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# Making the Sales Rep Essential in Today's Environment

**We need to help re-establish the reps' value for this new era as they are our industry's front line.**

It starts with rethinking our sales force strategy, rebranding our reps, and training them to deliver on their brand promise, not just that of the products they sell.

**A**lthough great strides have been made in the innovation of new drugs, the reputation of the industry's brand has suffered. Nearly one-quarter of physicians work in practices that ban pharmaceutical sales representatives and when they do allow contact with a physician occurs about 20% of the time.<sup>1</sup> Our reputation is just a notch above the cable company industry, according to the August 2008 Harris Poll, followed by health insurance, managed care, oil, and tobacco.

As Craig and I contemplated how we got here, we reflected on the sales teams who sold us products when we were the customer. Despite being on opposite sides of the country and in very different yet demanding settings, we both held the Upjohn sales representatives in high esteem as integral members of our team and the community. I, as a community and hospital pharmacist, and Craig, as an assistant chief resident and internist at a teaching hospital, always made time for the Upjohn rep.

Having since then led a global brand and sales team and both of us having worked with numerous client sales teams, we believe we can learn from the Upjohn reps — synonymous with trust and service — for inspiration today. We need to help re-establish the reps' value for this new era as they are our industry's front line. It starts with rethinking our sales force strategy, rebranding our reps, and training them to deliver on their brand promise, not just that of the products they sell.

## What makes a sales rep essential in today's environment?

We believe it comes down to three driving, interrelated factors:

### 1. Access

Sales reps need to offer something of value to physicians' practices and their integral support teams. Train your front line to understand what drives their business, their community, and their reputation as quality providers. As Dr. Sponseller shares from personal encounters, "Stop asking me to make you successful, ask me what I need to be successful."

### 2. Credibility

Make your reps indispensable for their wealth of insights, service support programs, and connectivity to expertise beyond their knowledge. Give reps tools that help practitioners become heroes to their patients and caregivers. Don't leave reps out to dry by forcing them to sell on the merits of their ability to debate product usage — also known as overcoming objectives — day in and day out. The physicians aren't buying one-for-all solutions, and their customers are savvy enough to know their options as well.

### 3. Success

A successful organization is not the sum total of its details. Shifting away from silos and into a collaborative, community-driven total sales and marketing team will help you see opportunities in this dynamic marketplace. Change the motivation of the entire team to go beyond single product scripts. Look for insights that allow you to affect behavior within specific communities and leverage those opportunities to benefit your entire portfolio and corporate reputation.

## The Rep of the Future

### What does the new rep need to be successful?

To start, reps must have the experience and problem-solving skills to be able to truly understand physicians' varied needs beyond a "product-lens" approach. As clinical decision making is a complex, dynamic process, reps need a holistic training approach that requires the synthesis of clinical knowledge, business acumen, and individual patient assessment. Becoming a source of credibility in the field, as were the Upjohn reps, is now much more about being an ally than a sales person.

