

# Practice Makes Perfect

BY MICHAEL T. FERRIS



Sales training is important, but it's refreshing that knowledge is even more important. Large corporations require regular sales training. Even their top sales people are sent to training seminars on a regular basis to refine their skills. The very best sales people in all industries are constantly working to improve their productivity. Most

work on a commission basis as this is the only way they can constantly raise their income. As with most professions, smart companies observe what the top performers do, and then try to emulate them.

After a home care agency or hospice takes the first step in training their sales team, they must then embark on a pro-

gram of continual coaching and training. The most successful sales people are constantly improving their approach and technique, and having their knowledge refreshed. Ongoing learning is part of being a professional sales person. Sales is an art form, and it requires practice to achieve excellence.

Hiring sales people for home care and hospice requires a focus on finding those applicants that possess the personality and character necessary to deliver the results. It is better to hire someone with good sales skills and experience selling an intangible—service. They should have the core competencies to be able to effectively do so. Careful hiring practices are essential to assembling a highly effective sales team. Do not hire anyone who is not cut out to be a sales person. The craft is one that requires practitioners that have the innate skills to be good sales people. They must be self starters and should be motivated by the desire to compete and win. They should be focused on consistently beating their own goals and set new sales records.

The sales person should earn their way through their sales productivity. Just as a

## Marketing Pediatric Home Care and Hospice Services

Pediatric home care and hospice must be approached as more than another specialty program; it is a completely different service. The staff must be trained in pediatrics, and most will prefer to work only with children. The referral sources think differently with regards to pediatric patients and their home care needs. Successful companies such as Pediatric Services of America ([www.psakids.com](http://www.psakids.com)) recognized this and have positioned themselves as the resource in the communities they serve for pediatric home care. They have branded themselves as one thing and one thing only. When considering a pediatric program or marketing an existing one, agencies should take the same focused approach.

More patient/family involvement, more private health insurance / managed care payers, less competition, and pediatricians that are more involved (in general) in their patients' home plan of care. This all adds up to real

opportunity if you are willing to focus on providing not only a high level of medical care, but also very strong customer care. The greater involvement by the families and pediatricians makes the customer service component very important. Gone are the days that you could get away with poor service because you were the only game in town. Many of the hospital based pediatric home care programs are feeling the heat of competition as more national, and regional players are focusing on peds. Since there is a good amount of infusion related to pediatric home care cases, the larger infusion players are starting to provide the pediatric nursing component as well.

The need for great customer service and patient care in pediatric hospice is perhaps even greater. There has been a lack of providers historically and this has created an opportunity. If there was ever an area of our industry that needs compassionate care and customer service, this is it.

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field nurse has certain productivity standards, so too, should the sales team. Set goals based on beating the referral patterns observed in the same month in prior years. Every market is different, but once you have several years of data under your belt, you should be able to predict which months are the strongest and the weakest for referrals.

Another way for the sales team to “sharpen their saw” is to maintain a sales learning library. There are many great sales books, and most are available on tape. Just visit your favorite local or online bookseller, and you will find more than enough to choose from. Make them available to the members of the sales team. Some agencies will require certain reading. If you do, make sure that the sales people submit book reports to the group. Each will find different important parts to the same sales book. By having

them all report back to you and the team, everyone will get more out of the assignment. If you send a member of the sales team to a conference (such as the NAHC

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Annual Meeting which has many sessions on home care and hospice sales and marketing), make sure that they know that on their return, they will have to give a report and share their knowledge with

the entire team. Make attendance a reward for exceptional sales performance.

Create reminders to keep the sales concepts and practices in your sales team’s minds. Have meetings on a regular basis that allow the team to share successes and get help when they are stymied. Set up regular required email reports for the sales team members to submit to sales management on a daily or weekly basis. Review the basics of sales on a regular basis with the entire team. Even your most seasoned sales people will benefit from these reminders of how it is done. All sales people get into bad habits or take shortcuts; only with regular reminder programs can you guard against this, and provide your people the support that they deserve.

Goals and plans must be maintained and monitored. Goal setting can be the most motivating process if you make it

## Seven Keys to Successful Pediatric Home Care Marketing

**T**rain ALL of your staff to be extremely customer service oriented. Patience is a real virtue when providing pediatric home care services. There are many “frequent flyers” that will demand your agency if you provide them with the service and the reason to stand up for their choice. There are no more loyal customers and advocates than parents of chronically ill children if you have taken good care of them in the past.

Make sure that your entire marketing materials look and feel like pediatrics. To gain loyal following from the pediatric community, you must not look just like “one more home care agency.” The designs, colors and copy must be geared towards pediatric patients. Children’s hospitals have found that they must establish a separate identity from that of the main hospital to really compete for the pediatric patients. Why should home care or hospice be any different?

Have your sales people focus on telling pediatricians and pediatric specialists the story that will give them reason to remember your agency and to try it. Many are used to just letting the hospital take the cases, but given a good reason,

they will write for your agency.

Obtain contracts with the major insurance providers in your area. Negotiate rates that work for you. In most markets, insurers will pay better for pediatric services than other areas of home care. Having the ability to work with all payers is very important in pediatric services.

If you don’t offer infusion services, partner with someone that does. There are too many cases that involve infusion in peds. The referral source just wants to have one home care agency to call for all things pediatric.

Don’t overlook marketing to the family practitioners in the community as they have pediatric cases as well. Every year, more dually certified, Med/Peds physicians increase.


Partner up with some local pediatric charities. They will appreciate the support, and it will enable your agency to get closer to the patients, their families and the specialists. A wonderful one to consider is the Hole in the Wall Gang ([www.holeinthewallcamps.org](http://www.holeinthewallcamps.org)) camps for children internationally with chronic illnesses.

become a part of the way your team operates. Each team member must take ownership of their goals, and be responsible and accountable for producing the results. Well planned activities are the way goals are achieved. There should be support in the form of current referral reports and coaching. Invest in coaching for the sales team, and the entire investment of team and coach will pay many dividends.

Observation is critical as well, and should be an integral part of the coaching process. Make sure that the sales people know that they are important by having managers ride along with them. You will want to have some of the ride along observations happen without notice so that you can see what they are really doing, and how they are planning and using their time.

Finally, help the sales team make the intangible seem tangible. Selling home care and hospice services are selling intangibles. You are selling a service that most do not need when you contact them. Anything that you can do to make it tangible will pay off big time. An example would be the practice of taking telehealth

reports to the physician, and showing them how their patient is progressing. If you can find out when the patient is having his or her next scheduled appointment, then you can have a fresh copy of the latest telemedicine report in the chart. This provides a tangible item that shows the doctor what is going on in the home. While most sales reps don’t want to hear this, taking orders to the physicians provide a reason to be there, and tangible proof of the services being delivered. Coupling that with telemonitoring reports and any other updates on the patient, will make their job much easier in the long run.

Whatever you do in the way of selling and marketing your services, don’t do it half way. Hiring sales people is only the first step. Giving them the initial training is the next. The final step is to make sure that they have ongoing support in practicing the basic sales activities. Keep them practicing and they will continue to out produce the competition. Remember that if you are marketing your services, you are in sales. Think accordingly. Act accordingly. Happy Marketing! 

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