in teaching is when you describe the benefits (what I will have) of a new product or service.

The most successful reps always mention the fact and the feeling when teaching a client about the benefits, i.e. “so this new flea and tick control will create higher compliance rates and give you the satisfaction that you are doing the very best for both the animal and its owner.”

Sacrifice your ego

The most successful distribution reps I know have a very well developed ego, which is necessary to deal with all the rejection, but still press ahead with a positive attitude. But that ego is well in check on their calls. Whether it is the receptionist, the technician, the practice manager or the hospital owner, the most successful reps make that person

feel as if they are the most important in the room at that point in time.

They do that because that receptionist is a decision maker – he or she can open the door and provide access for that rep. Technicians or practice managers are decision makers in that they can influence the ultimate buyer. So the most successful reps sacrifice their ego by seeing themselves as the decision-getter and their role as helping the

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decision-makers make the biggest committed decision they can handle today.

So while Grenny’s intention was to help leaders create a more candid culture, I’m convinced these four tips will enable sales reps to create a more open sales environment and enhance their sustainable competitive advantage. Of course you are the ultimate decision maker. What do you think? The first person to send me their thoughts and mailing address will receive a free copy of our book “Cracking the Code to Leadership.” ■