



How to Grow Profits through Professional Development - Interview with ACP-LS Founder, Chuck Drucker

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

Chris: Hello everyone and welcome to the show. Today my guest is Chuck Drucker. Chuck has spent over 20 years in the life sciences including global marketing positions at Amersham, AAI Pharma and Covance. Chuck is currently the director of client facing operations and alliance management at Quest Diagnostics. He's also the president and founder of the ACP-LS, the Association of Commercial Professionals in the Life Sciences. Chuck, welcome to the show.

Chuck: Thank you Chris.

Chris: I'm so glad you could be here. For those who may not know about you, would you tell us just a little bit about your background so our listeners understand who it is that I'm talking to today.

Chuck: Yeah, absolutely. And thanks for the great introduction. Well the first half of my career I sold and marketed chromatography, electrophoresis, molecular biology systems and reagents, things like that. And then the second half of my career I ended up on the drug development services, the manufacturing services side. A lot of people will call that CROs and CMOs, and again I spent a lot of time in sales and marketing for those companies that you mentioned. Currently as you described my role with Quest Diagnostics is actually the clinical trials division, so we're a central lab, and again our same customers, life scientists at pharma, biotech, academia, government, etcetera.

Chris: Nice. And so let's talk a little bit about the ACP-LS. You've kind of described it to me, I'm getting a better feel for it, but tell me what problem were you trying to solve when you started this organization?

Chuck: Yeah. There were two main problems we were trying to solve. First before the ACP-LS there was no professional association that was dedicated to networking, professional development and education of commercial professionals like us that work in the life sciences and sell products and services to the folks I mentioned earlier. Our clients, they belong to lots of professional associations like ASBMB, AAPS, DIA, and there really was just nothing for us. So that really was the first reason there was a gap, there was no professional organization for us, and the second thing or the second sort of problem was when I talked to my colleagues in starting this thing up, and I did a whole bunch of market research, we did some surveys, some focus groups and things a theme arose around raising the bar for commercial professionals in our space. Our employers certainly do some work on developing their sales and marketing people, but our research certainly identified that there was the need for us to band together and also raise the bar together.

Chris: So I'm sure you're going to give us some specific examples and I'm hoping this is the right time. We had a previous conversation and you had mentioned an article in the Harvard Business Review and you were kind enough to share that with us as well as some related articles. I will certainly link to those in the show notes. But I think you were suggesting that the concept of employee engagement was an area where the organization could help its members. Do you want to talk about that?

Chuck: Yeah, sure. So the concept is pretty straightforward. In the article that you'll post, there's a chain of events that can lead to improved profits, which are what the companies that we work for are generally striving towards. But that chain of events starts with satisfied employees. And satisfied employees are far more productive and engaged and those engaged employees provide better service which leads to higher customer satisfaction, loyalty, growth and profit. That's sort of this profit chain that the article talks about. So it's great to have that vision, but putting it into action isn't always so simple. So you've probably seen this. Many companies have instituted an employee engagement surveys to measure employee engagement and they build programs to improve engagement after that. And then there's the customer experience angle. There's a whole field now of customer experience marketing. You guys may have heard of the Customer Experience Professionals Association.

And their whole goal is to advance customer experience management practices. And then you have so many companies that have dedicated resources to customer experience from, you know every single interaction that happens, they're starting to look at those things and make them as best as they can be. But I would say from a commercial professional

perspective perhaps the most compelling research that I've seen on this idea of customer loyalty was the work done by the Conference Executive Board. They're the ones that wrote the book "The Challenger Sale". And what they found was that the largest contribution by far to customer loyalty stemmed from the purchasing experience, from the sales experience. In fact, their data showed that this contribution was larger than the brand and the product and service quality combined.

So again, this idea of the experience that our customers get through buying our products and services, that's the biggest driver of customer loyalty. So if you kind of think about that, if you're a commercial team, if your sales and marketers aren't engaged at the beginning of that sort of profit chain, there is no way that you're going to be able to drive that customer loyalty. So from an association perspective, we also saw that yes, employers should work really hard to get employees engaged, but there's something that we all have in common as commercial professionals in the life sciences and we should be engaged and excited about what we do to help our customers which eventually, in our case, helps humankind as well.

Chris: Right. And that was one of the things I noticed in the article, was that having a company where individuals were proud of the things they produced was a big factor in employee engagement. And the other one, and I think this relates a little bit to why the touch at the point of sale and that whole process is so important, is their perceived ability to solve customer problems. Seems like employees get a large degree of satisfaction when they have the freedom to do that. And the opposite I'm sure must be true, if they don't feel that they can solve problems then it must be pretty frustrating. My question there is, can you give an example of that for sales and what are your thoughts on that for marketing?

Chuck: Right, right, right. So there's a couple of things that come to mind but the first thing that came to mind is organizational structure. So depending on how you structure your organization, your employees will have much more or much less autonomy. I'm in a pretty good situation personally right now in that for the clients that I'm accountable for, I have the sales resources, the project management resources, and the data management resources. That's pretty unique, the buck sort of stops with me for a lot of the customer issues and they never have to escalate because we can solve them right within our own team. In another orientation, in another place that I worked, we often had to get multiple leaders to solve issues that sort of spanned different organizations or different parts of our organization. So I think that's a really good example of how solving problems can be affected by your organizational structure.

