
The Age of Coaching

How pharma sales teams can
face the future with confidence



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Introduction

We know the ground has shifted beneath our feet. But every epoch-fracturing event ushers in a new era.

The pandemic has been healthcare and the pharmaceutical industry's meteor moment: established eco-systems have been wiped out and sales force routines have been scorched from the face of the earth.

These cataclysmic events offer a unique opportunity for radical, rather than incremental change.

Welcome to the Age of Coaching.

Coaching has always been treasured by the wise and it has become an imperative for survival and growth in a highly competitive market with multiple launches and activity yet limited connection with healthcare professionals.

Lamenting the past will have no impact on sales performance and medical science liaison (MSL) teams' ability to influence and convince clients but adapting to a fresh approach where both sales people and MSLs are coached to capitalise on a new skill set can be transformative.

Barack Obama's nation-moving speeches were not off the cuff – every moment, every pause, inflection and emphasis were practiced well before being delivered with spell-binding effect. Tennis stars Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer work out an approach for each match and practice till it is grooved into their soul. They lose the moment, the game, set and match if they are not pitch perfect.

Companies across industry that are investing time and resources into coaching are being rewarded handsomely with improved balance sheets, business efficiencies and effectiveness, and employee satisfaction.

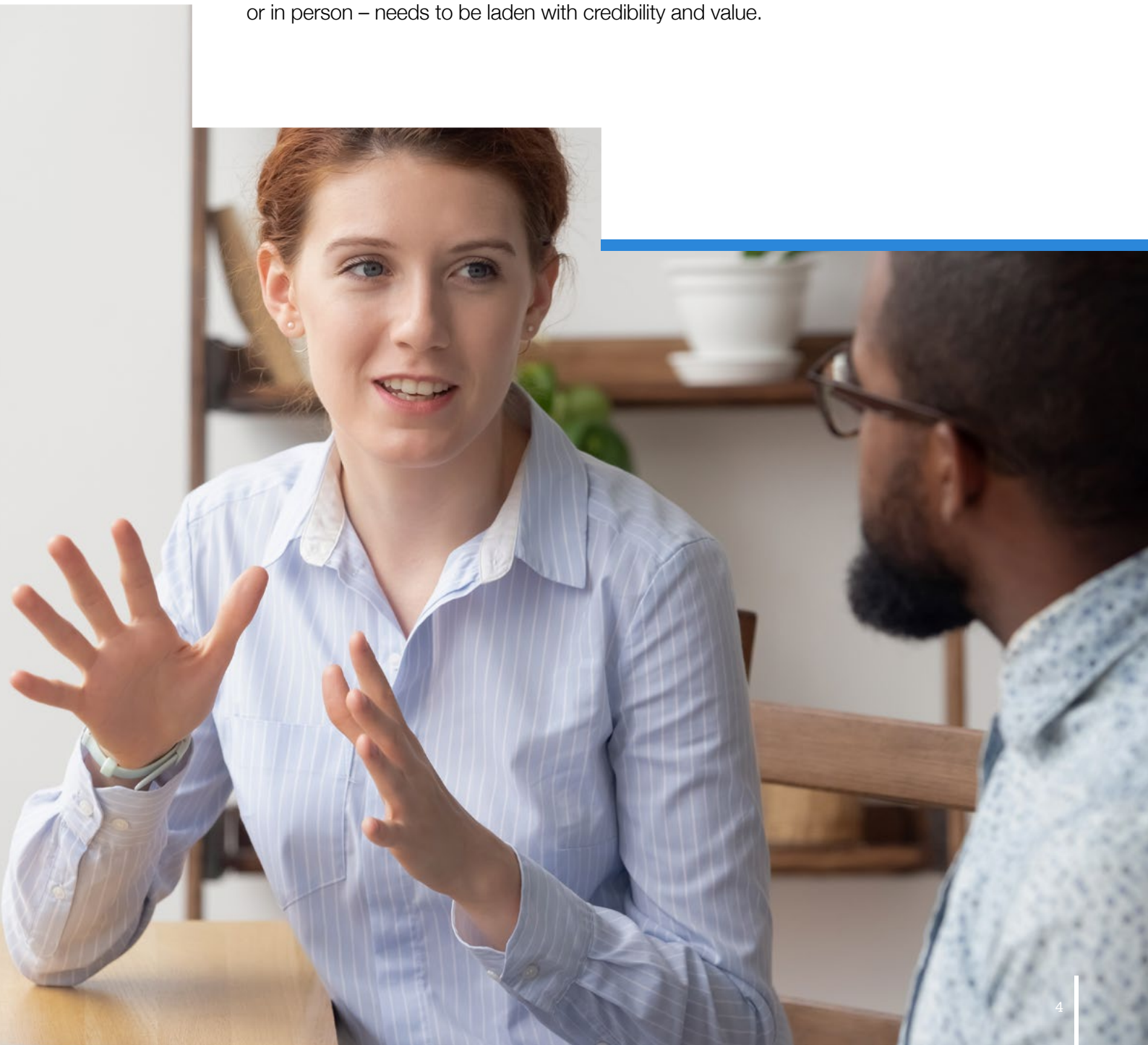
This whitepaper analyses the benefits of technology-based coaching programmes and examines how business leaders are reaping rewards from improved productivity, organisational strength, enhanced team-work and job satisfaction and staff retention.

