



## Learning to GROW

When it comes to the essential task of coaching customer-facing teams, first-line managers need more than just models, tools and templates; they need the right mind-set too

**The role of a regional sales manager has changed a lot during his time in the pharmaceutical industry,** says Gary Killington of PI Partnership. “I have seen the same cycle in many companies across the industry, where regional sales managers are transformed into regional business managers with greater responsibility for sales analysis, key accounts and reporting. Companies have created or recruited managers with strong analytical skills but I worry that the spreadsheets and reports are getting in the way of the vital task of coaching the teams to develop skills,” he says.

With smaller and more specialised teams seeing fewer but potentially more important customers, companies are coming to realise the importance of investing in their customer-facing teams whether they be commercial or medical. “Coaching from managers is often seen as the best route to develop and enhance skills but how much time are managers actually spending with them and how much of that time is spent actively coaching?” asks Gary.

Many managers are not yet fully equipped for the role, he says. “We work with all teams from sales reps, key account managers and MSLs to regional managers and beyond – and I worry that some companies are not putting in the time and budget needed to train their first-line managers.”

Those companies that do offer training often focus solely on coaching models, says Gary. “Simply taking managers out of the field for a few days to get a refresher on GROW or another coaching model and do some role-play is not going to change their belief in coaching or improve their ability to coach well. Awareness alone doesn’t make you a better coach,” he says.

### **Managers (and companies) need the following:**

- A process and/or approach (GROW is the most common)
- Ways to apply the model – practising in real-life situations with real doctors and customers in a controlled environment is the best option
- An efficient way to measure the outputs of a field visit – usually a robust field visit/coaching evaluation form with both quantitative and qualitative measures

- Finally, a way to capture the data is important but analysing it – and acting on it – is essential – there are a range of software packages available to track, capture and analyse the outputs of coaching days.

Coaching training should also equip managers with a positive mind-set, says Gary. “Managers that have a positive attitude towards the coaching process can then convince their teams of the value of coaching and to underline what they can gain through it.”

Recently, Gary and his colleagues at the PI Partnership have been harnessing innovative techniques based on recent neuroscience research. “We have been looking at cutting-edge work into the application of neuroscience and positivity in the workplace, especially from a leadership perspective, which can be used to make coaches more effective. Also, we have had remarkable success applying NLP – neurolinguistic programming – techniques to make coaching more effective and messages more sticky. These are exciting innovations.”

To ensure customer-facing teams and first-line managers are equipped to operate in the ever-changing healthcare environment, contact Gary on [garykillington@pi-partnership.com](mailto:garykillington@pi-partnership.com).

### **CHECKLIST: COMPANIES SHOULD ASK THEMSELVES:**

1. Am I confident I know how much time my managers spend in the field?
2. What percentage of this time is spent actively coaching?
3. When managers are coaching, what types of coaching are they conducting?
4. What are the outputs of that coaching? Are they the right ones?
5. Am I capturing the outputs of the coaching and who analyses them?
6. How do we ensure coaching complements other training and development interventions?
7. Who is responsible for first-line manager ongoing development?

