



Career Pathways of Sales Trainers

By Cindy Kravitz

Many pharmaceutical companies view sales training departments as a hub where ability and opportunity meet to develop promising talent for other high visibility roles in the organization. To gain insight into the typical career pathway of a sales trainer in mid- to large-tier pharmaceutical organizations, TGaS Advisors surveyed training & development leaders in February 2016 and received responses from nine pharmaceutical companies. We explored topics including a sales trainer’s professional background, skill development and evaluation while in-role and time spent in-role before pursuing new opportunities.

Prior Experience and Necessary Skills

Most sales trainers have previously “carried the bag” as a pharmaceutical sales representative and/or worked in a pharmaceutical or biotech training role at another company (Figure 1). When hiring a new sales trainer, companies generally look for a combination of strong project management, clinical acumen, facilitation and communication skills. Other important skills mentioned by one respondent include the ability to influence and see the bigger picture in an organization, as well as learning agility.

In-Role Skill Development During Tenure

Although only half of responding companies (five of nine) have formal development plans for their sales trainers, those in-role are trained on a variety of skills to prepare them to be successful throughout their tenure in

FIGURE 1 PREVIOUSLY HELD ROLES

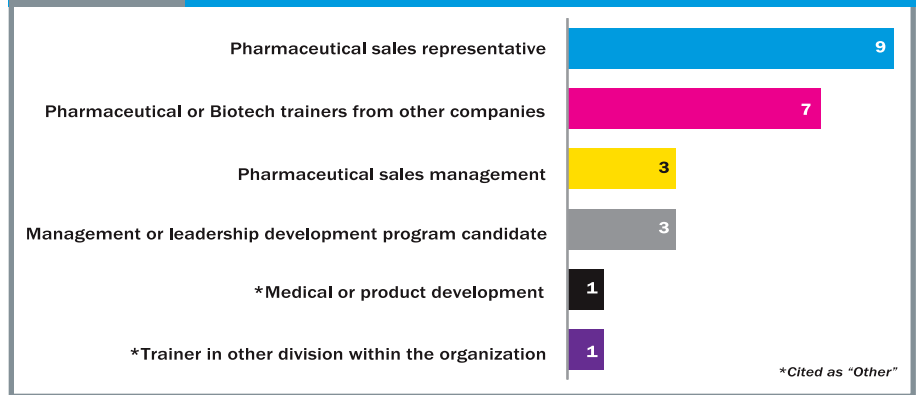


FIGURE 2 IN-ROLE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT DURING TENURE



FIGURE 3 COMPETENCIES TO EVALUATE SALES TRAINERS



the training department. Most companies provide formal training on facilitation and project management, both of which are often noted as integral skills for excelling in a sales trainer position. Some companies develop a greater variety of skills in their sales trainers, including coaching and influence, adult learning principles, curriculum design, virtual training and stakeholder management (Figure 2).

Additionally, many companies use professional and on-the-job methods of skills development, including:

- Encouraging sales trainers to attend industry conferences, such as the LTEN annual conference, to further develop their skills and talents.
- Assigning sales trainers to high stakes and high visibility projects, such as launch brands, global projects, partnerships with emerging leader programs and training workshop builds.