New Era – New Skills

Picking through the debris of the pandemic's impact on the pharmaceutical industry reveals one shining element – the opportunity to raise the bar on excellence in sales performance and MSL exchanges.

The safety net of regularly timetabled meetings with HCPs has been removed so it will take a new set of skills to survive and prosper post-pandemic. Sales forces, MSLs and their corporate structures need to embrace fresh techniques, strategies and channels that enable them to deliver vital information and detail without being lost in the tsunami of digital content unleashed to make up the lack of traditional contact.

Product knowledge and a sales pitch will no longer be enough and each moment in front of an HCP – be it via an online platform, a phone call or in person – needs to be laden with credibility and value.



“You can grow businesses by developing individuals as a company. You do that by driving credibility, competence and performance,” says Michael Cassar, regional sales manager at Galderma, who has a track record with pharmaceutical multi-nationals such as Wyeth, GSK, MSD and Liberty Medical.

He operates at the sharp edges of sales force performance where connecting with clients and delivering clear, compelling messages and detail is the lifeblood of campaigns. Providing regular coaching with relevant feedback enhances his team’s ability to make the best of every contact, deploying a spectrum of skills from scientific knowledge, through active listening to an acute understanding of an HCP’s needs and the rhythms of their workload.

“New skills and a new approach are needed”

“Given the accessibility issues to get in front of our customers in healthcare, I think a new or enhanced existing skill set is critical,” adds Cassar. “These include developing a rapport, reading a situation and getting to see an HCP in the first place then, critically, what they do in that meeting will determine whether or not the door remains open for subsequent visits for our sales people.”

HCPs are time poor and have demonstrated they are comfortable with a hybrid relationship with medical affairs, sales force and MSLs via face-to-face and online contact. Casual drop-ins for coffee, sandwiches and updates were a casualty of the pandemic with a poor long-term prognosis.



Coaching is a game-changer

The new potent forces are the strategic use of online platforms with tailored messaging sent via preferred channels, and all with a hallmark of credibility.

Many existing skills used by field forces are relevant but they – and competencies with new channels - benefit from consistent and continuous coaching.

Distinguished leadership coach Carol Kauffman, assistant professor at the department of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, observed that coaching is an effective force for change at individual and organisational level. “It empowers all of us to be at our best,” she states.

“Building knowledge requires focus, practice, coaching, and the forming of new attitudes”



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Dr Kauffman, founder of the [Institute of Coaching](#) who has advised a range of healthcare clients, believes that coaching optimises “the performance of a person or organisation in diverse arenas including leadership, healthcare, and public service.”

