

“The Greatest Sales Book Ever Written”

By Dean Gould

ADDENDUM A: Medical/Pharmaceutical Sales Tips

The philosophies, suggestions and rules for becoming a great sales representative presented in this book are applicable to every sales job. But my background is in the medical sales field, and I’ve picked up a few additional ideas that are specific to that industry that I’ll share here. Hopefully, they will be helpful to those of you following in my footsteps.

No matter what type of product you sell, as a medical or pharmaceutical sales rep, you must call on the physicians; whether they are surgeons, radiologists, cardiologists, or whoever else is doing the procedure or caring for the patients. This does not mean that you leave or ignore the other medical team members, such as the nurses, scrub techs, x-ray techs, orderlies, or scheduling managers. But in most medical device or pharm sales positions, the physician will have the most influence, if he/she does a lot of business at that hospital. Oh, sure, material managers, OR Directors and many others will tell you not to call on the surgeons or the cardiologists; that things are changing, and the physicians don’t have any say, anymore, but don’t believe it. Even the physicians will sometimes tell you that, just to get rid of you, but don’t let them fool you. If you are not calling on the physicians, you are not going to be a successful medical or pharmaceutical sales representative.

What are some ways to get in to see physicians?

- a. Ask a doctor using your product to introduce you or make a phone call to tell other physicians they should see you to hear about your great new products. Referrals are a great source of new business no matter what business you are in.
- b. Ask a nurse, Operating Room or Lab Supervisor, scrub tech, P.A., office nurse or anyone else who has that physician’s “ear” to introduce you to them.
- c. Work with other non-competing sales reps, either within another division within your company or outside your company. Return the favor by introducing them to those physicians with whom you have relationships and they will do the same.
- d. Respond immediately to leads generated from trade shows. The worst thing average sales reps do is let a lead sit on their desk for a month before they make an effort to contact the physician who requested information. Leads go stale fast.
- e. Many hospitals have brochures or directories that list every physician that practices in the hospital. Often the directories are broken down by type of physician (i.e. surgeons, cardiologists, and radiologists, etc). They even go so far as to put a picture of them next to their name, address, phone number, etc. Get a copy of these directories for all your major accounts. If you can’t get one, see if one of your colleagues in another division has one that you can copy or maybe even ask noncompetitive rep from another company.

Be prepared prior to your call on physicians. Many doctors don’t like to see sales reps so if you have worked hard to get the appointment, don’t waste their time by being unprepared. That means getting as much information as possible, pertinent to this

physician, prior to the call. Their time is extremely valuable so don't waste their time or yours.

It is important to pay attention to everyone in the OR, Cath Lab, Special Procedures or any other department in which you sell products. As I mentioned, other OR personnel can be valuable sources of information and many times they can sell your product to the tough, "hold-out" physician for you. In addition, sometimes the physicians aren't the key decision makers. A decision on your product, while it may somewhat affect the physician's work, may be made by someone other than the physician, including an assistant.

For instance, in heart surgery, there are products that are used to "harvest" the saphenous vein in the leg. While the surgeon controls the procedure, a physician's assistant, private scrub, first assist, or a surgical tech usually does the actual "taking" of the vein. In this case, the best place to sell that product may be with one of those other people, not the surgeon.

Once you gain the surgeon's support of your product, don't be hesitant to ask them to call the other key decision makers in the hospital. It may be an OR Supervisor, a Cath Lab Director, Special Procedure Supervisor, a CEO, a CFO, Material Manager, or Administrator that the doctor may have to call. This can sometimes be a tough call, on your part, but often you'll just have to do what you have to do to get your product used. If you don't call on the physicians and ask for their support, the other decision makers or people with control or power may respond, "None of the physicians have requested or told me they want your product". Then, when you do call on the physicians to rally support, those same people may be mad at you for showing your product to physicians in the first place. This was always a frustrating double-edged sword to me but it's part of the job. You've got to play the game and work the system. Don't take anything for granted.

Many sales people believe the physicians no longer have the power to make decisions as to which products they will use, but they are wrong. I have seen surgeons go ballistic if they didn't get the products they deem necessary to provide proper patient care. Physicians are under enough pressure taking care of patients and saving lives. They need the proper tools to do their job and they will go to bat for products they believe in. It is your job to make sure they understand the differences and advantages of your product.

Generally speaking, medical personnel are very bright people. They're certainly not stupid. They can see the benefits. They understand patients. Don't let people tell you that your product is a commodity. It will be the death of your career. When competitive products are brought into the hospital, you must fight for your products. You must ask for the support of the physicians. If you don't fight the battles, you'll lose the war.

As a patient, I always want my physicians to be aware of the best, most advanced products available. If we, as representatives for innovative companies, don't show them the products, many times they just might not know about them. You'd be surprised. I can't tell you how many times at trade shows, physicians are amazed how long a product has been out on the market, because their sales rep failed to inform them or materials management wouldn't let the rep into the hospital. What about those patients that could already have benefited from the product but couldn't because someone didn't think it was worthy to show the doctors or nurses?

