



Making Your Training Investment Pay Off

By Juanita Brown and Robert J. Oosdyke - Health Care Furnishings, Inc.

In last week's article, we posed this reality...

If you are pursuing healthcare furniture sales opportunities without a full understanding of the needs of healthcare's specialized buyers and specifiers, and the process they use to procure furniture, you could be hurting your reputation more than you are helping it.

To be professional, you must possess the knowledge to navigate through the procurement process required to sell furnishings to healthcare customers, having respect for all the players from materials managers to hospital end-users, and the A&D firm, local Integrated Delivery Network (IDN) and the Group Purchasing Organization (GPO) acting on behalf of healthcare end-users.

Today's question is... "How do we implement a training plan that will really work?"

A sad truth about the "training function" is too many dollars have been spent on so-called "training activities" by well-meaning organizations that didn't produce the desired results. At best, this has left a serious misperception that the training function can go away without consequence during periods of belt tightening. At worst, it has created skeptics who do not support a training function even in good times. Just look at our industry! During tough economic times when our survival depends on our level of professionalism, almost every contract furniture company has decreased or eliminated its training function to cut costs.

When discussing his need to educate and train his people, a very wise dealer principal once said, "I have to be frugal, but I can't be stupid about it!"

His comment sheds light on several issues relating to our challenge of keeping ourselves professionally skilled and knowledgeable. Yes, today we must be frugal. Intelligent frugality does not mean that you don't spend money. It means that you spend no more money than necessary to get the result that makes the investment a wise decision. As it relates to training, it means that you pay for "doing it right the first time" so that

you don't have to spend any more than is necessary to get the results you are after.

The question is NOT... training or no training? You simply will not succeed at tapping into the revenue stream of healthcare sales without the skills and knowledge defined above. The only way to fill skill and knowledge gaps is to "train" human beings using methods that confirm that they do indeed know and understand and that they can actually perform the skill. And, during the training process, you must measure both the knowledge and the performance progress of trainees.

So... how do we "do it right the first time" to truly support an increase in healthcare sales?

We begin by acknowledging and leveraging three facts:

- First... human beings must BOTH learn new information and physically practice the application of this information many times before real change occurs in the way they "go out and sell furniture." This truth is the reason our military doesn't just put new soldiers through a web-based training boot camp before sending them into combat. This truth is the reason the football team doesn't just study game tapes before going out on the football field. It's why you can't just buy a book and learn to play the guitar... and there are lots of fine books on how to play the guitar. If we really want to change the way we work, we simply must PRACTICE! Training must include practice!

- Second... as human beings we can never escape the need to PRACTICE. And practice is TRAINING! Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods would both tell you that the need for training only increases as you get better at what you do. The better you get, the more you have to lose by not training to keep your knowledge and skills sharpened. It is a big error in judgment to think you can hire someone who is beyond the need for training or that your star salespeople outgrow the need for training or the need for practice. This is a misconception that can damage the health of your selling organization!

- Third... even the best improvements in knowledge and skill will not produce results when the work process does not allow newly learned behaviors to be implemented on the job. When managers themselves do not have the knowledge and skill, you can bet the investment in training the sales rep will reap a "less than desired" result. Why? Because the manager is the coach. The manager creates the process within which people work and are held accountable. Imagine a bunch of star football players on the field without a coach.

To do it right and to make your training investment turn into increased sales revenue in healthcare, you must:

- Start with the coaches, the implementers, the members of your team who are responsible for the process in which your sales function operates... your managers. The very first step is to ensure your managers have the knowledge and skill it takes to be successful. Then ensure they have adequate training resources to impart the skill and knowledge to the players in the field. Lastly, and most importantly, ensure they have ongoing training resources dedicated to maintaining achieved levels of skill and knowledge among the players, your field salespeople. Position training as a management tool.

- Understand that "training for knowledge" is only half of the work required. The other half required is "training for skill" and requires a different approach. The most efficient way to effectively "train for knowledge" is through a self-paced approach, like web-based training, for example. On the other hand, "training for skill" requires a hands-on, workshop approach, the opportunity to take the shot over and over again when it doesn't affect the score of the game... a setting that allows people to "just do it" over and over until it becomes intuitive. Realize that an "all-on-the-web" training approach will not work alone. Realize that an "all-in-the-classroom" training approach will work, but alone, it's too expensive. Implement a "blended" approach, such as a combo of web-based and workshop training, to build professionalism.

- Realize that human beings never lose the need to practice. We never get so skilled and knowledgeable that we no longer need training. Building knowledge and skill is only the first step. The real driver of results is our commitment to continuous reinforcement training for the purposes of staying on top of our game. Dedicate resources to continuous training to

maintain professionalism.

In last week's article, we asked, "Does your strategic plan for tapping into the growing vertical market of healthcare specifically define how you will build the knowledge and the necessary skills for your sales organization to successfully pursue healthcare business?"

This week we ask, "Does this strategic plan define the sensible methods you will use to ensure a return on your training investment?"

Designed specifically for the contract furniture industry, HCFI is offering "Selling to the Healthcare Buyer," a "new business development" program providing web-based and classroom education on the healthcare marketplace and the healthcare buying process that puts in motion the selling activities resulting in success with healthcare customers. The combined experience of healthcare expert, Robert J. Oosdyke, and furniture industry veterans and training experts, Juanita Brown, Steven Smith, and Royce Robinson, culminates to provide this new resource.

HCFI will be presenting the "Health Care Furnishings Executive Forum," during NeoCon in June, bringing together key executives from Group Purchasing Organizations (GPO), Integrated Delivery Networks (IDN), furniture manufacturers, dealers, independent rep groups, and A&D. You will hear first hand the issues relating to the sales/marketing of products and meeting healthcare customer expectations. If you are serious about selling in the healthcare market, don't miss this opportunity. This program is being held on Tuesday, June 15 from 8:15 am to 12:30 pm at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, Chicago Merchandise Mart. Seating is limited! For a registration form, email info@hcfurninc.com.

Click [HERE](#) to download a form.

Registration fees are: Prior to May 15, 2004 - 1st attendee: \$199 each - additional attendees: \$179 each.

After May 15, 2004 - 1st attendee: \$249 each - additional attendees: \$229 each.

For a thorough discussion of your sales opportunities within healthcare, HCFI provides a two-hour on-site presentation, "Education in Healthcare," delivered and customized to your organization. It provides a thorough overview of everything you need to know about pursuing business in the dynamic and growing industry of healthcare!

For information on HCFI's seminars, consulting and training programs, contact HCFI at info@hcfurninc.com or phone 949-500-



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