

Rules of engagement

Do you have the skills and aptitude to re-engineer your pharmacy as a health destination for women, asks Glenn Guilfoyle.

ARE YOU LOOKING to increase your pharmacy's women's health profile, and become a health solution destination for conditions like pain, heart health, and pregnancy?

Experience shows us that there are two broad domains you need to master to achieve this objective—engineering and conversational.

The 'engineering' domain focuses on elements such as physical environment, people, process and product.

The 'conversational' domain features areas such as attitude and aptitude.

First, let's dissect the engineering requirements, since it almost does not matter how good you are at the attitude and aptitude—if your engineering does not reach a satisfactory performance threshold, you will undermine your potential conversational advantage.

The critical success factor here is to create an environment that encourages pharmacist-led, proactive consultations with women who present with health issues and queries.

How well are your service counters set up for conducting proactive and complete solution conversations with women, as opposed to counter locations to perform perfunctory medication and health—despatches? Do you have separate and dedicated script-out and over-the-counter (OTC) locations to facilitate order, workflow and customer solution conversations? Are you and your customer able to sit down for a chat at the service counter, or step aside to a consult room?

Do you have adequate staffing levels and pharmacist representation in the mix to position solution-oriented pharmacists at script-out and OTC locations to have these conversations with women? Do you benchmark your staffing levels and

mix to know how you compete?

Does your workflow mirror your customer traffic flow to enable order, efficiency and composure? Do you serve anyone at any counter or have you 'trained' your customers to come to dedicated service counter locations to best meet their needs for that visit?

Have you placed the most popular complementary add-ons within a step or arm's reach of script-out and OTC locations to support your focus on women's health and conditions like pain, heart health and pregnancy, for example?

With the engineering issues mastered, you then need to maximise what I call your conversation competitive advantage. Unfortunately, pharmacists, generally, have not been trained in the prerequisite skills. Counselling protocols such as what-stop-go-speak, while still relevant and important, are no longer good enough to underpin your women's health destination objective. This form of language is overly risk management-based. Your conversational goal should now reflect: 'extend what they know, challenge what they think they know, teach what they don't know'. In this context you should be leading the consultation, not only reacting and responding only to the customer's agenda.

Ultimately, this can deliver commercially, but the motivation must be to offer the customer a range of choices above and beyond their expectations—one that provides a more complete solution than they are asking for. This is attitudinal so you do need to have a mindset to master the conversational skills required to shift the customer's expectations. And it is also aptitudinal—you need to be able to learn and practice these new skills.

To do this, four fundamental skills are required:

- listening skills;
- questioning skills;
- advisory skills; and
- objection-handling skills.

The key to mastering listening and questioning skills is to link and make the conversation around the health domain (signs, symptoms, side effects) and to make the emotional connection (impacts on work, rest, play). By asking the right questions the right way, you will increase trust and encourage the customer to do more talking than you. Any recommendation you subsequently provide will be perceived as providing choice and options rather than pitching product. To quote pharmacist Samantha Kourtis, it's about being seen by your female patients as a healthcare professional rather than a retailer.

The engineering piece is like a level on your Maslow's hierarchy: it needs to be at a threshold performance level for you to be able to actualise your conversation skills. Becoming a health-focused pharmacy requires a self-awareness and focus on the attitude element. The engineering piece is vital—but not enormously difficult to accomplish.

Our work at The Next Level leads us to believe that most pharmacists possess the aptitude to change the way they engage. It must start with the recognition that the way pharmacists have been taught to communicate actually hampers true engagement. So attitudinal success begins with the recognition that becoming excellent at engaging with customers would be like taking yourself off to language school and learning a foreign language. Therefore, the brain must be rewired to the tongue in a different way to that underpinned by normal risk management protocols that pharmacists have been trained to use. **wh**



Glenn Guilfoyle is the founder and principal of The Next Level – Sales System

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