

and many other individuals and institutions throughout the continuum of patient care.

So Much Training, So Little Time

The training/medical education function (T/ME) is charged with providing basic training of new-hire salespeople, as well as new product updates. These new products and product enhancements are continually being developed and released by the company's four strategic business units (SBUs). These SBUs are often involved in friendly competition for various corporate resources, including sales-training support. Thus each SBU lobbies to ensure that its particular products are well represented in the sales training. At the same time, home-office sales and marketing managers want the training to provide fundamental sales and account management skills, orientation to corporate values, proper use of support personnel, appropriate administrative practices, and so on. As might be expected, regional field managers prefer that their people spend more time making sales calls and less time in formal training. Thus there is a continual struggle among these constituencies over how the precious few days of formal training will be allocated.

In the midst of this, T/ME's people find themselves in the difficult position of refereeing disputes among these constituencies over which topics should receive more emphasis. What's more, T/ME has sought to move sales training and support beyond a focus on content dissemination to a performance-based orientation. Such an orientation, as any trainer knows, requires that increasing amounts of training time be provided for practice and feedback. The bottom line: Sales, marketing, and SBU managers have increasingly longer lists of content to be presented in the limited time available; field managers want trainees to spend less time out of the field; and T/ME people want to make more practice time available to build skills.

Time to "Think Outside the Box"

Fortunately, the difficulties faced by T/ME are largely invisible to those outside the company. RESPIRONICS continues to expand its product line, its sales force, and the boundaries of its market, which is now served by field offices around the world. Driven by this rapid growth and a need to ensure that the "best practices" of its successful sales veterans are captured and disseminated to new hires, T/ME resolved that it could not continue business as usual. It could not persist in designing and institutionalizing a sales-training program that was, in effect, serving as the neck of the funnel in which new content, new

skills, and new-hire salespeople become stuck until course developers can complete their latest revisions. So T/ME decided that it was time for a fundamental overhaul in its approach to training and training development. It determined that three important goals of this overhaul would be a more change-resistant curriculum, the ability to deliver just-in-time training, and an emphasis on performance enhancement instead of merely providing training. A fourth goal, and one that ultimately took T/ME into uncharted waters, was for all members of the sales organization to take responsibility for their own ongoing learning. It followed from this fourth goal that every one of the stakeholders in the sales process should participate in creating a program that would transform them all into a learning organization. Having no experience with executing such a transformation, T/ME decided to focus on the creation of several outputs that seemed to be essential underpinnings. These included the following:

- high-resolution definition of the sales job (that is, a comprehensive and detailed sales job model to serve as a framework for organization-wide learning and curriculum renewal)
- a detailed sales career path to help guide individual development of salespeople
- a broad, performance-based curriculum architecture, emphasizing field-driven training and including home study, mentoring, and the extensive use of performance aids and enhanced support systems to supplant training
- a set of standards for instructional designers who would be creating the learning-support materials (to help ensure quality and consistency)
- detailed descriptions of specific courseware, job aids, field support practices, and management support requirements to guide designers and developers
- a prioritized list of the many instructional development projects that the program would initiate.

The Initiative

From the onset, the T/ME team faced a paradox: To support the learning organization, the teaching-learning process as well as its core vision and values had to be decentralized throughout the entire organization. That which made up the content of the learning (“best practices,” essential skills, company policy, new product information, and the like), however, would have to be centrally acquired, structured, and maintained. The dilemma was clear: Given the need for a

centralized coordination, how could T/ME ensure real, meaningful participation by all the far-flung members of the sales and marketing organization?

What was needed was a new training development paradigm. It became clear that it would not be enough for a mere handful of home-office-appointed subject matter experts (SMEs) to speak on behalf of a particular constituency. If responsibility for learning was to be ubiquitous, then input on the underlying structures, premises, and content of the learning would need to be nearly universal. For this reason, everyone in the sales and marketing organization was invited to analyze the sales work process, identify essential skills that would make up the job model, and define the essential teaching-learning structures that would need to be in place. T/ME's role was to facilitate and coordinate inputs, synthesize results, circulate results for review, collect feedback, revise, and recirculate for final approval. Because the salespeople are primarily responsible for selling products instead of creating training, however, T/ME was careful to reduce the intensity of sales force participation over time. In this way, the T/ME team ensured that the underlying structures and assumptions were synchronized with the prevailing values of the sales force, and, at the same time, saved the sales force from the chores of developing training and performance support tools.

Figure 1 illustrates how the responsibility for defining and maintaining the various outputs was apportioned. Note that the entire organization (not merely a handful of SMEs) was largely responsible for the description of the sales work environment and processes, the job model, and the career paths. This broad effort helped to ensure that the perspectives of all regions in the field, all market environments (e.g., hospital, home care), and all levels of the RESPIRONICS salesperson were represented in the definitions. At the same time, it allowed vital team building and a broad "group consciousness" to evolve as the sales force essentially defined itself and its values. Because these are foundations for all other learning-support mechanisms, they are depicted as the base of the pyramid.

At the other end of the scale, the creation of curriculum details and courses became the responsibility of the training specialists. As the pyramid shape implies, the training specialist's role was more narrowly defined as determining tactics (i.e., specifying curriculum details and courses) and executing the strategy dictated by the broader organization's definition of work processes, job model, and so on.