

The Secrets of Effective Medical Device Sales Training: Interview with Mark Wilson, Director of Sales Training for Advanced Biohealing

Scott Nelson: Hello, everyone. It's Scott Nelson, and welcome to Medsider, home of the free medical device MBA, and on today's program, we have Mark Wilson, who is the Director of Training at Advanced Biohealing, which is now a Shire company. In this interview, he tells us why medical device sales training is vastly underrated and why you should be paying closer attention to it. Here's what we'll learn:

- The importance of immersing yourself in the business in order to build an effective medical device training program.
- Why the sales training role should not be viewed as a transition or developmental position.
- Mark's tips for developing a mobile learning strategy.
- How to convince senior leadership that training is essential to business development.

So welcome to the call, Mark. Appreciate your coming on.

Mark Wilson: Well, thanks for having me.

Scott Nelson: Let's start. We're going to spend most of the interview digging into your background a little bit because you have an awesome résumé and you've advanced very quickly at a relatively young age, so we're going to dig into that, but let's start out with Advanced Biohealing. You're currently the Director of Training there at ABH. ABH was recently acquired by the Shire, but what types of products do your sales reps carry?

Mark Wilson: Our primary focus here at Advanced Biohealing is with a product called Dermagraft, and Dermagraft is a living skin equivalent or a dermal substitute. It's neonatal fibroblasts that are seeded onto a Vicryl mesh and after about a 14-day period, at the end of the day you've got a piece of living tissue and it's going to be the freshest piece of living tissue commercially available. Primarily used in the wound care environment today, it's actually indicated for diabetic foot ulcers, and what happens is we've got an epidemic on our hand, oftentimes referred to as diabetes.

This diabetes epidemic unfortunately leads to stalled or non-healing ulcers. We've got a lot of patients that unfortunately have these open wounds which are an open portal to infection, which leads to hospitalization and potentially amputation. So, the sooner we get these things closed the better, and unfortunately, these dermal beds need re-organization, and Dermagraft is really responsible for reorganizing that dermal bed, allowing the host keratinocytes in these wounds to really migrate across and acquire complete closure after the use of this type of living skin equivalent.

Scott Nelson: Okay. So, if I'm a physician that treats diabetic patients right now, what would I maybe be using that one of your reps would call on me and try to convert me over too?

Mark Wilson: You know, most of our representatives spend the majority of their time in wound care centers. These are hubs where you've got these non-healing ulcers that get referred in from a variety of different specialties, whether it be vascular, whether it be podiatry, that doesn't typically do these difficult-to-treat wounds, or even primary care physicians who are traditionally going to do wet-to-dry dressings until they see no progress, and when they stall out primarily due to underlying diabetes and neuropathy, they'll get referred into these wound care centers.

So, the general rule of thumb today, the standard of care is that these wounds, if you don't see healing more than 50% at four weeks, that's been the clinical decision marker. It's a diagnostic marker for okay, it's time to now move to advanced modalities. So, Dermagraft is primarily labeled as an advanced modality. So, if a wound care center that's treating a patient doesn't see that progress of greater than 50% closure at four weeks, it's now time to move on. So, it's not necessarily competing with another product per se, but it's really adopting the new standard of care for treating these types of ulcers.

Scott Nelson: Got you. Okay. Okay. As the director of training, I'm guessing that you're training sales reps. Does it encompass more than that?

Mark Wilson: Yeah, right now the primary focus, just because when I came on board there was no formal commercial training team, so we've been building a team. Currently, we've got a sales training manager and a training coordinator that is on my team and we continue to grow what I like to call our training empire to accommodate for both commercial, which would encompass reimbursement, marketing, sales, the whole commercial operations team. Now, in 2012 customer education and provider training as well. So, we continue to grow to make sure that we can accommodate the growth of our product and making sure that we supply our customers with also some education outside of just the commercial side of our business.

Scott Nelson: Okay. Okay. When you look back over the past, because you started with ABH back in October of 2010, correct?

Mark Wilson: That's correct.

Scott Nelson: Okay. So, when you look over the past year, and this question more pertains to the sales trainers that are maybe listening to this call right now. Are there a few things that you did to build this team out, a piece of advice that you would give the other sales trainers that are doing the same thing?

