

# MD Snapshot

by Peter Shaw

## Benchmarking Managers

The traditional district sales manager (DSM) role is well established. It has long been recognized that the DSM is key to sales force effectiveness. Yet, despite this recognition, few (if any) companies benchmark DSM's coaching capabilities.

Many of the best sales professionals have told us that they feel that their needs are not being met, in that they do not get practical personal development from their DSM. Being a successful sales professional does not necessarily mean that an individual will be a good DSM, yet this is the most consistent criteria for pro-

motion. Most companies concentrate on the bureaucratic responsibilities of the DSM in their training and spend little time on management and coaching skills. The role of the DSM is becoming more strategic rather than tactical, which makes the pharmaceutical DSM so much different from an individual at the same position in any other industry, where they would continue to have a well-defined customer. It is therefore not surprising that some of the best sales professionals, who have no desire to move into a management role, opt to change jobs/companies rather than stay where their personal and professional development is not satisfied by the DSM.

Our data confirms the fact that DSMs could benefit from more robust training and coaching. At a national level across three regions, MD Mindset assessed 270 specialist sales professionals. Each of the sales professionals was assessed on calls conducted on practicing Cardiologists and Endocrinologists. Each call was observed by a DSM and both the DSM and the doctor independently completed an identical evaluation form covering 18 key performance indicators (KPIs). The KPIs were then adapted for a generic sales model and the results obtained from doctors and DSMs were compared.

The most striking difference noticed was that the scoring of the

DSMs varied by as much as 30 percent (Figure 1), yet that of the doctors varied by only 3 to 5 percent (Figure 2). This was despite the fact that the 150 doctors used for the assessments represented two very different specialties and three different geographical locations, whereas the same 50 DSMs assessed each of the three regions of sales professionals. The doctors were also much more consistent in their assessments of the KPIs, as can be seen in Figure 2.

There are many possible reasons for these differences. Doctors spend, on average, 10-12 years in training before they reach the top of their specialty and then spend the rest of their working lives maintaining professional license and board certification. Doctors are trained in the same way and have the same mindset, hence the consistency in the way they assess sales reps, clinical papers, literature, etc. In contrast, DSMs often come from successful sales careers into a position where they are expected to fulfill different roles and responsibilities without coaching the very skills that got them the position in the first place.

The end result of this is that sales reps may not be performing at their optimal levels and can lose interest quickly if they do not have a DSM who is able to recognize what is needed to keep that individual motivated and strive for continuous development. At a time where companies are downsizing their sales forces, it is imperative that robust DSM coaching skills be implemented.

DSMs can become more consistent in their coaching and drive optimal performance if they better understand the MD Mindset. Benchmarking is a way to measure this and to help make the case to leadership for what needs to be done to optimize coaching performance. [PR](#)

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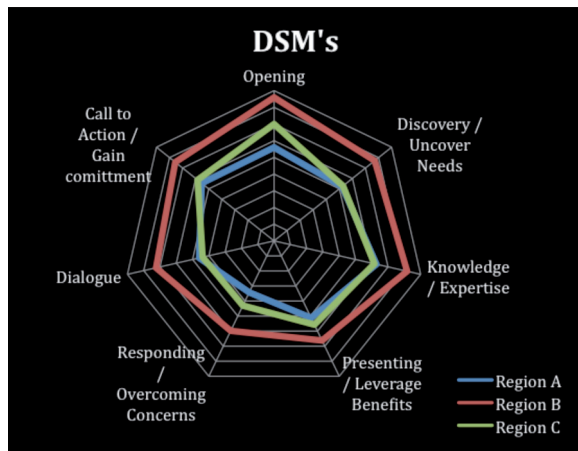


Figure 1. DSM Assessment

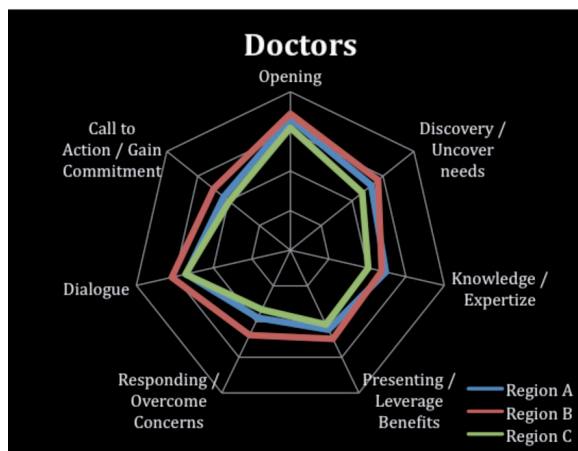


Figure 2. Doctor Assessment