Developing new skills alongside traditional talents needs forensic understanding of corporate goals, client requirements and digital capabilities.

“It’s a mix that will change from client to client,” says Chris Costandi, a sales and commercial excellence leader, who has worked for Allergan, Novartis and at GSK. “But, if you don’t recognise that new skills and a new approach are needed then you will be left behind.”

“Communications skills that reps have spent years developing need to be refined for the remote engagements that have become a fixture of healthcare interactions”

“Communications skills that reps have spent years developing need to be refined for the remote engagements that have become a fixture of healthcare interactions. They work differently for phone calls and video meetings and messages and language has to be shaped to suit accordingly.

“Salespeople and MSLs need to develop specific competencies when hosting virtual meetings such as the ability to ask the right questions of their clients at the right time but then to also and listen intently to their response and observe body language as well... critical skills when engaging with clients remotely.”

A [report](#) from Boston Consulting in June 2020 advocated for learning to be embedded in corporate culture rather than being episodic for launches and campaigns.

It stated: “Building knowledge requires focus, practice, coaching, and the forming of new attitudes, all of which take months. If organisations want to win at learning, they need to incorporate their skill-building efforts into the work that people do every day. And they must build skills at all levels of the enterprise—top to bottom—as an integrated part of the business and use regular business metrics to measure impact.”

Adding value

Coaching was once marginalised as a diversion from routine work – sometimes welcome, other times not – with focus on adding skills, knowledge and competencies surfacing only at product-specific sales conferences and launch meetings.

But its value is becoming more evident in sales figures and in strengthening individual and team performances across a landscape radically reshaped by the pandemic.

“Coaching is what will ultimately drive overall results and the bottom line. It brings value and should be valued,” adds Cassar. “In coaching, you are aiming to bring about a change or reinforcement of behaviour and skills and, in any sales environment, a crucial factor is conveying the key selling points of your product.

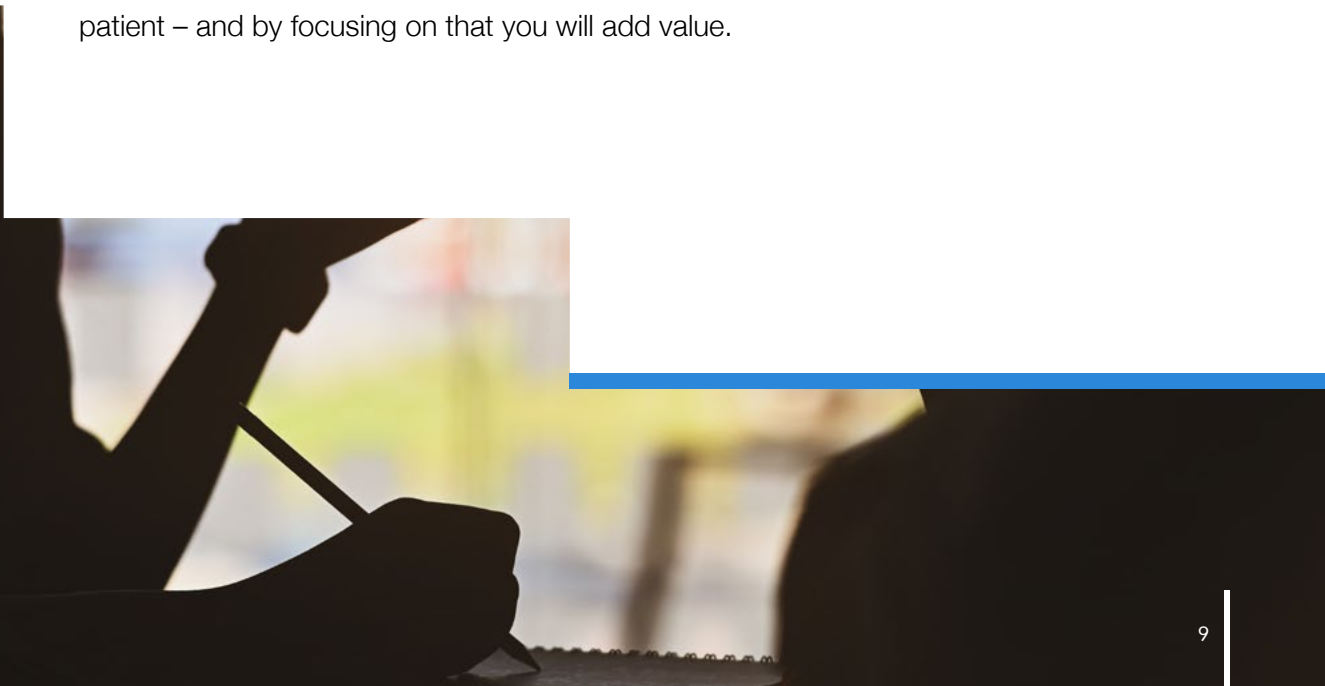
“You need to demonstrate to an HCP that you are adding value and are not wasting their time.

