

From Obstacles to Opportunities

Update Your Healthcare
Sales Approach



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Outdated training and sales strategies are limiting the impact of salespeople in today's competitive market.

Scientists, inventors, and clinicians have created advanced therapies that can improve human life, but innovative drugs and medical devices offer little value beyond scientific achievement if they don't get to the patients who need them. Due to seismic shifts in the healthcare industry, the representatives who support these products say it's increasingly difficult to gain access to key decision makers. They're finding that the "tried-and-true" sales strategies they relied on in the past are no longer effective.

What's at the root of these challenges, and how can salespeople overcome them?

Healthcare sales are hindered by four common problems. In this playbook, we'll explore those problems and detail effective solutions. With the help of two industry experts, we'll confront obsolete sales and training tactics, outline the transformative potential of a human-first approach to sales, and show you how to elevate the performance of your healthcare sales team.

Why Traditional Sales & Training Strategies Fall Short

Problem #1: Access

Healthcare sales have traditionally occurred in a face-to-face environment. Pharmaceutical and medical device sales representatives visited doctors at work or hosted them at events. For years, these in-person interactions fueled healthcare sales.

“In the early 2000s, the formula for success was volume and repetition,” says Chuck Karvelas, Senior Director, Commercial Learning at Sage Therapeutics. “I remember one of my first sales leaders saying, ‘Say our messages 10 times a day to the right 10 people, with a little bit of energy and passion, and you will grow your business.’”

Since then, sales reps’ access to physicians and decision makers has declined precipitously. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted in-person sales calls to healthcare facilities, many hospitals and medical

clinics were deliberately limiting access, often by requiring sales personnel to obtain specific certifications or pay fees. Providers’ increased skepticism, a response to the actions of unscrupulous people who prioritized profits above all else, further eroded trust and significantly reduced opportunities for in-person interactions.

In the medtech space, we see the problem of access presenting itself differently or in different ways. While many in the field still have access to service accounts, their interaction with key decision makers, both clinical and non-clinical has become increasingly difficult. Additionally, the infusion of clinicians into customer-facing roles along with traditional training methods has led to the misconception that service is selling. Adding to this problem is the misconception that personal relationships developed supporting cases are equivalent to business relationships that change and shape the way care is provided.

In-person interactions were down by more than 75% during the height of the pandemic, according to a 2021 survey conducted by Atraxia, a cloud software and data analytics company serving the life sciences industry.¹ Since then, in-person meetings have resumed, but **access to decision makers has not rebounded to pre-COVID levels.** According to a Veeva Pulse Field Trends Report, 50% of healthcare providers are “highly selective” and “limit their access to three or fewer biopharmas.”² That access can vary greatly by specialty, with 30% of psychiatrists limiting access to just one company.³

Today, limited access to healthcare providers and decision makers is the rule, not the exception. **Volume + repetition is no longer an effective sales formula.** With fewer accessible contacts, healthcare salespeople must understand and address the unique needs of healthcare providers, both clinical and non-clinical, to reliably secure sales.





Problem #2: Service Isn't Selling

The one group of sales representatives who still have regular access to healthcare professionals is those who assist with surgical cases or medical procedures. While these sales professionals are typically regarded as valuable members of the team, their collegial relationships often fail to translate into increased sales.

Providing service is an activity; selling is a change process.

“How many patient outcomes are you going to change by showing up, bringing the tray, and helping the doctor get the right size screw or hip?” Crowder says. “Selling is a change mechanism. It’s ‘let me help you improve care, outcomes, and efficiencies.’”

Service can be an important part of selling, but service and selling require unique skill sets. Unfortunately, many customer-facing teams confuse “service” and “selling”; they don’t understand the difference between the two — and they haven’t learned the consultative skills that can change the way care is provided.

As a result, there is a huge disconnect between activity and productivity in healthcare sales, Crowder says. Most customer-facing sales reps devote their time to providing excellent service and little to no time to engaging healthcare providers and other decision makers in practice-changing conversations.

Problem #3: Information Ignores Emotions

Healthcare sales representatives have long emphasized the features and benefits of the products they sell. That's because "historically, medical device and pharmaceutical companies have tended to take a very product-centric approach to salesperson training," says John Crowder, Vice President, Healthcare, at Integrity Solutions.

That approach made sense; after all, physicians and healthcare providers are data-driven people who have been taught to carefully consider evidence and facts. But healthcare providers are human, and humans do not make decisions on information alone. In fact, 95% of human decision-making happens in the limbic system, the emotional center of the brain.⁴

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Traditional sales training ignores this important fact.

That's a mistake. Simply sharing information was never the most effective sales strategy — and two decades into the Information Age, it's particularly unproductive.

"What makes great sales professionals great is their ability to understand how their customers think, what their concerns are, and what they're interested in," Karvelas says.

