

The Challenge:

Professional Development Fit for Pharma

By Mark Gregory

Most companies and managers know that to survive and be successful, they must embody a culture of continuous learning where professional development is a top priority. But, this goal can be elusive.

One company, Pharmahorizons Inc., with the help of dozens of pharma executives and veterans, has come up with a unique approach to learning. Their program, the Case Study Challenge, overcomes most barriers to professional development.

So, what makes the Case Study Challenge a good professional development fit for pharma? For starters, it is training that is industry and student-focused, flexible, fun, and affordable.

This is how Kevin Crowe, regional sales manager, at Lundbeck Canada, a member of last year's Challenge views the event: "While most of us are caught up in the day-to-day activities at work, I found

it surprisingly refreshing to devote some time and effort to a problem-solving exercise like the Case Study Challenge. Discussing the case and reaching consensus with my teammates really got the creative juices flowing."

The Challenge, which runs annually from March to November, consists of eight business cases in two categories: pharma managers and pharma sales representatives. The cases cover topics such as human resources, sales, marketing and sales management, product management, regulatory affairs, and business development. A team of professionals actually working in the industry develops these cases. The cases represent very realistic scenarios that compel participants, working in teams of three or four, or as individuals, to problem-solve and find workable and innovative solutions. No travel is involved and teams can work together in person, over the phone, or via e-mail.



Pharmahorizons Case Study Challenge 2002 winners (from left to right): Dany Labrecque, Sophie Vadeboncoeur (Pharmahorizons), Paul Blais, Gina Lucas, David Cousins, Doug Wright, Darlene Macartney.

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During the spring and summer, teams sign on through the Challenge Web site at www.pharmahorizons.com. Then, beginning July 14 and every two weeks until November 3, teams receive a Challenge case by e-mail. They have two weeks to develop a solution and submit it to a small team of judges drawn from a group of 24 industry leaders. The judges score the responses and identify the best answer. The top teams with the highest marks at the end of the competition win prizes, trophies, and industry recognition. Teams only have to complete three of the eight cases to be eligible for prizes, but the more cases they complete the greater their chances to win and their learning “return on investment.”

Michel Chouinard, vice-president and general manager at Biovail Canada, is a strong supporter of the Challenge and understands the value of continuous learning. He was a judge and one of the case developers in the 2002 event.

“Central to the effectiveness of the Case Study Challenge is that it is modeled after the Harvard School of Business (HSB) approach to learning. The HSB believes that success in business comes from experience and knowledge, from the ability to analyze and reflect, from observing and interacting with others, and learning from these encounters,” Mr. Chouinard said.

Leading pharma companies who took part in last year’s event included: Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS), Merck Frosst, Pfizer, Aventis Pharma, Axcen Pharma, Berlex Canada, Lundbeck Canada, Novo Nordisk, and Roche Diagnostics. Companies took different approaches to their teams. Some formed groups from territories and work units and encouraged internal competition. Others pulled cross-functional teams together that forged stronger company understanding.

The Challenge formula is magic for many, like Anna Tsouluhas, product manager at Abbott Laboratories.

“The Challenge is a great initiative that allows people, who do not necessarily get the opportunity to work together, to exchange ideas, brainstorm about relevant issues in our industry, and collaborate on applicable solutions,” Ms. Tsouluhas said.

The professional development program also draws praise from people like Dany Labrecque, vice-president of sales at BMS. A team of BMS sales managers from Ontario won the 2002 Challenge.

“By giving BMS employees a chance to take part in the Challenge, we delivered on our pledge to show that we value them. In return, each of our teams threw themselves into the event. The Challenge experience proved to be highly educational and motivational,” Mr. Labrecque said.

“Now that the Challenge is bilingual, we are looking forward to fielding more teams and taking on the best managers and sales reps in the business in spirited competition,” he added.

Other pharma executives support the need for easy-to-access, practical professional development.

“Today’s successful companies are driven by skilled managers and professionals who demonstrate leadership, teamwork, innovation and continuous learning,” Daniel Livernoche, national sales director at Aventis Pharma, said.

“We are proud that our Aventis Pharma team was among the top teams in last year’s event.”

This year, the Challenge has partnered with sponsors that include the Chronicle of Healthcare Marketing magazine, IMS Health, and others to broaden awareness of the Challenge.

Pharmahorizons has a toll-free North American hotline at 1-888-514-5858, ext. 240 for those who want more information or wish to sign up by phone rather than online at the Challenge Web site at www.pharmahorizons.com.

If you are looking for a professional development program that is affordable, custom tailored for pharma, and doesn’t require time away from the field or the office, ask yourself: Are you up to the Challenge? [CPM](#)

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