Mark Wilson: Yeah, I think first and foremost, you've got to immerse yourself in the business and you've got to learn the business from the ground up. You've got to ask a lot of questions, you've got to get in the field, you've got to understand the model, and then you just have to be a student of the business and demonstrate your ability to come in and design a program that really fits the current model and make enhancements where you see or deem appropriate. So, I think it's really, again, immersing yourself in the business so you become a part of the team that is considered the expert. I think that comes with spending time with the folks, educating them on what you believe you can deliver, and more importantly, just listening and being a good listener. I think

that's really what's allowed me to come in here and build a training platform that we continue to build on.

We've got a pretty substantial initial training program and are launching an advanced training program here within a 12-month period, which is really unheard of but one in which when you've got the experience and you rely on mentors or rely on colleagues within the industry who have done that before if they can provide you with any kind of guidance which I'd be happy to do so if anyone wanted to contact me. It just allows a training organization, even if you're a one-man show like I've been until the last couple of months, you can still pretty much build a foundation, and then, as you demonstrate your work, the organization is going to continue to invest in areas where they see there's a return.

Scott Nelson: Sure. Sure. I want to go back to immersing yourself in the business because I think that's huge, and I'm glad you mentioned that. It's almost like key point number one because I mean, I've always respected you since our days at Bard Peripheral Vascular. But that's one of the things that separated you from a lot of the other sales trainers that I personally have experienced, is that you get that aspect, that you understand what a rep experiences in the field so you can help lead a training team. So, why do you think other trainers don't get that?

Mark Wilson: Well, I think training is an interesting field because it depends on what you're trying to accomplish. Many organizations have training as a steppingstone to sales management or they use it as a transitional role.

Scott Nelson: Got you.

Mark Wilson: I guess it's going to be dependent on the organization. Many organizations, the bigger Fortune 50, Fortune 100 companies no longer look at training as a developmental role. I mean, there are roles within the learning and development field that are used for development purposes but at the end of the day, at the director or VP, at the senior level, even chief learning officers, I think people really are starting to understand that continuity in the training program is essential.

So, I think it just depends again on the organization. If you happen to be in one of those developmental roles, I understand that you want to demonstrate your worth and you want to put your fingerprint or your footprint on that program, but one of the most frustrating things from a district manager or from a regional manager perspective is that you go in and make all these changes because you want to add value, but unfortunately it drives them batty.

So, I think a lot of organizations are seeing that at the senior level, despite the fact there may be some developmental roles. At the senior level, you really want a learning and development professional that understands the instruction design, understands the business because learning is there to support the business. It's not butts in seats but, am I affecting the speed of productivity? Am I affecting the business as a whole and being a business partner to the various organizations within the organization, or I should say various departments within the organization that you support?

Scott Nelson: Got you. I got you. So, really, in essence, to sum that up, it almost starts top down. I mean, if there's someone up top that gets how important the training and development department is, that will almost filter down. Is that kind of in essence what you're saying?

Mark Wilson: Sure. Sure, sure, sure, yeah. You do have to have support at the top, and I've seen colleagues of mine as well as myself, I'm very fortunate to have a lot of support amongst my own colleagues on the commercial leadership team and up through our senior vice-president who sees a lot of value in ensuring that the team remains well-trained, and we use a lot of different modalities to do that. I think he relies on us and leveraging technology when you have a remote sales force or a remote commercial team. You have to leverage technology to reach those folks, but the more they're confident in their capabilities and their knowledge, the more that translates into confidence in the field.

Scott Nelson: Okay. Got you. To your point, I guess I'm envisioning myself if I'm leading a training and development team and I'm hearing you say that. I may be experiencing the opposite where I've got someone up top that just doesn't get it. They don't understand how important the training department is. What would you say to that person to help them convince their leadership that the training department is essential to driving business?

Mark Wilson: Well, I think if you're in a situation like that, which I know I personally have had a situation like that as well as some colleagues of mine that I network with, I know they're in similar situations. I think what it comes down to is just, again, fully immersing yourself in the business and working around the organization, making sure that everyone around you, your colleagues really feel that you do have value so that's adequately being communicated up top because you're not the only one that should be communicating that.

You need the folks on your team. So, if you sit on a commercial leadership team, you need your sales leadership and/or other parts of the commercial organization to be communicating to whoever you're reporting in to, especially because most of us are all reporting in through the same structure. Making sure that they're communicating the value that you bring every day because a lot of times we are working behind the scenes. You oftentimes hear me say that training is often leading from behind. You have to make sure that somebody is out there promoting you. You're obviously not going to promote yourself. Then I think the other piece is you've got to make sure that you're demonstrating what you're bringing and showing.