Chris: I like that and it's easy to understand it. The way that I would describe it is, it takes the friction out of the process because you are a single decision maker and you're not negotiating between different interest groups if you were to try to address something.

Chuck: That's right. A few years ago when I was with Amersham they trained every leader on something called the Levinson Principles of Accountable Leadership and it was a framework of how you were supposed to behave to improve processes, but also how you're supposed to behave in respect to others. So if you have an issue with someone you should address them directly and if it doesn't work out you should both feel free to go to your manager, that was one idea. But the biggest thing the Levinson Principles affected was exactly what I said; it was changing the organizational structure so that decisions could move closer to customers.

Chris: Nice, I really like that. So in our previous conversation you talked about, for example, and this relates a little bit to what we talked about - broadening employees view of the whole process. The one I'm thinking about is marketing communications people, for example, sitting in on sales calls with customers and taking trips with sales people just to get a feel for what their customers, really the marcom customers to a degree are the sales team, besides all the external prospects. Are there any other examples you can give where members might expand their views of their own businesses?

Chuck: I think I have an example that we all can relate to. Whatever company that you're with, when they hire a new leader that's coming from the outside and doesn't really know your company or your business, at first when you talk to that person if you get a chance, before they're up to speed, they really have no idea and they ask a lot of questions which is great, but they are exposed to customers immediately. They're executives. That's the way that it goes. And within a very short amount of time they get it. They understand the issues; they hear what the customers are saying. If we could just expose more of our teams, whether that's marketing communications or quite frankly, sometimes it's even the salespeople who don't necessarily get fed the information of other things that are going on with the company, if we could do that just like we do that in a standard way for executives, we could get our commercial teams to function much, much more effectively. So I think, Chris, that's my first example. The second one, I think is a little bit more broad than your individual company.

Let's say that you're focused on genomics products today. You could be a marketer, you could be a salesperson, but in a few years from now you may find yourself working for a CRO, selling or marketing genomics services. I have a couple colleagues from Amersham that ended up at CROs that are doing that kind of thing now. So they're now marketing a service that's utilizing those same products that they sold all those years ago. So the point is: shouldn't we all become more knowledgeable about the drug discovery process, the drug development process, quite frankly the manufacturing process? And those genomic products that you're selling into discovery today someday will be used in a clinical trial and perhaps some day after that will be used as a companion diagnostic so even though you're

working for a company that sells products, shouldn't you learn about what it's like to sell services, too?

Chris: Fantastic, I'm not sure I would have ever thought of that, but it makes total sense. And just an opportunity for not only people to improve their career immediately and kind of get a bigger picture, but also looking at the ACP-LS as somewhat of a development organization, an opportunity to see different possibilities for yourself in your industry.

Chuck: I think if you talk to people that have been in different roles for 20 or so years, they probably would have never guessed the twists and turns that their career took. I know when I started years and years ago at Pharmacia Biotech involved in chromatography and electrophoresis, I didn't think that I would be at Quest Diagnostics handling central lab services. It never would have occurred to me.

Chris: Yeah and then honestly, when I was in school I don't think I would have imagined any of the things I've done since I left.

So I'm going to shift gears a little bit and then probably again. But I want to talk about this other thing that was in the article and that was about customer ownership. I realize that many companies, the ones that I've worked for, have a stable of key users, they call them gurus or key opinion leaders, that speak about their own research that they do using a certain company's products. And it got me to thinking, could we market differently to this group of customer owners to make them feel more a part of the company, and for example, because I'm always thinking about content, could we actually develop content for a customer owner persona? Would there be value in that and giving them some sort of premium level of information (as if people don't have enough to do already). I'd be interested in your thoughts on that.

Chuck: I think some folks in our space have done that already. And I think sometimes you can hear the term sort of customer retention marketing or retention marketing related to that. But the first thing I thought about when you raised this was yeah, you can design specific content for them, and I think that would be great. But wouldn't it also be great if that content was really interactive? In other words think of it almost as an advisory board, right? When we start to think about launching a new product or service we'll often form a customer advisory board and we'll run ideas by them. You know they may often be our first Beta testers. But I am aware of some folks within our industry, that they have an online sort of customer advisory board, those folks that really like those products and services and they are engaging them quite often with surveys, with new ideas, inviting them to things, so I think it's a great idea.

Chris: I really appreciated the article because although I was aware of that kind of thing, the article really made it stand out to me that there are people in any industry, for any

product who take great satisfaction in feeling like they have a hand in what the next version will be. So they're not just customers. They really feel they are influencing the direction of the company without actually having to work there. So pointing that out explicitly, I thought, has a huge amount of value.

Chuck: And sometimes those people do end up working for your company as well.

