



Building the bridges: manufacturing to reps to end users

by Liz Beerman

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All of us, whether manufacturers, reps, distributors, or those who service these channel business model warriors, have had to explain what the rep business model is. Cocktail party, dinner party, conference room or shipping dock — explaining the impact of creating and moving product becomes a relevant topic of conversation. How does what I am buying get to ME without paying the middle person?

It has been reported that the majority of American manufacturers move their product through the “independent, multi-line, synergistic, professional field selling model.” What a mouthful of words! Yet, the power and politics behind them drives and delivers more than 90 percent of product daily from the end of the manufacturing, integration or assembly line, across the miles, to a location that is only words on an invoice, to an end customer with an associated price and profit margin that will ultimately determine the success ... or failure ... of your transaction and bottom line.

OK, so you are overworked, exceptionally tired, underpaid, not recognized for your 110 percent effort and wondering why you stay with it. Where do you turn for help?

Identifying, building, developing and incentivizing the relationship among key players in this scenario is the one and only path to ensuring consistent goal attainment, without killing yourself and your team in the process.

Manufacturer to channel, rep and distribution, and to end user, demand cutting-edge relationships that, while crucial, are too often either taken for granted, or worse, seen as adversarial.

Start with the question of yourself, “What

motivates or incentivizes YOU to buy? And from whom?” Most often it is the credible referral, certification or personal relationship that drives your decision. Manufacturer to channel, rep and end user is no different.

So how can you implement and then impact continued motivation — coming and going — to increase revenue?

Manufacturers bridge to rep firms in three steps:

- **Identify** those traits and skills that have worked most successfully in selling your product (either from your direct sales or rep sales).
 - What do they do? Watch their deliberate actions and document them.
 - Why do they do it? What is the desired outcome?
 - Did they get the sale with a happy customer on the other side?
 - Then replicate it with the rep firms you partner with.
- **Validate** the rep firm is a Certified Professional Manufacturer Representative, (CPMR). Be assured that it takes its business seriously, has invested in the infrastructure of the firm and is guaranteed to be here tomorrow.
- **Value** the partnership by understanding the rep business and determining what elements would be of value to them. What specifics do they want, and need, in a motivation and incentive plan, beyond commissions? If they go above and beyond ... so should you, consistently.

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FEATURE ARTICLE: Building the bridges

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Manufacturer sales firms (reps) bridge to manufacturers in four steps:

- **Identify** the components of line profitability for your firm. Where are you spending your time, and what are the measurable results based on the anticipated sales cycle? (ROTI: return on time invested.) Time = Money!
- **Consider** what actions are being asked of you beyond writing up a sale and earning a standard commission? Are there areas, tasks, reports and meetings that are being expected and not rewarded?
- **Communicate** to motivate. How often in your manufacturer or territory meetings do you revisit your contract, revisit your deliverables, and revisit the subject of motivating and incentivizing to promote line focus?
- **Value** those actions that increase the worth of your firm. Is this a line that recognizes you as a partner, understands your culture and contributes deliberately to your business success?

Manufacturer sales firms bridge to their salespeople in four steps:

- **Identify** the talent, skills and corresponding actions that provide reliable and consistent sales success. Then go hire based on that list!
- **Link** the actions and reward factors that motivate the individual. "Incentivization" is not a one-size-fits-all proposition.
- **Develop** their sales skills through deliberate and consistent on-the-job training, formal online or live training, committed supportive mentoring, industry association participation and professional sales certification (CSP).
- **Support** relationship building, "emotional favorite" status, SME (subject matter expert) expansion and individual business growth for the salesperson.

Relationships are built with bridges — lots of them — visible, strong, consistent and easy to maneuver. Regardless of your role as manufacturer, distributor, rep firm executive or salesperson, you are in the business of increasing revenue and decreasing cost. Period.

Invest with MRERF. Our job as YOUR Manufacturers' Representative Educational Research Foundation is to ensure that you have the resources and training to realize your goals, build those bridges and celebrate success. Our job is to offer ONLY those programs that address the manufacturers' rep business model. You are in it. Partner with those who understand your needs, your challenges and your rewards.

Contact MRERF at www.mrerf.org and join us at our next CPMR, CSP or MBP class. We hear you, we understand, and we are ready to help you build that next bridge! ■

SALESWISE: Hiring A-players

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worked with on an A, B, C scale? How would you rate the team when you left it on an A, B, C scale? When we speak with members of your team, what will they say were your biggest strengths and weaknesses as a manager?

Once again, these questions show that candidates better tell the truth because you will be following up with their former team members. Get curious about details, and don't accept vague answers.

5. Why did you leave that job?

Dig deeper if you hear general answers such as, "My boss and I didn't connect." Or "I was struggling working on my own." Find out why, and keep plugging until you have a clear picture of what actually happened.

You need to know if someone left after being successful (A-player clue) or if they were pushed out (B or C clue). You never know what you might hear as the picture fills in and the person's true identity is revealed.

You will still have to pursue further conversations with promising candidates and their references, but these five questions will get you off to a good start.

Talk back: I would love to hear back from you. Let me know your most successful interviewing techniques or your worst hiring blooper.

Business video recommendation: What is the most important factor for success? Dr. Joachim de Posada, an adjunct professor at the University of Miami and a motivational speaker and author of "Don't Eat the Marshmallow Yet: The sweet secret to success in work and life." Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0yhHKWUa0g> and watch him describe why people succeed ... or don't. ■

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