You have to make every interaction a positive one so you can build on what you have been discussing. Even if it does not result in a sale or contract, the client needs to feel those precious moments they gave up were well spent.”

Investing in coaching need not be a bank-breaker; failing to invest could be.

“The pharma industry, like many others, is very competitive with some products doing pretty much the same thing, so you have to stand out, you have to add value,” says Cassar. “You do that by presenting in a way that actually delivers on the needs of the customer – ultimately the patient – and by focusing on that you will add value.

“You have to stand out,
you have to add value”



“You have to bring something to the table and, therefore, add value and you do that by demonstrating competence and that you are knowledgeable. But you can’t do that without understanding them and adapting, shaping and practicing your message.

More companies are now making coaching an integral part of their organisation’s culture with managers, MSLs and sales teams being given time and space to learn and problem solve in a positive environment.

“This is a critical part of the jigsaw that needs to be addressed”

But the value of coaching can be compromised if managers and team leaders – often promoted directly from successful field careers – are not upskilled in training techniques themselves.

“This is a critical part of the jigsaw that needs to be addressed as they are often thrust into management roles without the necessary skills or training,” says Chris Costandi.

He sees coaching bringing value across the corporate structure with digital tools freeing up time and investment in technology bringing clear, measurable returns.



Coaching as part of the DNA

Coaching needs to be a fundamental characteristic of a company with its status enshrined in the core mission statement. But, as research reveals, industry has some distance to travel.

Studies across sales reps of all sectors shine a light on the issue: [The Voice of the Sales Rep Study](#), from SalesFuel in 2020, reported that only 30% of reps get frequent coaching personalised to their unique needs while [Gartner](#) recorded that only 38% felt their manager was helping them develop the skills for their role and just 34% were confident they were being prepared for the future.

It is only a snapshot but early adopters in coaching, and using technology to deliver it, are racing ahead both in terms of performance and job satisfaction.

Investing in coaching need not be a bank-breaker; failing to invest could be



“Teams must be given the time to practice and make the best of their coaching opportunities. It is clear that the more you put in, the more you will gain from it”

“Coaching should be a part of the culture,” says Emma Booth, executive director global business at Amgen. “One of the common hurdles is that people responsible for coaching have multiple roles so that needs attention. But if you can put in weekly touch points with your teams and ask the right questions about their priorities and find out how you can help then that will help them advance.”

“Sometimes, it might feel impossible to imagine how better coaching can be achieved without big organisational commitment and restructures. But, if you break it down and have it as part of weekly catch ups, it can become more readily adopted. The main thing is for an organisation to say ‘coaching is a priority’ and find things that support the journey to make it happen.”

“Investment in coaching needs to start with the managers”

Booth adds that coaching can empower MSLs to deliver their scientific knowledge and passion in an engaging narrative. “It is truly something we can all benefit from,” she states.

Her strategy identifies a simple, effective, inexpensive entry point into adopting coaching as a core quality but the pursuit of behavioural change and skill development needs a long-term commitment.

