



Skill, Science, and THE ART OF THE CONVERSATION

Shifting marketplace dynamics have created unprecedented challenges for pharma industry sales organizations. Increasing hurdles to physician access, governmental and industry constraints on promotion, competition from generics, and diminishing degrees of differentiation among products have combined to force companies to rethink their approach to selling and customer engagement.

To survive and thrive, today's sales representatives must bring more value to their customers to be able to justify the substantial expense of their continued presence in the field. Enhancing representatives' scientific and technical knowledge is part of the equation, but without an understanding the nuances of how to effectively communicate with their customers, even the most knowledgeable reps will fall flat.

Developing Linguistic Intelligence

Arming reps with meaningful product- or patient-focused messages won't make them more effective communicators. However, developing their linguistic intelligence to understand the dimensions and dynamics that occur within a business conversation will help them influence, manage, and extend their conversations, allowing their meaningful messages to be told. Utilizing a linguistic framework, reps can be better prepared to take advantage of the speaking and/or listening openings that occur naturally in any given conversation.

Many business conversations tend to be haphazard and lack clarity of meaning and purpose for all participants. Fruitful conversations, however, are guided by rules for both listening and speaking. By recognizing what goes into a quality conversation, an effective communicator can expertly manage the direction of the dialogue toward a desired outcome.

A New Communication Framework to Enhance Sales Training.

There is a gap in the way pharma is shifting from agenda-driven messaging to a more customer-focused approach. That gap is, knowing how to use the prescriber-patient experience and link it to the brand's objectives.

Bridging from customer needs to product benefits requires the flexible use of industry knowledge, sales messaging, and most importantly, advanced conversational skills. Do reps understand

how to use the microcosm of each physician's office to deliver the right message to each customer in that office? Due to time and access constraints, reps often have a brief moment or two with customers to establish rapport, deliver value, and differentiate their product. How can they set themselves apart? A well-structured communications framework can help them translate linguistic skills into actionable consulting.

The ECCO model (Expression, Context, Content, Observation) is an example of a linguistic model that provides a communication framework for building advanced conversational skills. By addressing three dynamic conversational dimensions, transactional talk, interactional talk, and manner, the model equips representatives with the tools to engage with customers in conversations that place a priority on adding value to a busy physician's efforts to serve their customers; the patients.

The ability to expertly structure and manage conversations displays customer focus and translates to a message that is heard more loudly and clearly.

In transactional talk, reps present purpose and construct fact-based product conversations by collecting information about patient experiences and focusing on the product fea-

tures that are most relevant to their customers' customers.

Through interactional talk, reps tune into the context and dynamics of what their customers are faced with when treating patients. It is in this dimension that reps can enhance engagement by demonstrating an understanding of patient needs. This builds rapport with their customers. Here, rather than delivering general one-size-fits-all brand messages, interactional messages demonstrate attention to the individual customer's needs.

Transactional and interactional talk is greatly impacted by manner. Manner is a person's personal style and personality and is the medium through which messages are effectively or ineffectively projected. The ability to combine these elements to structure and manage conversations in an expert way, while displaying customer focus, increases the opportunities for meaningful messages to be delivered.

Developing reps strategic listening and tactical inquiry abilities within the framework of a communications model, provides them with the skills to direct and manage a given conversation in a patient- or product-focused manner given their orientation in the content and context of the conversation. By understanding the listening and speaking rules that

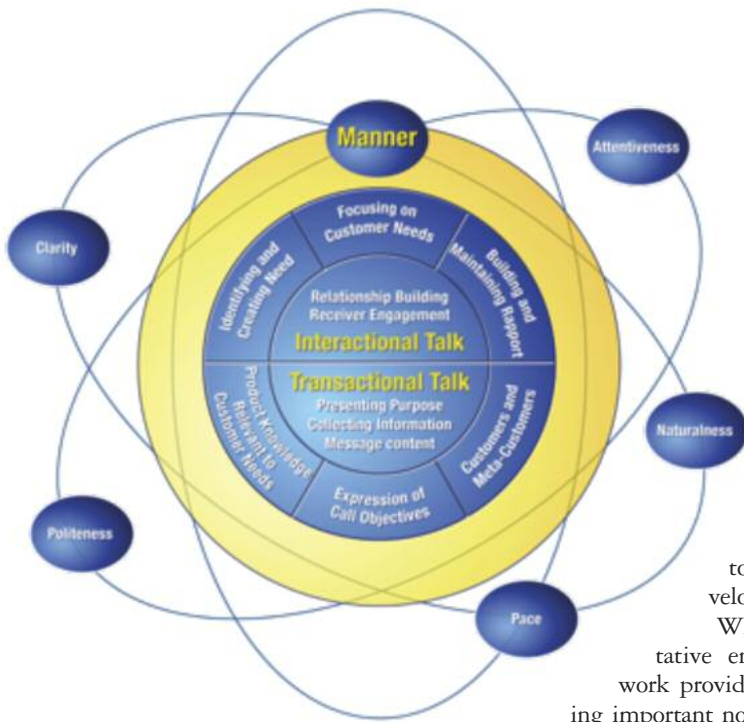
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provider/patient dialogues, it provides the potential for building stronger customer relationships and understanding the true barriers to patient treatment,” says Chris Downey, former Director of Training and Development at Genentech.

When applied to consultative encounters, this framework provides a roadmap connecting important nodes that are integral to successful selling:

- Interactional talk — relationship building while focusing on patient needs;
- Transactional talk — the reason for the call, fact-based and content driven;
- Manner — the presenter’s personal style and personality.

govern structured conversations, they can recognize the natural openings that present themselves to guide the conversation in ways that leads to longer, more effective engagements with their customers.

“Because this model is based on real

When physicians are engaged, there are greater opportunities to extend conversations. However, the more conversations are extended, the greater the need for more sophisticated mechanisms to manage the conversation.

A well-constructed communication framework ties patient experiences and brand messages to advanced conversational management cues that can be leveraged in customer interactions.

As customer engagement is extended, there is greater opportunity and receptivity for brand messages to be effectively delivered. **PV**

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