### So how do we build the new training curriculum?

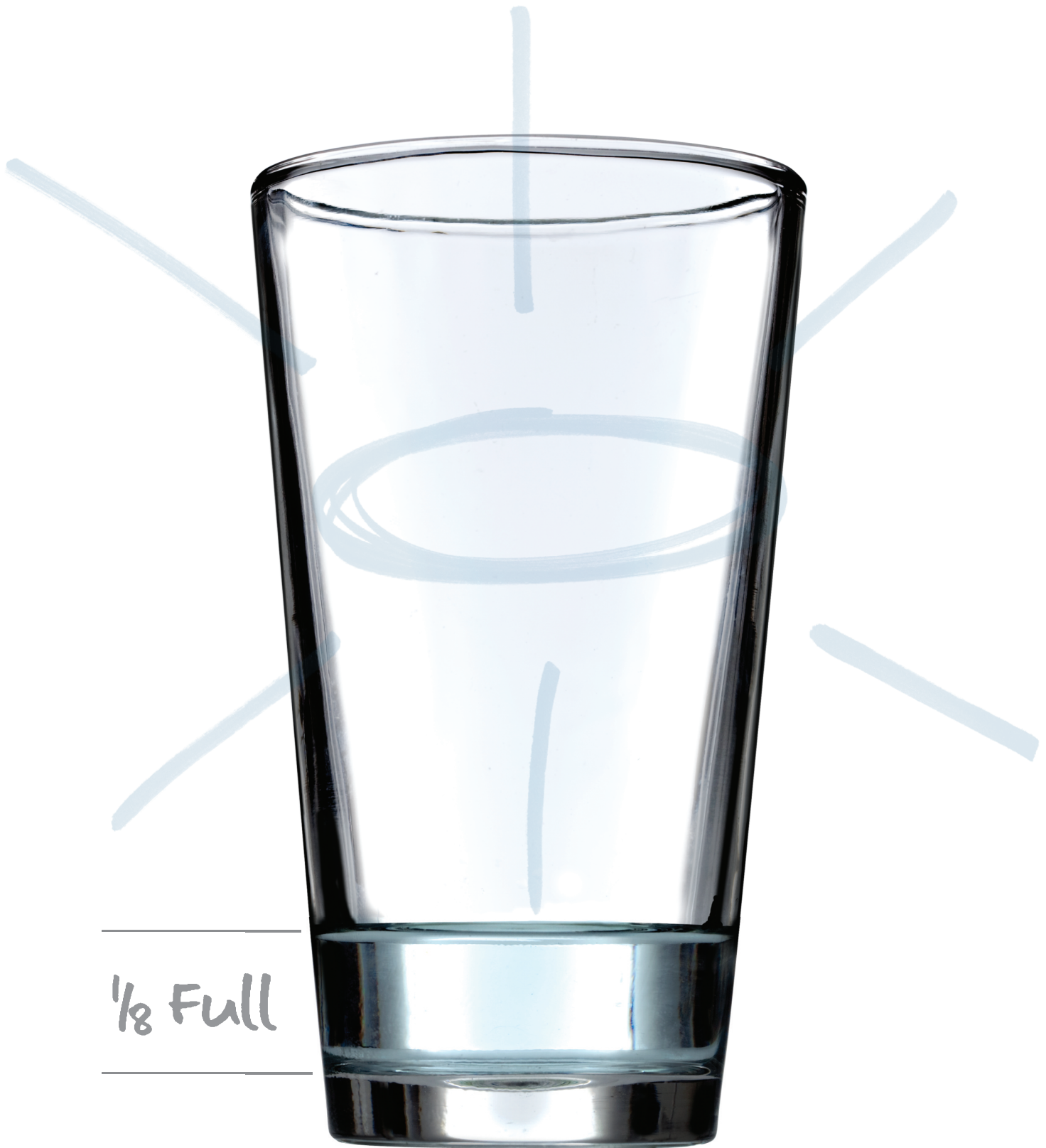
Content should be developed in conjunction with the very practitioners, patients, and caregivers you're trying to serve. Their input helps define the learning objectives and certification process as it begins with the premise: "What's in it for the customer and his/her patients?" Clearly prescriptions still matter. But you can't get prescriptions without maintaining access. And you can't maintain access without credibility. All of which you have to define up front and create quantitative and qualitative metrics of success by which to incentivize a diverse team of stakeholders.

## Back to the future

It brings us full circle to the respected sales force of yesteryear, the sales force that intuitively understood how to see the world through the eyes of the clinician, the sales force that was integral. If adopted in critical mass, the model will also help precipitate the slow transformation of an industry with a battered public image to one of genuine corporate responsibility. We can only optimistically predict greater benefits for all of us in our professional and personal lives. ■

Footnote: 1. WSJ Health Blog, March 29, 2009. <http://blogs.wsj.com/health/2009/03/23/the-long-decline-of-drug-sales-reps/>. Accessed on April 8, 2009.

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