



It is probable that most middle managers have, at some time, thought through the possibility of a career outside of pharmaceutical management. For those who have, or indeed are presently entertaining such ideas, then the option of entering the service sector is certainly an obvious route.

Two of the main questions which require answers prior to such a change are, 'What lies on the other side and will I be suited?' Jon Heeks of Ethical Healthcare Resources, a man who leaped the great divide several years ago, takes you through what to expect and how to decide whether you are suited to the challenge.

Some years ago, in a journal similar to this one, a writer posed the question, 'Where do all those career minded pharmaceutical middle managers in their mid thirties go?' The question has been rattling around in my head ever since, because after more

opportunities were realised outside mainstream pharmaceuticals in the service sector working for a major CSO and subsequently with a fledging organisation marketing e communications and live e detailing to UK pharmaceuticals.

This brings me back to the question about those middle managers. Today as I look around the service sector which I joined in the early 90s I see many people take the same steps; sometimes company restructuring forces the move; sometimes it's the desire to work outside the hierarchical confines of corporate pharmaceuticals; and sometimes the step is driven by the entrepreneurial instinct to grow a business and reap the financial rewards of a good idea.

Whatever the motivation, it is very clear that some prosper on the other side of the fence, whilst others find the leap impossible. These are important issues for anybody who is considering making the same move.

in your mainstream pharmaceutical sales career did you close such a deal and how many times did a single purchasing decision influence large numbers of jobs and many individual's security and income? In the service sector there are no places to hide, no external factors to blame and the pressure is real.

The Frustration

How many sales processes did you enter into where your organisation had to satisfy a multitude of stakeholders and engage the political environment within their organisation over a long sales cycle? Not often, I suspect, although perhaps these issues apply more readily to healthcare companies now as the NHS changes its purchasing procedures.

Nevertheless, service organisations often have to focus on a small number of important customers and a limited number of decision makers. The enormous significance of such small numbers is

the efforts made around CRM and that if anybody is pleasing anybody in particular, it's their own management structure and culture.

So why make the leap into the service sector at all? Much of the answer lies in the changing nature of pharmaceutical companies as they respond to changes in their markets. Essentially, they become more virtual as time goes on, employing more and more skills based outside the company and using those skills to inform and enable increasingly vital changes within the company. We all recognise that some of the service providers now run organisations which are as big as the pharmaceutical companies and replicate and enhance from the outside what the industry has inside its structures. And the answer to the question "why?" then is that there will be plenty of opportunity in the service sector to bring insight and originality to the table, to have influence governed by the quality of that contribution and to work at the cutting edge of



ACROSS THE GREAT DIVIDE

A Career in the Service Sector

than ten years of mergers, acquisitions, alliances, movement of people and change management, I think I know at least one of the answers.

My career followed the traditional path through the UK sales functions of a blue chip company, took a relatively unusual turn through the Far East setting up branch offices in major cities as the Asian dragons expanded and, in those career terms, stalled on the declining economies of Africa. Great learning in a traditional company with interesting products, a good reputation for training and development with a great deal of fun and professional relationships which are strong a decade later.

Since then I've launched more major products, gained broader marketing experience, dealt with bigger brands, closed deals on bigger numbers and learned more than I could have believed possible when I was part of that blue chip environment. The roles were varied, some of the responsibilities seemed enormous and many of the tasks frustrating in the extreme. What is interesting is that these

Firstly, the environment is truly different. Superficially it may look the same, sharing as it does similar healthcare, product and commercial languages. Clearly many individuals in the service companies serve their apprenticeship in the mainstream industry and there is much in common.

The first and most significant difference is that here the customer truly is king. In the service sector literally nothing happens until somebody sells something and nothing continues to happen unless delivery is seamless, timely, and to the customer's complete satisfaction. Unlike the pharmaceutical sector, it will often be YOU who SOLELY takes the responsibility for making this occur.

Significant projects are rare and extremely valuable often running into multiples of millions and securing the future of the service organisation. This means winning and delivering the business is crucial. As a middle manager who has made the leap, your organisation will probably be looking to you to secure and deliver the contracts. How many times

sometimes new to the mainstream executive and it can be difficult to deal with. A few purchasing decisions or a few changes of personnel in the client organisation could have a major effect on the shape of the service provider's business. Service life can be very dynamic. As a senior executive in such an organisation, you may well set a robust strategy, properly researched and resourced with finance and skills. Even then you will still find yourself buffeted by the sheer tactical nature of the environment; by the constant need to win that pitch, secure that relationship, deliver that service and consolidate on that successful project.

Similarly, there is always a tremendous focus on delivery to the customer in the service sector and an organisation will focus much of its attention on making sure that the client gets what they're paying for, and that the success of a project is measured and acknowledged by the customer. Get that wrong and your service organisation flounders quickly. My sense is that this kind of process is still internalised within healthcare companies, despite

change and innovation. Working life will be fast, furious; perhaps a little bit risky, but very stimulating and full of variety.

Who will succeed? It will be those individuals who thrive on variety and change, who back themselves to influence others through the force of their thinking as well as their enthusiasm and energy. Perhaps there's the profile of a risk taker there as well, but above all it will be those who understand the compelling need to deliver who will thrive outside mainstream healthcare organisations.

So where did those middle managers get to? Well I know some of them; they're thriving in an expanding service sector.

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