Chris: Yeah! You'd probably like that. Okay. So moving onto leadership as an opportunity. I recently had another podcast with Taia Ergueta, who is one of my former bosses and part of that podcast was about leadership in marcom and the importance of marketing communications sort of taking a role with a couple of purposes. One, of course, to produce better communications but also to get them out of the mode of being a production unit and more into the mode of being a strategy unit. You mentioned some opportunities for people to develop leadership skills within the context of ACP-LS and I'd love it if you would talk a little bit about that.

Chuck: Yeah and then I do agree that there are those times when the marketing communications team is like that production group. I fortunately had an opportunity to work closely with those folks and if you give them a chance they can produce amazing things. So the ACP-LS, it's a nonprofit volunteer association. And we have lots of different volunteer opportunities where folks can lead teams, so there's some of your idea of some leadership opportunities and also to participate on teams. Examples could be our annual meeting team. We have program chairs, we have kind of track chairs if you will, folks that are looking after certain topics. We even have people that are taking the lead on certain presentation areas, so if we're going to have the annual meeting and we're going to talk about social media, well there's a person who's taking the lead to pull that great presentation together.

There's the newsletter editorial board. There's always the webinar series. There are also programs that are looking for leaders. Something that many of our members have talked about that we should do together, is to have a certification and training program. They've also talked a little bit more about how the ACP-LS can be kind of the place to go if you're looking for a job, again if you're a commercial professional in our space, or if you are someone who is posting a job and trying to find people. We've talked about having more trade show presence. Again could we find a person to lead that effort and coordinate an ACP-LS trade show presence? We've also heard a lot about regional meetings. People would say, "Hey, can't we just have a lunch and learn in Boston or a lunch and learn in San Francisco?" or different things like that. So I think there's lots of opportunities for leadership.

I would just add though, that sometimes when we do our day jobs there are not always development opportunities for us to be involved with. Maybe our manager doesn't consider

us for a particular project because there's other team members with more seniority. I've seen this now a few times where some leaders in our industry have asked their own team members to join ACP-LS projects as a part of their development plan to help them develop specific skills. So if you just sort of think about the association as your association, it's your industry association. It's nonprofit, it can be what you make of it. A whole bunch of people now have found opportunities to grow and develop from it.

Chris: Great. I'm just going to pick out one thing you mentioned in there and it went back to our previous conversation. So you talked about your annual meeting which I'm sure delivers a huge amount of value for everybody. And I think you mentioned that you learned something in the first one, and I'm really just trying to give a picture of the organization about two different populations of attendees at the meeting and their different experience level. So would you talk about what that was and what has come about as a result?

Chuck: Yes, during our first annual meeting we had a really nice mix of highly experienced people and then, you know, folks with less experience. We had VPs of commercial sales and marketing, we've had presidents of companies, and then we also had people that just came out of the lab and had their first marketing job and really had no idea how to approach their own job and didn't feel like they were getting all that they could get from inside their companies. So that first meeting worked really well, there were a lot of great interactions between these two groups of people, right? The experienced folks were more than happy to share their ideas, but the challenge was that this first meeting took place in one single room so a lot of that interaction was happening at the networking breaks and things.

As a result of that experience, our second meeting included a series of small breakout sessions where some of those really experienced people now were going to lead a discussion about a specific topic much more in depth and it was a much smaller, tighter group where you could get a lot of questions answered and asked. In fact you saw a lot of people just trading business cards because they really wanted to get some help after the meeting. So we do plan to use that same format of those smaller breakouts where experts as well as sort of novices can get together and we'll use that for our next meeting this fall.

Chris: So I might be putting you on the spot on this, but do you know the dates for that show?

Chuck: Yeah, I don't yet, our meeting planner left me a message literally today to say, "Hey, I've looked at a whole bunch of sites." But we are looking at the Bay Area for our 2015 meeting and September, October is the planning dates right now.

Chris: All right, great. Well if you find out soon, I will include that in the show notes as well but certainly people know to look out for it. I will link to ACP-LS directly in the show notes so you can get all the information you would like to get there. The URL is ACP-LS.org and I

want to really thank Chuck for joining me today and I really appreciate all those fantastic insights and honestly, things that I would have never thought of because my experience in the industry has been fairly narrow. But before we go I just want to ask if there's anything else you would like to say before we wrap up?

Chuck: Yeah well first I want to thank you Chris for pulling this whole thing together. I really appreciate the opportunity to talk about ACP-LS and I want to leave you with a thought about networking. If it wasn't for ACP-LS we would have never had met and I wouldn't have had such an excellent experience of working with you on a project that is completely tangential to my day job. So this project of, you know, doing this podcast really has nothing to do with my day job. So as a result, I am way more likely to recommend you for a job if one should come up or consider you for my next content oriented project or recommend you to a friend for that matter. The point is that our customers have been networking for professional associations for a really, really long time and now we have that same opportunity with ACP-LS.

Chris: Well thank you for the kind words. I have enjoyed my interactions with the ACP-LS. I appreciate being contacted by Alan Gerstein for the opportunity to do a couple blog posts last year and again I would not have known as much about the organization if that had not happened and, of course, this has been hugely fun for me and again thank you very much for participating.

Chuck: You're very welcome. Thank you.

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