I mean, one of the things I tend to do is I tend to track our new folks, and I've been able to demonstrate that albeit there's a lot of variables and you can't control all the variables in a particular territory or what business is handed to a new representative, but if you can know what those particular variables are, you can actually do some run rates on business and demonstrate that you're actually increasing speed to productivity and that's really been something I've carried on now into two different organizations. I think that's been valuable, to be able to demonstrate that, because now all of a sudden when you're building a new platform or a new training modality and you want to launch that, you get a lot of receptivity from all facets of the organization including the leadership.

Scott Nelson: Got you. It's almost as if I understand you correctly. If you can take almost a measurable or quantifiable ROI on how the training process is impacting a certain territory, that's going to help convince leadership that training is all the more important. Help me understand that though, and for those of us listening. Is there a way to measure that from an ROI perspective?

Mark Wilson: I think it's debated. I think you will go to a lot of these training conferences and whether you're working for a Fortune 50 company outside of the biotech, pharmaceutical, or med device space or you're working within it, I think it continues to be debated because there are a lot of variables. But the argument I make is that okay, let's go the next 60 days and have no training initiatives and see how that affects the confidence and the morale of the team because it's more than just instilling knowledge or taking people out to the field or leveraging technology to give people information. I think it really does affect someone's psyche and their ability to commit to doing the job and to do it well. I think there's a level of connectedness, there's a level of promise that comes with delivering information to your sales teams as long as the sales teams see the value or the commercial teams see the value.

That's another piece that also gets communicated, is when folks say, "Hey, you know what? We're not getting enough information," or "We're not getting the appropriate amount of training." That does often come up when you do survey your representatives. If that alone provides confidence, when you have confidence that gets translated to your customer there's really only one reason why customers buy from our sales representatives. That's because they've got the ability to transfer confidence in both the person and the product to that customer. If a customer doesn't see that, they're not buying because it's an inexpensive product or it's an overvalued product. They're buying purely because of the person in front of them that is demonstrating value, and it's that transfer of confidence. I believe training is a big component of it.

Scott Nelson: Yeah, no doubt. So, that's a great piece. So, it's the transfer of the confidence not only in the product but also the rep or the person as well.

Mark Wilson: Oh, I absolutely believe that, because you see a lot of products that are the higher-priced products in the category in which they compete, but purely because of the relationship between the representative and the physician and/or customer. Whoever the customer is, you see them purchasing the more expensive product because there's more value, right?

Scott Nelson: Sure.

Mark Wilson: Not just value in the product and how it performs clinically, but the service that the representative provides for the product and for the customer, more importantly.

Scott Nelson: Got you. Got you. That's great stuff. I'm going to forget about this if I don't ask you now, but you mentioned almost, what was it, technology to reach reps in the field. Are there certain tools that you use to promote or enhance ongoing training and learning with the sales force without actually bringing in the sales force to some sort of national meeting?

Mark Wilson: Yeah, absolutely. I think you do need to start leveraging technology. This is to all of the training professionals out there if you haven't quite adopted the mobile technology like the iPhone, Android, or iPads, we're missing out, I think, from a transfer of knowledge and confidence like I've been talking about. We're missing out on a huge opportunity.

The iPad and its mobile capabilities, I know it's quite frustrating especially if you've been working in a learning management system and designing learning modules in a flash-based platform, because unfortunately the iPad is built in Objective C, so that's going to require some work to transform those particular modules. But let's just be real. The learning management system, most of those modules are anywhere from 35 minutes to an hour, and that's just not appropriate for the iPad.

So, I think it's really designing a mobile strategy so that when you are going to provide learning cubes or learning chunks to the various members of your commercial team that are remote, that you provide them with just in time training or training on-demand that's appropriate to leverage on the iPad. So, I think it's really stepping back a second and saying, okay, we've got these mobile technologies but what's our strategy? Just because you've got modules on a learning management system doesn't mean you just take all of that information and convert them over to something that's iPad friendly.

You really have to think about, okay, what do I want my team to have access to when they've got downtime in the field or when they are running amuck and you want to be able to transfer some information to them quickly. How do you create that and what is the strategy?" You can't be ignorant of the fact that LMSs, they're not a dying breed, they're a great platform but it's not going to be appropriate for what these guys need when they're in the field. So, you've got to think through, okay, what's the most critical, and what do I want to give them access to?" Otherwise, they won't access the information if it's too difficult when they're on their iPads and in the field.

