



SALES LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

TAP Pharmaceutical Products engages and develops leaders within their sales organization.

By Eric Otterbein and Jami York

For large, global organizations, online learning provides reduced travel time and costs, 24/7 access to courses, and quick integration and deployment of learning throughout the company. But a successful initiative, whether online or in the classroom, is one that ties a leader's individual development with the organization's performance management system. This is especially true for leadership development initiatives.

By creating a transparent and seamless accountability system that is tied to the strategic objectives of the organization, managers are active participants in their own professional development. This system enables organizations to better measure a manager's developmental progress, to examine how new skills are being applied, and to explore which areas still need improvement.

For TAP Pharmaceutical Products, employee development initiatives that are tied to the company's strategic goals are not only instrumental in developing the management and leadership competencies of its geographically dispersed field sales management group—regional managers, district managers, and specialty managers—but also for measuring performance improvements as well.

With the help of leadership development company Ninth House, TAP developed a leadership development initiative that gives the sales management group a variety of leadership and management development courses with a simple click of the mouse. This multifaceted program provides interactive training on strategic competencies, and improves the long-term performance and retention of key managers. More importantly, the program supports one of the company's core missions: to enhance lives by delivering high-quality pharmaceutical products for patients.

Consistency and flexibility

Pharmaceutical companies typically have a range of products under development and on the market. Due to the intricacy of these highly specialized products, the company's regional managers, district managers, and specialty managers need sophisticated training to provide accurate information to physicians, pharmacists, and nurses.

Previously, TAP approached training and development independently—basing it largely on the experience and levels of its field sales management group. The company determined that inconsistent training slowed the transfer of knowledge from the field sales managers to the sales force.

To combat this speed-to-market and speed-to-knowledge challenge, TAP assembled representatives from the sales organization, sales management training group, corporate management, and human resources to identify core competencies and skills needed for each field sales manager position. The new skill and competency definitions that were developed lessened the confusion among managers, enabled more accu-

rate transfer of specific pharmaceutical knowledge to the field sales organization, and provided a clear roadmap for professional development.

TAP recognized that flexibility in both training and delivery was important for the program's success. The program leveraged the company's intranet to provide all field sales managers convenient access to different learning opportunities offered throughout the company, regardless of location. Sales managers could read about upcoming classroom training and enroll via an online interface. Moreover, by offering leadership and management courses in a variety of ways—such as online, in-classroom, or on CD-ROMs and videocassettes—TAP was able to address the different learning styles, experience levels, and location of all participants.

TAP selected leadership and management courses that had interactive simulations or quizzes to engage learners, supported the skills and competencies outlined by the company, were easy to access, and had flexible delivery and per-course pricing based on the total learner population.

Leadership training

In addition to providing learning opportunities via the intranet, TAP also mandated specific leadership development training to ensure consistency among sales managers. TAP selected a blended learning course from Ninth House, *Forging Breakthroughs*, that included interactive parables and quizzes to teach solutions to complex business communication challenges. The objective was to arm managers with the critical thinking and communication skills that they need to be effective with customers as well as their teams.

As part of the planning phase, TAP discovered that a successful blended learning program incorporates five key components: plan, learn, apply, sustain, and measure. It should develop a specific learning strategy that aligns leadership training with the company's goals; consider how self-paced interactive learning will be received by the field sales organization based on different learning needs, experience levels, and locations; create opportunities

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for online, in-person, or virtual group discussions; provide post-learning opportunities to reinforce the training and new skills; and assess and track progress by measuring organizational impact, conducting pre- and post tests, and incorporating 360-degree, multi-rater assessments.

TAP held one-hour sessions over the phone with all program participants to review expectations prior to participation in the online course. Additionally, to benchmark the initiative, TAP deployed pre-and post-learning assessments to gauge sales managers' knowledge of the material and provide them with the opportunity to apply newly acquired skills in engaging simulations.

But, presenting new information is only one piece of the puzzle. To sustain learning, TAP offered a series of short video segments from Ninth House that sales managers could access via the company intranet.

In addition, TAP convened a week-long, three-city "Leaderpalooza" learning festival for its field sales organization. This event dovetailed with the original initiative and offered complementary leadership and management skills training on business acumen, mediation skills, coaching, writing, facilitation, and conflict management.

Performance development

Workplace training and development organizations are instrumental in ensuring proper alignment of training initiatives and the organization's per-

formance development process. When a manager's development is strategically linked to a larger organizational performance development system, the company creates a sustainable process that is repeatable and measurable on an annual basis. Managers are held to distinct performance, leadership, and management objectives, so they can better understand what is required to be successful.

Additionally, strategic alignment creates a common language between managers and direct reports to discuss career advancement, learning and growth opportunities, and areas for improvement. Manager and employee communication and relations are improved. A synergistic relationship is produced that ties managers' success or failure to that of their direct reports.

In the case of leadership development, the organization's value and impact may not be immediately perceived; but with long-term training and cultivation, managers are better able to mentor, coach, and engage direct reports, all of which has a direct impact on an organization's productivity and employee engagement.

This has financial impact within the pharmaceutical industry. A recent Sales Executive Council and SEC Solutions Research report highlighted the significant role that managerial coaching plays with regard to the performance of sales representatives. Managers who provided less than two hours of coaching per month per sales representative achieved 90 percent of their goals; but managers who provided three or more hours achieved 107 percent of their sales goals.

Once common competencies and skills for each position were defined at TAP, the company closely aligned employees' training and development needs with the company's performance management systems. TAP's managers offered feedback and recommended training via the company's performance evaluation process, while regional managers, district managers, and specialty managers incorporated

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the information into individual development plans.

Ninth House's Your Leadership Journey program helps TAP's field sales managers identify and select courses that address their individual competency and skill needs. With this puzzle in place, managers and direct reports use a system to track training and development progress through the learning management system, while comparing progress against individual development plans and evaluations through the company's performance management system.

Through this system, field sales managers are measured based on individual performance as well as their

ability to collaborate, mentor, and develop direct reports.

Early analysis shows positive behavioral change from the field sales management group, which should affect the entire organization. And based on initial learner feedback, regional managers, district managers, and specialty managers expect to increase customer satisfaction, reduce turnover, and improve manager-employee relationships. **T+D**

Eric Otterbein is director of field sales management development for TAP Pharmaceutical Products; eric.otterbein@TAP.com. **Jami York** is director of learning services for Ninth House; cecel@ninthhouse.com