

# IMPROVE COMMERCIAL EXCELLENCE THROUGH COACHING



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# INTRODUCTION

Sales reps in Life Sciences face a unique challenge and opportunity because their role has a direct tie to the human condition. Reps are tasked with digesting and understanding a large volume of complex information they'll use to communicate with Healthcare Providers (HCPs), and in turn, HCPs will use to make decisions that impact patients' lives. Training in Life Sciences isn't just a one-time event. Reps receive intensive training multiple times a year during NSMs, POAs, and Product Launches so learning new information is always a requirement.

Given this heavy responsibility it's crucial that reps accurately deliver information to their HCPs, unfortunately this doesn't always happen. A recent survey of Commercial Learning and Development (CL&D) professionals revealed that 74% believe their reps are sharing unapproved messaging and content in the field. In another survey, 70% of HCPs felt that pharma reps "do not completely understand their needs and expectations."

Between HCPs feeling misunderstood and reps potentially sharing inaccurate messages, how can organizations confidently demonstrate their value while also protecting their brand, avoiding compliance issues and, most importantly, protecting patient safety?

## The answer lies in coaching.

While many CL&D departments focus on training programs aimed at effective knowledge transfer; knowledge application through coaching is often an afterthought. With shrinking HCP availability and patient safety top of mind, communicating accurate, personalized, and value-driven messages is tantamount. This is where good coaching can make all the difference.

This guide outlines practical steps to help CL&D teams establish more comprehensive and effective coaching strategies to reduce risk and achieve commercial excellence.

**In 2022, a top pharma company faced a fine of \$65 million for off-label and unapproved promotion of medical products.**

- Violation Tracker Industry Summary Page

# STEP 1 : FACILITATE KNOWLEDGE APPLICATION

Ebbinghaus' Forgetting Curve tells us that most learners forget 50% of what they've learned after only twenty minutes, and 90% within a week. When training departments don't prioritize learning retention strategies like verbalization, accuracy, and personalized message delivery, the risk of unapproved content and messaging usage rises.

How do you improve retention and application?

## DEVELOP MESSAGING MASTERY

Verbalization exercises that allow for active recall of key message phrases and develop field reps' communication skills will allow better, more effective, risk-reduced interactions with HCPs.

## EMPOWER KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Encourage a culture of knowledge sharing by enabling peer coaching. This offers opportunities for safe communication without the pressure of impacting HCP relationships. It promotes a trusted and ongoing sharing practice. Reps receive feedback and suggestions from their peers which can have an invaluable impact.

## EQUIP WITH VIRTUAL ROLE-PLAY

Equipping training and sales managers with the tools to practice scenarios is crucial. Coaching that puts reps in real-world scenarios challenges them to apply their training to actual use cases, and encourages them to practice their messaging in a safe space to avoid adverse risk to patients. If mistakes are made, reps can be coached to use the right message and avoid misspeaking when in the field.

***The Learning Pyramid, developed by the National Training Laboratories, suggests that learners can retain up to 90% of knowledge attained if they apply it.***

- Overview of the learning pyramid for training providers

## STEP 2 : EMPOWER KNOWLEDGE VALIDATION

Communicating an inappropriate message to a HCP can have dire consequences. CL&D teams need to promote compliance and give their reps the confidence they need when in the field.

How do you ensure message consistency and compliance?

### INCORPORATE FEEDBACK LOOPS

CL&D teams can put coaching back into the hands of their field reps by empowering them to request coaching on-demand. Reps can address their own knowledge gaps and sharpen understanding of topics before saying the wrong thing to an HCP. By leveraging video coaching tools, reps can also practice and refine their approach repeatedly until they've perfected the message.

### TIMELY CERTIFICATIONS

Incorporating learning assessments and certifications into training not only improves both rep and manager confidence, but also ensures audit-ready regulatory compliance.

### INTEGRATED FIELD COACHING REPORTS

While spaced learning (learning over time) and interval retrieval (rehearsal of information across different points in time) is proven to increase knowledge retention, managers need tools to monitor and observe this behavior. Tracking training effectiveness and enabling coaching to correct behavior through Field Coaching Reports (FCRs) offers visibility into rep behavior while in the flow of their workdays, rather than weeks or even months later during a ride-along.

**“ If there’s a new customer objection, we send it out as a scenario, and sales reps practice answering it. The recording is sent to their district manager, who views it and provides coaching to the rep. ”**

– Pete Hodlofski, Director of Sales, Idorsia Pharmaceuticals LTD

## STEP 3: EMPLOY CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Pinpointing when and where non-compliant behavior happens is difficult. With training modules and messaging in one place, marketing materials in another place, and coaching tools in yet another place, rep confusion is understandable. Additionally, frequent updates made to the large and complex set of materials after training concludes, leaves reps unsure of which to use with HCPs. The most effective way to eliminate the use of unapproved and out of date material and messaging is to implement a continuous learning culture that includes coaching and champions learning in the flow of work.

### TARGET COACHING

For continuous learning to be truly effective, you need visibility into field behavior to understand where the issues are. Knowing what content is being used, what reps are searching for, and what training is being accessed most frequently provides insight into where reps are struggling and where coaching opportunities lie. Such insight allows managers to proactively identify and address specific knowledge gaps with targeted coaching. This helps managers eliminate risky behavior before it affects patient outcomes.

### MAKE CONTENT EASY TO DIGEST

Reps are tasked with consuming and understanding complex information that can be difficult to recall. By dividing training modules into smaller, more manageable chunks – micro-learning – information is easier to digest and retain. Following the micro-learning with specific coaching scenarios that are linked to the key talking points helps translate knowledge into practice. This approach builds rep confidence and increases their effectiveness in the field.

### CENTRALIZED INFORMATION

Issues with access can often be a barrier to more value-driven engagements. When reps struggle to access high-quality, MLR-approved assets, commercial success is threatened. Centralizing training, content, and coaching into one platform establishes a single source of truth and makes it easy for reps to get what they need and stay on-message.

**Philips Respironics gathered real data to identify patterns and profile the behavior of their top performing reps. That knowledge provided managers with “actionable insight” – which added precision to their coaching.**

– Customer Story: Increase Sales by Identifying Top Rep Behavior

# CONCLUSION

Onboarding is one word everywhere else; can you change it here?

Life Sciences field representatives wield a unique power. No other industry has the personal reach that can directly impact patient outcomes and save lives. With the stakes as high as they are, it is of the utmost importance that CL&D teams and Sales leaders implement a more robust coaching strategy as part of a larger continuous learning culture within their organizations. Understanding and incorporating coaching practices is crucial to helping avoid unintentional outcomes, but more than that, it ensures that reps are given the tools they need to succeed. To do this, organizations need to break down functional silos, centralize information for reps, and make it easy to tie coaching to specific needs. This needs to happen beyond the on-boarding process, but also as part of NSMs, POAs, and Product Launches. A strategy that champions ongoing knowledge transfer and application through coaching with a focus on accessibility and flexible modalities are the way forward. A platform that provides access to unified and continuous learning will enable Life Sciences organizations to protect their brand reputation, reduce risk to patients, and achieve commercial excellence.

To learn more about how a continuous learning culture that focuses on training and coaching could help your organization reduce risk and achieve commercial success, [contact us](#).

## ABOUT ACTO

ACTO, the #1 learning platform for Life Sciences, helps educate and engage learners through unified touch points and journeys, which reduces risk, improves efficiency, and boosts effectiveness. With ACTO, commercial and clinical leaders can draw deep, powerful insights to improve performance by consolidating learning into an omnichannel experience.

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