It also has to be timely with specific feedback, observes Galderma’s Michael Cassar.

“The ad hoc nature of coaching in most organisations means that staff sometimes just end up practicing bad habits,” he says.

“Investment in coaching needs to start with the managers who invariably have been excellent performers out in the field but they now need a new set of skills.”

Focus and Feedback

He advocates continuous coaching that focuses on a small range of messages and delivery techniques rather than a bucket list of skill improvements. The results will flow from staff having the time, space and positive environment to learn with regular feedback.

“All the best athletes in the world have coaches who provide specific feedback,” he adds. “This commitment has to be ring-fenced in terms of the time, the equipment and the environment.

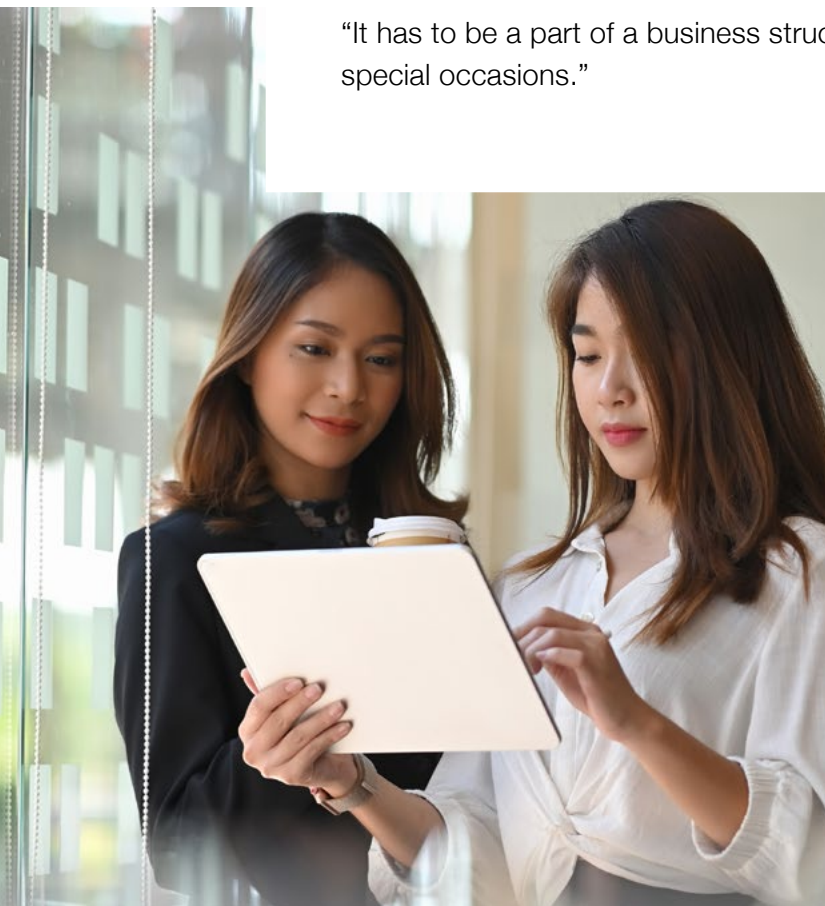
“Part of a business structure, not a bolt-on for special occasions”

“It will enable managers to enhance their staff’s capabilities and ultimately result in more sales.

“One way companies demonstrate that coaching is valued is by allocating time for it to happen and not letting it become a tick-box exercise. Coaching is constant and for that to be effective at changing behaviour, the feedback has to be timely and specified. It cannot be an afterthought.”

Chris Costandi adds: “We all understand that you have to prepare and lay the foundations for a successful sales call or medical exchange. But now this is more important because the reps or MSLs have to communicate on different platforms.

“It has to be a part of a business structure, not a bolt-on for special occasions.”



The challenges – The rewards

Establishing a dedicated coaching strand in a corporate structure requires an economic assessment of the return on investment.