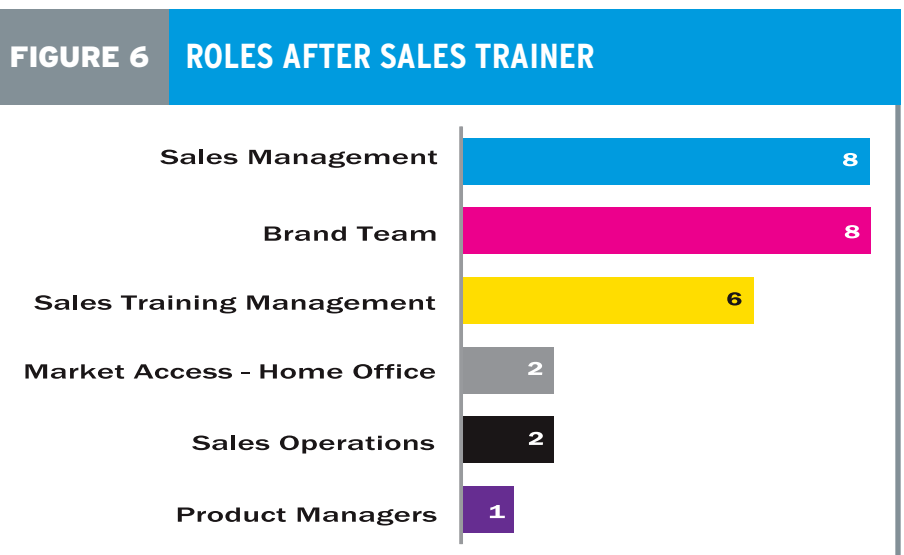
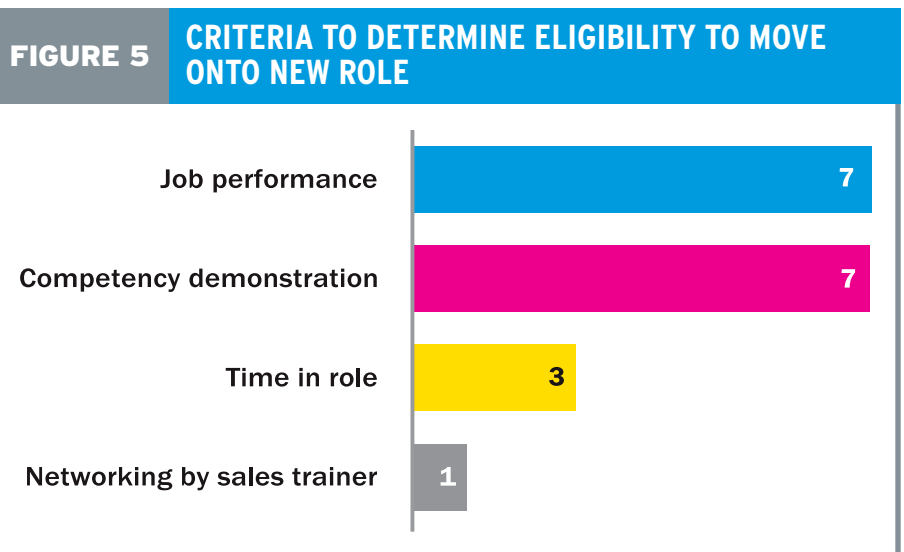
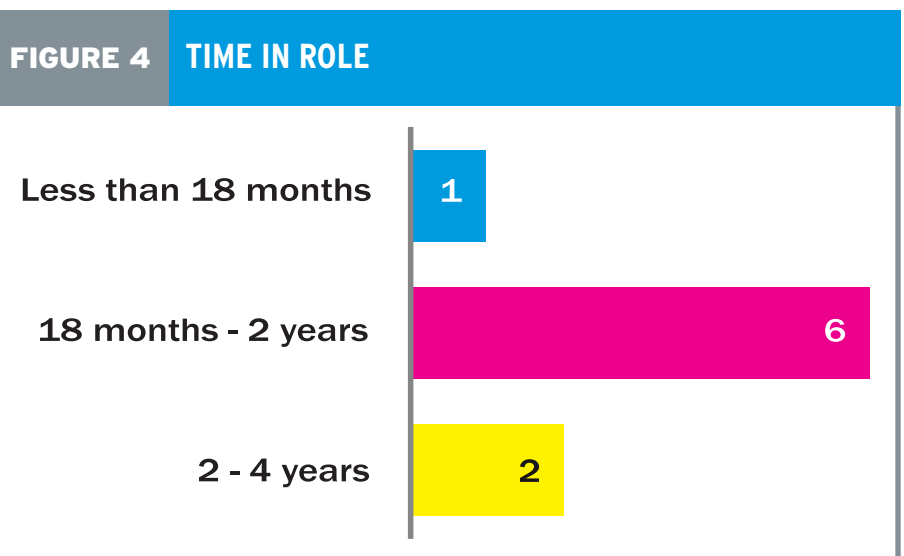
One respondent shared: “I assign projects that capitalize on individual strengths and offer the opportunity for my trainers to become subject matter experts in a specific area.”

Competencies to Evaluate Sales Trainers

Most companies (six of seven responding) track their sales trainers’ skills over time and use competencies to evaluate trainer skill level. The typical competencies for the sales trainer role are not only required for in-role success but also valuable and transferable to other more strategic roles in the organization. These competencies include:

- Leadership and coaching
- Project management
- Business acumen
- Impactful communication

Fewer companies cited more training-specific competencies, such



as facilitation and curriculum development/design (Figure 3). This aligns with the notion that many companies choose to prepare sales trainers for other more strategic roles within the organization rather than a long-term stay in the sales trainer role.

Time In-Role

At most companies, a sales trainer role is considered a rotational role in which someone may choose to stay for a longer duration (three to four years). However, most respondents state their sales trainers spend an average of only 18 months to two years in their positions (Figure 4).

Future Opportunities

No responding companies stated that they are incentivized to move members of the training & development department either up within the department or out of the

department into new roles. Most companies (five of nine) evaluate sales trainers against two main criteria to determine when they are ready to move on to their next role: job performance and competency (Figure 5). Positions within sales management, brand management or sales training management are the most common next steps for sales trainers (Figure 6). ■

About this Study: Working in partnership with LTEN, TGaS Advisors, a leading benchmarking and advisory services firm, conducts studies of training and development in the life sciences industry. For more information on the 2016 Career Pathways of Sales Trainer study, please contact Cindy Kravitz, MSIT, TGaS Advisors Training & Development, cindy.kravitz@tgas.com.

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