Information is easy for providers to find. The difference an effective salesperson makes is through human engagement and connection and the ability to uncover both stated and unstated needs. Although decision makers may not explicitly state their fears or concerns in initial conversations, their emotions — such as fear of moving to a new technology — can torpedo any movement toward an innovative product. Conversations that uncover and address emotions are key to sales.



Problem #4: Dated Sales Tactics Don't Sell Disruptive Technology

Innovative products that advance healthcare often require healthcare providers to alter their practice patterns. Simply telling a physician or health system representative about a product's benefits is not going to drive change. "Fewer side effects," "increased disease-free survival," and even "significant cost savings" may sound persuasive, but focusing on likely benefits ignores the fact that healthcare providers have good reasons for using the tools they already have. And it completely ignores the many uncomfortable changes a provider may need to make to integrate a new product into their clinical practice.

"Changing habits is hard for all of us, even if a customer sees the need to change, they may be hesitant or even unwilling to make the change. Some customers may have such ingrained habits they don't even see the need to change" Karvelas says.

To persuade people to change how they provide care, salespeople must understand:

- **What potential customers are currently doing**
- **How it's working — and what's not working**
- **Where the customer would like to be, in terms of outcomes**
- **What are the risks of changing? Of not changing?**
- **What are the benefits of changing? Of not changing?**

Sales professionals who have the skills to have these conversations are at a distinct advantage. “A naturally evolving sales conversation creates a desire for next steps that are equally incorporated by a good sales professional and a customer who sees the relevance of the conversation and value in the product the sales person is providing,” Karvelas says.

Unfortunately, most healthcare sales representatives aren't equipped to have those conversations.





Most Salespeople Don't Have the Skills that Drive Healthcare Sales Today

Because sales training has emphasized information sharing for so many years, that's what most sales professionals do.

Experienced representatives may be stuck using the same tactics they were taught decades ago — and may be at a loss to understand why once-successful tactics aren't driving sales the way they once did.

Only 27% of healthcare providers say biopharmaceutical companies communicate with them in a relevant and personalized way, according to data from the Digital Health Coalition.⁵ Less than one-third of surveyed physicians believe that pharmaceutical companies help them perform their job more effectively.⁶

This is a missed opportunity.



How Medtech is Limiting the Impact of a Powerful Resource

Imagine limiting the impact of your most trusted, well-connected customer-facing teams.

That is exactly what is happening in many medtech companies today, as expectations for their clinical teams focus mainly on providing clinical support, service, and product training. This is the case for 50% or more of customer-facing clinical teams in the medtech industry.

Customer-facing teams with clinical experience often include nurses, advanced providers, and techs who are reluctant to embrace the traditional sales role. They understand the pressures faced by working healthcare practitioners and don't want to come across as pushy or "salesy." As a result, they

focus on providing service to healthcare professionals instead of engaging in productive conversations about quality care.

To bridge this gap, it is important to shift their mindset so they understand that selling doesn't mean pushing product; it's about advocating for patients.

This is a message and a mindset that resonates particularly strongly with customer-facing teams that have a clinical background. "If you're a nurse working in the ICU, you are morally, legally, and ethically bound to advocate for that patient, to speak up when something isn't going right," Crowder says. When salespeople with clinical backgrounds realize they can do the same thing, their approach to sales shifts.

CASE STUDY #1

Stale Strategies Limit Award-Winning Sales Rep's Potential

When an award-winning healthcare sales representative with 30 years of experience visited a medical office, front desk personnel told her the doctor was not in. A few minutes later, the doctor appeared in the parking lot, eager to talk.

"The few times I've used your product, I've had really good results," she said.

The sales rep considered this a win, and her strategy to leverage this opportunity was to visit the doctor more often in the future.

While that tactic had worked well for her in the past, it was unlikely to net much new business, says John Crowder, Vice President, Healthcare, at Integrity Solutions.

"The drug the representative was selling is not a first-line drug; it was being used by this doctor fifth- or sixth-line and should be moved up in the treatment algorithm," Crowder says. "She would be more successful if she had a meaningful conversation with the doctor: *You're having good outcomes; can you tell me more about what you are seeing? How do you see this impacting your patient population moving forward? What are the issues you and your patients avoid when you add this product to your treatment regimen? How would it benefit you and your patients if you moved this product to second- or third-line versus waiting?*"

To stay competitive, sales representatives need to learn new approaches that work in today's market and will continue to serve them well regardless of how the environment evolves.

CASE STUDY #2

Empowering Clinicians to Transform Patient Care

The mortality rate for cardiogenic shock, the most acute form of heart failure, hovers near 50%.⁷

Treatment typically includes invasive cardiac procedures — bypass surgery or coronary angioplasty — and many patients need a medical device such as an extracorporeal oxygenation (ECMO) device or intra-aortic balloon pump to maintain blood flow and prevent organ damage. But some patients can't tolerate these invasive procedures. And mortality rates remain high, despite treatment.