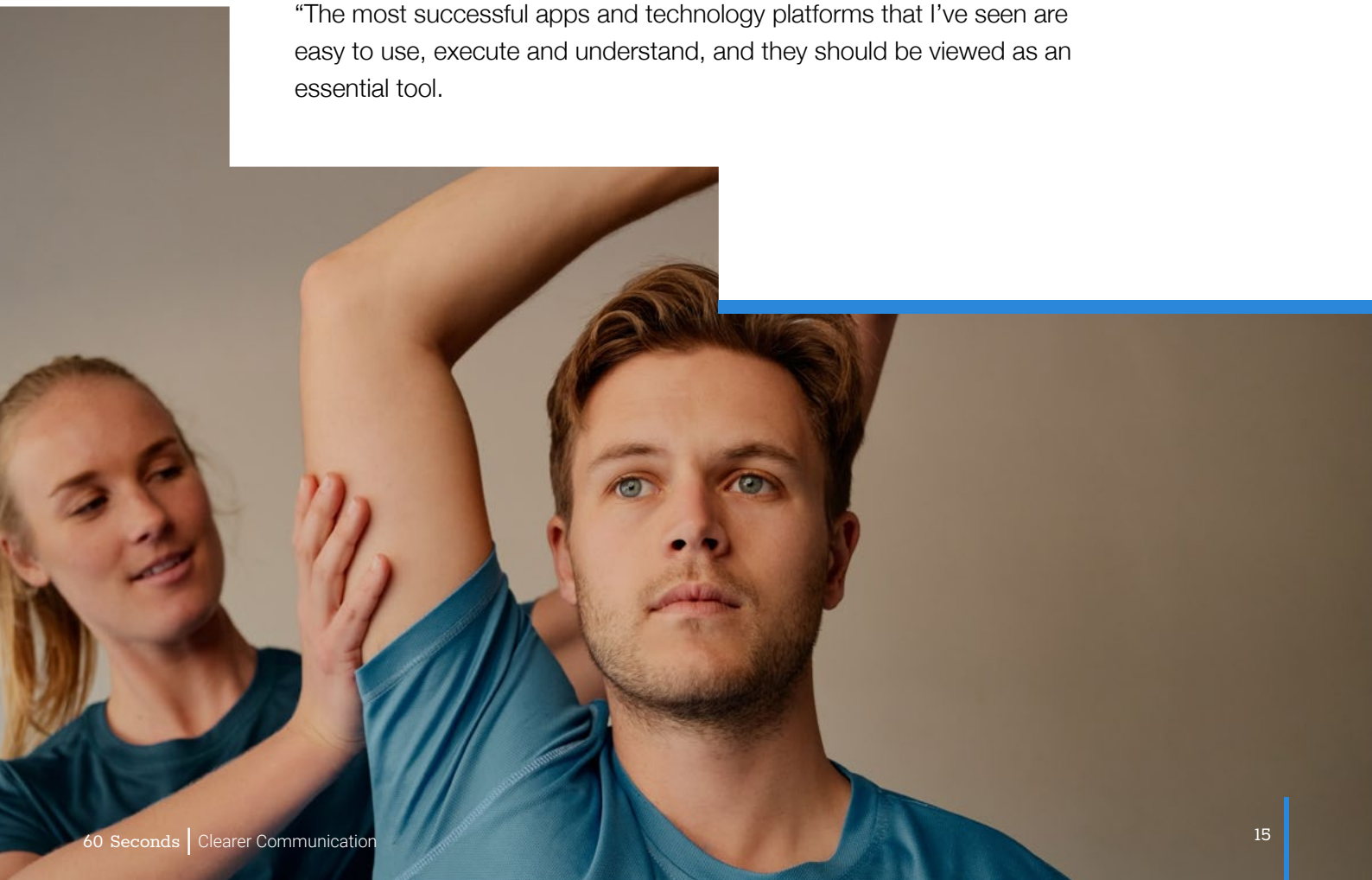
Many business leaders and coaching experts believe the outlay – often measured in redefining work commitment, roles and timetables rather than hefty capital investment – will pay swift dividends across a range of metrics from office camaraderie through business efficiencies to balance sheet performance.

