

Networking with Pharma Reps

Two Heads are ALWAYS Better Than One

For almost two decades I have joked about the Pharmaceutical Sales Representative as the Gucci-bag carrying, pointed-shoe wearing, slicked-back hair, Sterno-lunch carrying thorn in my flesh. (And this is just the men I'm describing!)

But seriously, these professionals are just that: professional. They are well trained and typically well managed. They have tremendous skills in account and territory management as well as in conducting professional, scientific-based discussions with physicians.

Twenty years ago when I broke into HME sales, I needed all the help I could get. I met Jeff and Mike on some of my routine calls to hospitals and physicians' offices. We began to see each other so much that we accused each other of spying and stalking. I can't remember who suggested we get some coffee, but we did and something really awesome happened. We began to network.

Networking brought some great revelations. First, I came to realize that the Pharma Representatives are not "competition". (Yes, they are competing for the time of the referral source; but they definitely do not have the same product offering.) Second, I found that they do have a terrific handle on the 3 W's: who, what, and when.

- Who: are the key players inside of the office or facility
- What: is the best sales approach
- When: is the best time to call on them

(You need to get the why and how. You should know the where!!)

Third, Pharma reps are like inmates at a prison who know the lay of the land. Why not take advantage of this?

Here is how I would recommend you approach them-

If there is a Pharma Rep that you run into periodically ask them if they would like to have some coffee sometime. (Be careful, you don't want this to come across the wrong way.) Tell them that you would like to network with them regarding some of the offices where you both have good relationships and see if you can help each other strengthen those relationships.

When you get to coffee shop be prepared to dialogue about their products as well as yours. Give them information about the specialists on whom you call and have them share the same. From here find the synergy. Focus on those difficult offices and see if the Pharma Rep has managed to overcome present issues. You may even get to a point where you can introduce one another to the referral sources and broaden your call deck further.

Let me caution you on a few areas: make sure that the Pharma Rep does not have a relationship with your competitor. Observe the Pharma Rep for weeks or months before approaching them with this networking idea. Make sure they are a professional. In offices where you both visit, ask the staff of their impression. (When they ask you why you want to know just tell them you see them everywhere and were just curious.)

This can be a fun and referral opening opportunity for many of you. Take advantage of this.