Scott Nelson: Right. Right. That mobile strategy seems to me almost an obvious, but yet, I mean, correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems like it's almost a rarity within the medical device/biotech spaces.

Mark Wilson: Well, what I'm seeing, I mean, you're absolutely right. What I'm seeing is I'm seeing a lot of what gives me the clue that unfortunately the strategy isn't there, is that I'm seeing what the vendors, all of the various vendors, are developing, and I'm seeing that it's just basically, because I guess it's inexpensive, but they're literally just transferring these modules that are 35 minutes to an hour-long into something that can be accessed via the iPad, and I just think that that's probably going to be an ineffective use of company money.

I think it would be better spent if you pull out the pieces, for example, if you had a couple of competitive modules on your learning management system that you ask your new hires to go through but you want it to provide them with just some clips of things that they could review, so maybe what I call a learning chunk or a learning cube. You would go out and you would create something mobile-ly, and they would have access to that right before they go into their lunch

and learn, or right before they go into an appointment or a call on a customer. They could review that, and that would be maybe a minute and a half of content at most. That's where you're going to see a lot of leverage of mobile technology.

Scott Nelson: Got you. Okay. So, almost taking the most important pieces that a rep can use or will use on a frequent basis and recreating that for on a mobile platform.

Mark Wilson: You're right. You just put it into a library so it's easily accessible.

Scott Nelson: Got you, and do you think from a rep standpoint. I guess, let me ask you this. At ABH, from a learning perspective, are you developing more tools for more learning on the clinical side, or are you also developing mobile tools for learning for more sales strategy?

Mark Wilson: We're doing both. We're doing your general administrative, we're doing clinical and we're also doing business strategy or what we call internally as kind of our model for doing business.

Scott Nelson: Got you.

Mark Wilson: So, we're addressing all three facets. The great thing about using a mobile platform, for those folks that are listening in and concerned about the regulatory hurdles, you know we all face them. ABH, despite being a startup organization, we are now part of a larger biotechnology company and we face all the same regulatory hurdles that I know a lot of our listeners face. I think that one of the great things about mobile platforms is that because your content is so much more refined and a lot shorter, that should help with the regulatory cycle in the medical-legal reviews because you're really... I know it's difficult because you're pulling pieces out of existing content, but that should help you to at least move more rapidly. Because what it comes down to with mobile platforms is that information is flowing so quickly it's completely changing the way we do business because clearly, customers can gain access to information with the click of a button. So, what value do our sales representatives bring when they're bringing old information?

So, I think you have to have a strategy in place, and you also have to have some conversations with your medical-legal team around a rapid review process for information that needs to be dispensed and disseminated quickly. I think as long as there is some qualification as to what that information is, your MLR team can move very quickly if you've designed that internally that way, because otherwise, now you're four, six, eight weeks in and it's been on Twitter, it's been on all the major social networks and everyone's seen it and it's like, "Okay, well, what value is it? Because now my customers are coming to me as a sales rep asking me and inquiring, but my company can't educate me on it."

Scott Nelson: Right.

Mark Wilson: You've got to almost create that internally, and so I think those of us who are a bit on the cutting edge of having those conversations and leading efforts internally, that's the value

we're going to bring to our sales forces when we're leading the charge in our home office type of leadership roles.

Scott Nelson: Got you. Yup. Very good. Very good. Let's dig into your background just a little bit as we conclude this call because I think you've had somewhat of a, maybe I'm overhyping just a little bit, but meteoric rise to the Director of Training and Development at Advanced Biohealing. Can you walk us through just real briefly? I don't want you to go into detail as to what you did at each company per se, but I want the audience to get a feel for how your career has excelled so quickly and maybe a few things that you would recommend to other people listening that are saying, "I want to advance my career like Mark did." Maybe some tips and advice. So, after you graduated from USC, were you a pharma rep? Was that your first role in the healthcare space?

Mark Wilson: Yeah, I pretty much started in the... I'll give you a little bit of background. So, I pretty much started in the pharmaceutical world and I did a variety of different roles. I guess I was at the right place at the right time and we saw promotions. That was back in the heyday of pharma, and I actually was very fortunate. I never worked in a pod at my own territory. I just worked for a division of J & J and I moved rather quickly into some of the specialty roles, and then eventually I made my way into med device. I had a little sidestep out of J & J and I worked for a merchandising/agency where Lilly and Amgen were my clients. Got a little bit of marketing experience for a little over a year, and then had an opportunity to get into the device space. I just learned just being a field trainer and being in a variety of different roles that training was something I was really passionate about, so I had opportunities to go into a variety of different types of roles.