Infrequent and inconsistent coaching, even when well-directed and resourced, plays to a single performance and has limited impact on staff developing problem-solving and knowledge acquisition skills.

“Some companies do get it and are being rewarded but others are still exploring its potential and they could be left behind,” says Cassar. “One of the critical parts is that these changes have to start from the top of the company and it should be an all-in approach.”

Chris Costandi believes that coaching is often overlooked in time-poor organisations. “From my experience, managers are the busiest people in an organisation with multiple priorities which means people development can get left by wayside. I would argue that it should be their number one priority,” he says.

“The most successful apps and technology platforms that I’ve seen are easy to use, execute and understand, and they should be viewed as an essential tool.

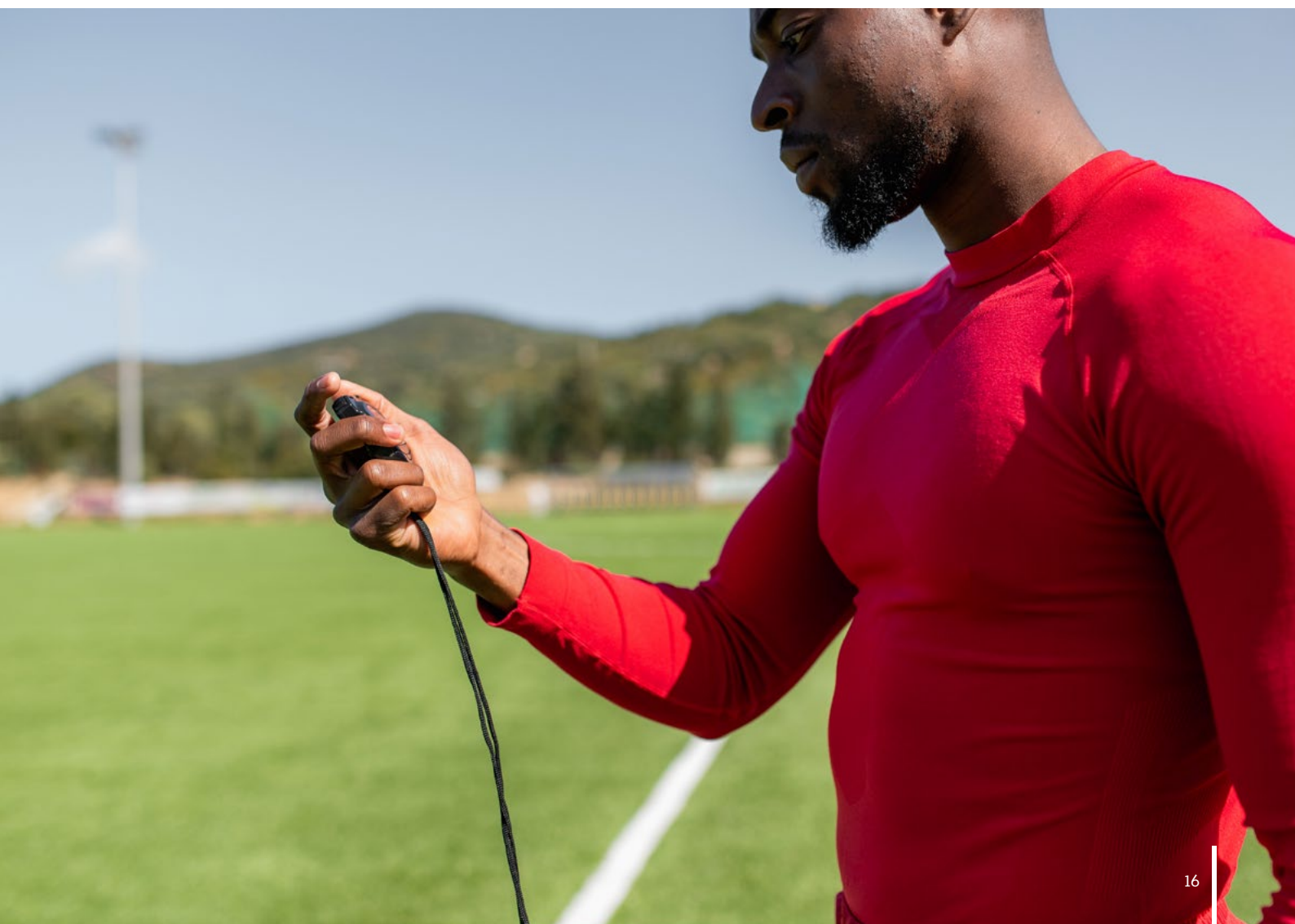


“Teams must be given the time to practice and make the best of their coaching opportunities. It is clear that the more you put in, the more you will gain from it.

“Using an app like 60 Seconds helps build confidence in the delivery via practice and insightful feedback from your manager. This timely feedback then allows the salesperson or MSL to think to themselves: ‘How can I improve further? How can I be more targeted? What do I need to focus on over the next few months?’ It shows up your strengths but also where you can further develop over time.

“It gives an individual an opportunity and a platform to practice and see feedback at the point of need. The continuous coaching effort drives confidence, knowledge and improved performance.

“The benefits are realised by the employee and by the customer – the entire customer engagement experience is improved. The salesperson or MSL can deliver on their objectives, which means they’ll be able to hit their targets and contribute to the overall success and performance of the organisation.”



Conclusion

Coaching capabilities have advanced and forward-looking companies are taking full advantage. They are not delaying to survey the wreckage of the pandemic storm but are re-building with dynamic methods of developing staff capabilities.

By deploying digital coaching, they are equipping staff with new skills, energising their performance and giving them the space to develop problem-solving mindsets.

Contact with healthcare professionals is becoming like gold dust and face-to-face opportunities will remain hard-chiseled as they struggle with overbearing workloads and a digital bombardment.