When a medical device company introduced a new, finger-sized heart pump that can be inserted percutaneously, they expected that their customer-facing sales representatives — most of them former clinicians — would be excited to share this innovation with healthcare providers. These clinicians had learned a very sales-oriented approach, yet they were disinclined to use it.

The company hired Integrity Solutions to work with their sales team. The facilitators tapped into the clinicians' desire to improve care.

“Most of these people are hardwired to be patient advocates,” Crowder says. “We taught them how to ask about current treatment and outcomes, how to ask: *If you could improve on that, what would that look like? What are your fears and concerns if you don't change?* There's a learning curve with new technology, and if **we don't address clinicians' fears, concerns, and hesitations, they'll continue to treat their patients with 40-year-old technology and get the same results.**”

After the sales team completed Integrity training, the company experienced **eight consecutive quarters of record-breaking growth.**

“Clinical teams can change care,” Crowder says. “They weren't selling a pump; they were advocating for better outcomes, better survival and improved efficiencies.”

A Human-First Approach to Sales

To successfully drive sales in the healthcare industry, salespeople must adopt a human-first approach. They must listen at least as much as they talk and demonstrate a genuine interest in clients.

“We need to become better humans to become better sales professionals,” Karvelas says.

In a time when information is rampant and freely available, sales representatives’ value lies in their ability to create and nurture human connections. Effective sales hinge on the salesperson’s ability to engage meaningfully with both clinical and non-clinical stakeholders.

“Listening to understand is different than listening to respond,” Crowder says. It entails asking thoughtful, open-ended questions, giving potential customers time

to express their needs and concerns, and then listening attentively, asking additional questions as needed for clarity.

“People believe what they hear themselves say more than what you tell them,” Karvelas says. “Getting customers to share their challenges and frustrations will increase your opportunity to help them realize the change in their behavior is important to them.”

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CHUCK KARVELAS
Senior Director, Commercial Learning at Sage Therapeutics



Start at the Top

Leadership matters.

Leaders have an outsized impact on a business' success, yet many healthcare sales leaders have never been taught how to coach sales representatives. According to Integrity's research:⁸

- **50% of firms provide no training for managers on coaching**
- **63% of companies have no agreed-upon definition of coaching and let managers interpret their own meaning of coaching**
- **Only 36% say that coaching is a stated priority of senior leadership**
- **55% say managers don't know how to coach**

Effective coaching, however, is key to long-term sales success. According to Integrity Solutions' research, companies that are effective at coaching sales reps achieve 15% higher sales revenue than those that are ineffective.⁹

Investing in training and skills development for the entire sales organization will significantly impact your top and bottom lines.

The Integrity Difference

Integrity Solutions closes the gap between traditional sales training and what actually works.

For over 50 years, Integrity has been a global leader in sales training and performance improvement, helping sales professionals in over 130 countries hone their skillset and mindset. Integrity Solutions has won Stevie Awards for excellence in sales training and consulting annually since 2019. Selling Power and Training Industry both consistently name Integrity Solutions to their annual lists of Top Sales Training Companies. In 2022, ISA - The Association of Learning Providers named Integrity Solutions their Business of the Year.



Integrity's comprehensive sales training program teaches salespeople the skills they need to overcome the emotional and structural obstacles that stand between them and sales success.

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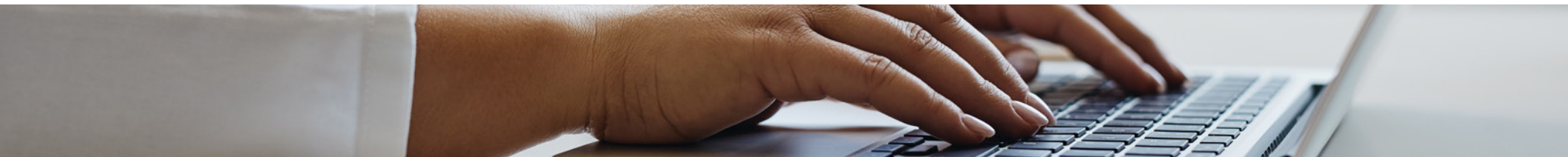
Our experience spans over 50 years and 130 countries, and includes healthcare sectors like medical devices, pharmaceutical, biotech, hospitals and health systems, and senior living care. Integrity Solutions is consistently recognized annually as a Top Sales Training Company by both Selling Power and Training Industry. The firm has received multiple Stevie Awards for Sales Training and Consulting excellence. And ISA – the Association of Learning Providers named Integrity Solutions their 2022 Business of the Year.

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