

Marketing Savvy: Turning Negatives into Positives—Part II

Creating New Business Models in a Soft Economy

This article appeared in OHR Tracker, Winter 2003-2004.

By Carolyn Merriman

Contributors to this article include Patrick Doherty, President of Work Fitness Center, and Jackie Longworth, Director of Occupational Medicine, Medcares and Employee Health of Bon Secours Health System.

This is the second in a two-part series discussing how today's market challenges affect the way occupational health providers react to employer needs. Topics address the importance of strengthening one's core strategy, selling deeper and wider to employers, and examples of sales success stories.

Occupational health providers looking for new sales opportunities needn't reinvent the wheel. In fact, those with viable programs say they've followed a two pronged approach—going back to basics and focusing on the desired outcomes for their clients and themselves.

Sound simplistic? Occupational health providers indicate that this strategy has helped them focus on their strengths, and more effectively position themselves to offer the best solutions for their employer clients.

A Step Back to Basics

As a provider, you probably already have the tools and capabilities you need to succeed. But in order to improve on your current position, you first need to determine what that position really is. Positive results and growth are easier to achieve when you set measurable objectives, share your vision with your staff, train them to meet new challenges, and tighten your daily management of clinic processes.

Work Fitness Center (WFC), a two-clinic occupational health provider serving the Quad Cities, is revisiting basic selling techniques through weekly training sessions for its sales and marketing staff. Team members use scripting to help them respond to the occupational health competition in the marketplace.

Patrick Doherty, President of WFC, says the scripting model helps his team differentiate themselves and counter competitors' sales strategies—selling on fee schedules or on their physician credentials—by anticipating employer questions and being prepared with well thought-out responses.

“We're focusing on selling the benefits of our services, instead of the features,” he emphasizes. “Our role is to listen and educate employers on what they can do better and how we can help them succeed.”

New Models for Selling Deeper and Wider

In a soft economy, you can't afford to be complacent just because you have business on the books.

Keep the business you can't afford to lose. It costs more to search for and initiate a relationship with a new client than it does to revitalize a relationship you already have.

Enhance your employer relationships. You've already earned their trust. They continue to buy from you.

Is your team ready to take a focused strategy?

Before you start, make sure you assess your internal and market readiness:

- ⇒ Do you have a strategy in place that you refer to monthly, quarterly, annually?
- ⇒ Are you tracking your progress along the way?
- ⇒ Do you have a training program that aims to continually raise the awareness and skills of your staff via scripting, role-playing, and employer situations?
- ⇒ Do your operations management and customer service teams mirror your strategy?
- ⇒ Does everyone on your team understand the philosophy of the organization and “walk the talk” when dealing with physicians, employers, and other customers?

A BACK-TO-BASICS AUDIT

ARE YOU READY?

Now is the time to provide them with new tools to manage their business and revenue. Determine what your customers needs (both currently and projected), document what you find, then match your services to the health and safety needs of their workforce.

That’s the thinking behind the Bon Secours Health System (Virginia) Circle of Care program, says Jackie Longworth, Director of Occupational Medicine, Medcares and Employee Health. The program has four components: a needs assessment, creation of a service plan, continuous monitoring, and measurement.

“You need a client profile document to answer the questions that relate back to the products you have and can outsource for the employer,” she notes. “Our Circle of Care program is customized for each company and covers a one- to five-year span of what they will need and implement.”

Tailor a benefit-oriented solution. “Don’t just go in with your standard package and information that overwhelms the client. Longworth always starts by asking “What’s your most important need?” Make sure that your solution is relevant and addresses the employer’s problems.

Find Your Focus

Once you identify where your program needs to improve, take steps to make it happen, evaluate your progress, then (and only then) move forward to research new opportunities.

- What is the most profitable area in your organization?
- What services have the highest market demand or potential?
- Are you prepared to serve this market, or is there a gap between what is needed and what you can deliver?
- Are you poised to respond to the opportunities you uncover?

Start by targeting a service that is high in demand and has the greatest potential for profit in your market. Then focus on building a strategy or product that addresses the need. Test several sales approaches that will help you achieve solid results. Work Fitness Center has targeted finding a solution to the over-utilization of occupational health services—a concern of employers in every industry. When a bookbinding client expressed its concern about this, one of Doherty’s customer service representatives suggested monitoring the number of initial visits referred to rehabilitation in one quarter.