It is your responsibility to the patients and your company to share the innovative products with the doctors, nurses, tech, and any of the other end users. Another way to get the information to the doctor is to visit with their office nurse or private assistant (PA). They usually know a tremendous amount about the procedure or products used and if they see value in the product, they will often share it with the physician.

Get to know the people who work in the doctor's office: the receptionist, office manager, the clinical nurse and everyone else. You may need to get in to see the doctor and his staff in 6 months or a year, when you are under competitive threat. If you just "blew off" everyone in the office, the last time you were there, they'll make it impossible for you to get in to see the doctor again. Take an interest in people. Know their names, hobbies, birthday's, and things about their children. This is your life. Get into it.

Stay visible in the doctor's office. If you go off into a corner, reading the Vanity Fair magazine, and the receptionist can't see you, she's going to forget you are there. Then when those two minutes pop up when the physician could see you, woops, too late; next patients in the exam room.

Stay within sight. Preferably don't sit down. Also, don't wait more than ½ hour for a doctor unless it's an extreme emergency. I've seen reps willing to waste half their morning waiting. It's another way to procrastinate. Make an appointment if you can, wait 30 minutes and then get out of there. Find out if you can come back at 5:00 when things have slowed down. When you are waiting, be sure to bring something you can work on so that you can make use of that down time. Read a clinical paper, organize your schedule book and "things to do list", write thank you notes, or review your goals. Hey, how about bringing along a sales improvement book? What a concept.

When you do get in to see the doctor, as always, ask good questions. Find out the physicians needs and what is important to them. Don't try to regurgitate everything you can in 30 seconds. Don't data-dump. They may say they have two minutes but if you ask good, open-ended questions you could end up with a 15-minute appointment and develop rapport.

On some sales calls, you may already have the product in the hospital but you want to increase and expand your business by getting a specific physician to use your product. Many times, after seeing some products, a physician will say, "Fine, I'll use it". Get them to sign a brochure or a note on their prescription pads saying they want your product pulled for their cases.

Again, you could also have them call the team leader, OR/Lab Supervisor, or CSR Manager to let them know directly. If you don't get them to do either of those two things, do you think they will remember by the time they get back into the OR? They'll just end up using whatever they give them unless your product is earth shattering or unique. Even if it is revolutionary, if they were using something before that worked OK and they are in the middle of a case, they may not feel they have enough time to wait for the nurse to go get the product and open it up. They'll use it "next" time.

You've got to get things prepared so this doesn't happen. In addition to getting them to sign a note saying they want to use your product in the OR, you will need to get their preference card changed as well as their information in the computer.

If they don't agree to switch to your product, try the next best thing: a commitment to evaluate your product(s). Once again, get them to sign a note saying they want to evaluate. Line up the evaluation in the hospital. Be sure their size or type of product is in stock, and be sure to set parameters of the evaluation for acceptance and conversion. With many medical devices, there is a learning curve, so you must get the physician committed to trying your product on at least three cases, preferably ten. Once they try the product and like it, make sure to get them to sign an evaluation form saying they now want the product for all future cases.

The most important thing you should strive for is to be in the case when the physician is using your product. This is the sign of a great sales rep. As my former manager Rick Puleo always says, "If you want to be successful in medical sales, you've got to be in the back, in scrubs". Another one I like is, "you got to be wearin' pajamas if you want the milk and cookies".

By being in scrubs, in surgery, or the lab everyday, most great reps rarely have to make office calls. They have made themselves a part of the surgical or lab teams so they can just see the surgeon almost anytime they want, during procedures. This is when you know you have arrived. Some reps get to that point within a year; some it may take several years, and some never get it.

Other ways to see physicians are:

- a. See them in the physicians/surgeons lounge. Many OR's or Labs don't want you to do this, but once again, if you have made yourself a valuable member of the team, they might work with you; especially if they want you to get the doctor converted over to your product.
- b. Sometimes, if it is important that you see the doctor NOW, you might have to wait for them outside the hospital, in the lobby, in the parking garage. This is pretty aggressive so be careful. This is only used when it is imperative that you see the doctor. Great reps, will do what it takes to get the job done. If that surgeon is the key to you converting the entire hospital to your product or is the key to saving your business, you've got to see them one way or another.
- c. Take them golfing, dinner, wine tasting, or fishing. Like any customer, whether it is a doctor, nurse, or tech, time away from the hospital, is the best way for them to really get to know you as a person and to have some relaxed, deep discussion about your product. Be careful not to break the new AVAMED rules if they apply to your business or company.
- d. Get another rep to bring you along on their dinner or outing with the physician.
- e. Invite the surgeon to visit your company plant for a tour. You should try to escort them to the plant, or at a minimum offer to drive them to the airport. This gives you 30 minutes of uninterrupted time with them. It's usually not a good thing to have a physician show up at your company headquarters only to announce they have never met you.