

Riding the Rocket and Making Sure it is Pointed Skyward – A Training Case Study

It's been a hard day at Buckman Biotech. The CEO has been giving Patrick Cornett, the VP of Human Resources, a tongue lashing in front of the whole management staff. The CEO believes that the training department has derailed efforts to directly market Buckman products. Patrick stopped in his subordinate's office at the end of the executive meeting. Alan Nelson, the Director of Training and Development reporting to Mr. Cornett, listens to Patrick describe the difficult meeting, "Because of the corporate initiatives, he feels like he has given your group a lot of leeway to make mistakes, mature, and succeed. However, he is beyond frustrated at this point. He has been publicly humiliated, and sees it as a problem originating in your group. The CEO needs answers to questions raised by shareholders about our new initiatives." As this mess rolls downhill, Alan finds out what the CEO doesn't like – and Alan shudders when he realizes the CEO's problem – and anger – has landed squarely on his desk.

Reaping the Rewards of Research

At less than \$10 billion market capitalization, Buckman Biotech has been considered by analysts to be a third tier drug company focused on research and development of new drugs. Buckman had previously focused almost exclusively on leveraging research and development. To achieve this focus, the company partnered with larger, well-established pharmaceutical companies to distribute Buckman products. After all, maintaining a sales and marketing force is expensive and requires operational expertise that Buckman had never attempted to develop.

However, Buckman executives recently came to the conclusion that they wanted a loftier position than the third tier of drug companies. To achieve that improvement,



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Buckman needed to reap more of the benefits of a very robust product research pipeline. If they continued on their current course of marketing their products via a larger drug company with an established sales force, Buckman could expect to continue giving up half of the revenue of their upcoming product releases. Buckman was expecting two blockbuster drugs to emerge from final large-scale FDA mandated human trials this year, along with two in the following year, and one per year after that for the next five years. Of course, a portion of these would fail in the approval process, but by any measure a significant revenue and profit stream would be coming in from these products beginning next year.

In addition to this promising research pipeline, previous marketing agreements with larger drug companies were expiring over the next five years, leaving Buckman with several years worth of patent coverage on three different mature products that were already doing well in the marketplace. Another positive development occurred when other tier three drug companies expressed an interest in alternatives to selling drugs via the large companies' sales force after the Buckman marketing plan was released. In the final analysis, the corporate executives came to the conclusion that if Buckman were to join the second tier, the company needed to begin marketing and selling their products directly to doctors, hospitals, clinics, and consumers.

Make It So

After this change in corporate strategy, Buckman had a long laundry list of needs, one of which was greatly increasing training. As a training manager in his previous job at Hardison Pharma, Alan learned a lot about creating training content, building training



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manuals and presentations, training trainers, and evaluating the training he provided.

Patrick knew about Alan’s reputation as a superstar because of their common experience working at a previous employer.

Alan was brought on board to radically grow the training department. He was expected to assess the amount of trainers and developers required to meet corporate goals, and quickly guide the team to begin rolling out training to their newly acquired sales personnel. “I am very concerned about the timetable the executive team had laid out for hiring and training the sales staff. I want to see the training group ready to go soon so that we can train the incoming new sales staff,” Patrick stated. “Pull out all the stops.”

Therefore, Alan pushed. He hired the staff as quickly as he could, pressed them for training curriculum as quickly it could be produced. He coordinated with the R&D group to ensure his developers documented the training required for each product. He worked his staff pretty mercilessly – to the point of complaints from his subordinates – but training curriculum was out and ready to use just prior to the training requirements of the new and growing sales group.

Why it all rolled downhill

However, the CEO was very concerned about reports of poor training quality. “Alan, the CEO is really steamed about the lack of education that the sales force claims is impeding their progress. He wants something done to ensure that the training is the best, bar none. So, let’s go back to the drawing board and evaluate the training to see what we can do.” “But Patrick, we do evaluate the training. We are at Level One. I have to say



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that we are really doing well to evaluate our training at all considering the strain this ramp-up has been. Also, I have been under the impression that our trainees have really liked the training they have taken. I don't see anything wrong on that front.” Patrick slowly focused in on Alan and said, “Look, I don't care if they like the training. I want to know if we are spending our money wisely.”

Patrick continued on with another sore point. “You need to hear directly some of what I heard from Sales in the staff meeting. Let's call James Buchanan, and we'll see if he can't give you some additional feedback.” After getting him on the phone, Alan has to listen to a small tirade about training that every manager in the company seems to have memorized from the same script. “I have had it with missing my sales numbers because my sales people are too busy flying back to corporate to play ‘What is in the purple pill?’ to get their job done,” said James. “They are supposed to be talking up Buckman products to doctors, and there is not a chance that my sales teams can make their quotas without cutting back on all of this so-called training.”

Finally, Patrick hammered home with what set off the loudest, brightest fireworks. It turns out that a financial analyst interviewed and won a sales job, subsequently attended training to get a feel for the products from the “inside” to do a report for his institutional shareholder customers. This questionable practice led to the analyst obtaining first-hand information about training, products, hiring rates, and geographic coverage from his classmates and training lectures. Ultimately, the analyst cited his experience as a reason to sell the stock. “The product training is not preparing the sales staff to sell the product adequately,” the analyst wrote. “It is fairly obvious that



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the training must be improved for Buckman Biotech to have any chance of success with their plans to market their own products.” These comments and others caused today’s downgrade of the stock, creating a serious flap in the executive suite. Shareholders were apparently becoming restive – Buckman’s stock price over the last few months had steadily declined in the face of analysts concluding that the company was not capable of large-scale sales force operations. Now that shareholders had independent confirmation of their belief that the organic growth strategy was not working as projected, the resistance to the plan could only get more intense. All of the work to transform the company seemed to be in jeopardy.

After taking all of this criticism, Alan decided to look through the training reaction information that each student provided at the end of the training. The reactions to the training were uniformly good. But it was especially troubling that a trainee actually wrote, “I really liked Jennifer as my trainer. The view was spectacular for the entire week.” Were the rest of the trainees reacting to the training or to the trainer?

The last development seemed like the final straw in a very bad day. Luckily for Alan, it was Friday evening, and he had a couple of days to attempt to salvage the company’s direction, his job, his boss’s job, and the CEO’s job. Alan wondered what he could do to straighten the whole mess out.



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