“During the quarter, the employer sent in 17 new injuries to us. And 17 were sent to rehab,” he says. “So the employer’s perception was accurate. Our rep used the data as an opportunity to address job design and ergonomics in the workplace. She worked with the employer proactively on how to reduce these kinds of injuries and thus the need for rehab.”

The rep suggested providing an on-site therapist 20 hours a week. In the first six months of the program, the employer’s workers’ compensation costs dropped 10% and absenteeism was

down 5%. The program provided a significant boost for Work Fitness Center as well. On-site service revenue has increased an impressive 13% since 2000.

The change in Work Fitness's product and sales model has enhanced operational and staffing efficiencies and increased net income, allowing the program to succeed in a "capped" market during difficult economic times.

Selling from the Inside Out: Motivating the Internal Workforce

You can craft a strategy and set forth goals, but success follows with a team willing to walk that talk. Instilling pride in your workforce and giving them the education and skills to do their jobs effectively is a crucial element. It is equally important to help them understand—and show you appreciate—their roles with employers and patients.

Bon Secours has given its clinical team a pride of ownership, Longworth says. "Every person knows his or her role very clearly. Building that sense of ownership—that feeling that, 'These customers are my responsibility, I'm here to serve them'—helps define the role of each person."

Staff members are held to performance standards and take part in regular clinical and customer-service training. Additionally, "just-in-time learning" zeroes in on particular situations and encourages team members to look at a problem and find a solution. Employees are rewarded for their efforts and attitudes with on-the-spot recognition perks such as movie tickets or lunches.

As a result, Bon Secours has a team that's proud of who they are and what they do, Longworth says. "They know that we take pride in helping them build their skills. Too many times in healthcare, we evaluate the clinical skills, not the customer-service skills. It's much easier to teach clinical than customer-service skills."

That pride in treating customers well has also helped dramatically reduce—and almost eliminate—staff turnover. And the clinics' customer retention rate has risen to an average of 97% to 99%.

Sharing the Big Picture with Your Team

It doesn't pay to keep secrets from your team. Sharing corporate goals along with the company's bottom line empowers everyone to take an active role in the organization. Train your entire team in business and employer issues. Remember that your clinic team may only see patients (employees) and your sales and marketing team may only see the employers. Keep everyone in the loop and they'll be more inclined to dedicate themselves to the big picture and realize the effect it has on them as individuals.

PUTTING WELLNESS FRONT AND CENTER

Occupational health providers who are selling deeper and wider are teaching employers how wellness products and programs can reduce workforce attrition and keep employees healthier in the long run.

Bon Secours Health System in Virginia offers an employee assistance program (EAP) that helps workers deal with stress, substance abuse, and family problems. "It also addresses a work/life balance," says Jackie Longworth. "If an employer can offer workers relief at work and support them, they are more apt to come to work and their productivity won't be affected." The provider also offers a wellness program that ranges from medical screenings and education about eating right to worksite yoga classes and healthy snacks in the workplace. Workers pay an annual fee based on which package they choose. Costs range from \$15 per year to participate in a walking program, to \$25 to \$50 annually for a program that includes access to the walking program, medical screenings, health fairs, speakers, and more.

The expanded service lines, says Longworth, have enhanced client relationships and helped the health system contribute to its bottom line. The wide range of product offerings positions the provider as the "company doctor" for employers.

"When contracts go out to bid, we're selected for the broad continuum of care that we offer," she adds. "We make a profit from our wellness services, and also have demonstrated that we can save employers money. They can use these savings, then, to add new programs for their employees."

5 POINTS FOR SUCCESS

Hard work does pay off, and making the effort is especially important in highly-competitive markets and tight economic times.

Remember the two-pronged approach: Go back to basics and keep your eye on the prize, both for you and for your clients.



Keep these action steps in mind:

- ❶ Conduct an assessment of your customer/prospect base and their needs alongside of your program offerings and sales approach
- ❷ Develop a retention strategy for your current customers that also identifies growth with targeted accounts.
- ❸ Establish a new business sales strategy that targets the “right” accounts to bring in to the most profitable services.
- ❹ Develop the entire team’s skills in terms of sales, services, and customer-focused messages.
- ❺ Establish an accountable plan with measurable outcomes, manage the team’s efforts toward those goals, and share the success of more rewarding relationships with customers.



*Carolyn Merriman, FRSA, President, Corporate Health Group,
www.corporatehealthgroup.com, 1-888-334-2500*