Adding to that burden – with ill-defined, disjointed approaches - will only condemn companies to a procession of closed doors and out-of-office responses. Coaching is needed to elevate a sales person or MSL above that swamp of poor, ill-directed information and foster the confidence and credibility to bring genuine value to customers.

Every contact must be viewed as a moment in the spotlight in front of a demanding audience - it would be unthinkable to walk on stage without the confidence of workshopping and rehearsing a speech or scene.

Company messages need every bit of that respect and time taken for coaching will pay dividends.



About the Interviewees



Emma Booth is executive director global business process and insights lead, R&D strategy

and operations at Amgen. Emma is a highly experienced and professional people-development strategist. She has worked in variety of medical affairs roles at Amgen Europe for the past 13 years. She is people-focused from both a team development and skills building perspective; as well as organisational design and implementation of technological solutions and process development.



Chris Costandi is a sales and commercial excellence consultant at 60 Seconds. He has

worked in the healthcare industry for over 20 years across a variety of divisions including prescription, medical devices and OTC for organisations such as Allergan, Novartis and GSK in driving a range of transformational sales force effectiveness (SFE) initiatives including capability development, coaching and leadership and key account management.



Michael Cassar is regional sales manager at Galderma. Mike has an extensive background as

a senior sales manager in the pharmaceutical and medical device industries across ANZ at Wyeth, GSK, MSD, Liberty Medical, Indivior and Galderma . He has worked with many teams to drive superior results in primary care, hospital, specialty, OTC, and devices. With a background in human movement and skill acquisition, Mike's core expertise is coaching and mentoring his direct reports on their ongoing development and driving a customer engagement mindset.

About 60 Seconds

60 Seconds is a remote coaching app designed to help users communicate with greater clarity through practice, coaching and measurement. It was built by a coach for coaches to deliver measurable learning momentum.

60seconds.com

Contact CEO and founder, Marcus West at marcus@60seconds.com



60 Seconds

Clearer Communication



60 Seconds

Clearer Communication

Practice, Coaching, Measurement