But I think early on I figured out that learning and development was something I was passionate about. There were obviously some strengths there, and you just lean on what value you can bring to an organization. I was given an opportunity to come in under a director at Bard Peripheral in a training capacity, really learned the training or learning and development field from the ground up, networked met with a lot of folks in the learning and development world, and got a couple of certificates in instructional design. Really started to understand how to lead a department and worked my way up at Bard. Then had an opportunity to come over here and build a training platform from scratch, which I know a lot of folks that are maybe listening to this call will never have that opportunity. But, I have to tell you, if you've ever got an opportunity to build a training platform from absolutely scratch, there's a lot of rewards and personal satisfaction that comes from that. The influence and the ability to shape an organization, there's not a lot of opportunities to do that in one's career so, there's no way I could pass up on that opportunity.

Scott Nelson: Got you. Okay. Just a last question here as we finish up. If you had a brother or a close friend, a family member come to you and say, "Mark, I like what you do. The medical or biotech space is kind of interesting to me. What are a couple of tips that you would give to me in order to get started on the right foot, experience a lot of success?"

Mark Wilson: I truly believe that you've got to follow your passion. I was very fortunate to have a father who instilled that in me at a very young age. I'll never forget the time that he and I were sitting on the couch and he was sharing with me some regrets that he had about his career choice, and he said, "You're going to spend more time working than anything else. The one thing, son, that I'd recommend to you is follow your passion." I was very fortunate to have some mentors and some influencers that were in the learning or training world. Very early on they identified that that was a real strength of mine and I had to identify that, that was a passion. So that's the first recommendation, is follow your dreams, follow your passions. That's number one.

Number two, once you get into a role that you're really passionate about, and if training happens to be that role, really learn from some of the experts. We've got a ton of societies; we've got a ton of conferences that you can go to and you can network with. The Society for Pharmaceutical and Biotech Trainers, the American Society for Training and Development. There are a lot of learning technology conferences, one of which I'm speaking at in a week here that's run by Q1 Productions.

I think you have to immerse yourself and really understand what resources are out there, and probably more importantly, how talented some of these folks are in learning and development. You know what? Don't try to reinvent the wheel, just try to excel, and execute flawlessly with what a lot of people out there are already doing, and that alone can bring a lot of value to the various organizations in which we work, and probably more importantly, can help us from a career enhancement standpoint.

Scott Nelson: Got you. Very good. I almost wonder if really the two go hand in hand. The ability to immerse yourself and really dig in, you probably want to do that if you truly have passion for what you're doing, would you think?

Mark Wilson: Absolutely. I mean, it shows. Believe it or not, when you're a standup facilitator or working behind the scenes, it absolutely shows when you are really good at your job, you're very passionate about it. People will see right through you in the learning and development world, and so "fake it so you make it" doesn't exist in this particular type of role within the organization.

Scott Nelson: Got you. Very good. Well, thanks a ton, Mark. For those who are listening that want to connect with you or want to maybe touch base with you, where would you send them?

Mark Wilson: I would absolutely send them to... My email address would be fantastic. That's the best place to get a hold of me and one they're welcome to.

Scott Nelson: Okay.

Mark Wilson: I don't know how you'd like to communicate that to your listeners if you'd want me to say it here.

Scott Nelson: Yeah, you can go and say it now, and I'll also include a link to your LinkedIn profile as well as your Twitter profile.

Mark Wilson: Perfect.

Scott Nelson: For those listening, you can look at the show notes and grab links there. But go on, say your email address for those listening that want to shoot you an email.

Mark Wilson: Sure, it's very easy – mwilson@abh.com. So, M as in Mark, Wilson, W-I-L-S-O-N@abh.com, A as in apple, B as in boy, H as in House dot com.

Scott Nelson: Very good. Alright, cool. Hey, thanks again, Mark. Really appreciate your coming on, taking time out of your busy schedule to make this happen.

Mark Wilson: Hey, no problem. Glad to be here. I hope all your listeners got a lot of benefits out of today.

Scott Nelson: I'm sure they did. I'm sure they did. Alright, very good. Well, thanks everyone for listening. Take care.