Interview: *SAMs and coaching*

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The following interview is with Sales Training Manager David Solberg of Intervet Inc., a division of Akzo Nobel N.V. Akzo Nobel is a global provider of animal medical products, and Solberg has 35 years' coaching experience.

Q: David, first, thanks for taking the time to speak on this very important topic. Do you think that it is important for a strategic account manager (SAM) to be an effective coach?

A: Absolutely. The SAM needs to coordinate and develop his team like any sales leader. As with any high-performance team, an account team needs a leader, manager and coach. The SAM needs to perform these roles and execute on these responsibilities.

Q: A SAM may not have direct management responsibility or control over the members of the team. How does this affect her coaching effectiveness?

A: This is a real issue that needs to be dealt with. I recommend that the corporation expand the job description of the SAM to include this responsibility and then properly communicate it throughout the organization. Team members then have a big win: two sales coaches, the team's direct manager and the team leader. This becomes an excellent development opportunity for any team member. One caution: The SAM as a coach should not execute job-related counseling that may affect the employment of team members. The SAM may, however, provide feedback to the direct manager to add to his knowledge bank for a specific team member / employee.

Q: Does this mean a team member's performance may have either a positive or negative effect on her long-term position with the organization?

A: Yes, like any employee who excels or fails in a designated role and associated responsibilities, it can definitely influence his future—as well it should.

Q: David, do you have any other thoughts on the topic of coaching and SAMs?

A: A few. First, effective coaching can facilitate collaboration within the account team. This is a critical part of any team's efforts. Also, coaching is most critical during difficult times, and with the way many strategic accounts are being challenged in their own businesses, most times for strategic account teams can be very challenging. A final thought for SAMs: Wanting to be a SAM is the easy part; continuing to want to be a SAM, as we are defining her new role as a coach, is the hard part.

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How to build collaborative advantage

For many years, multinational corporations (MNCs) could compete successfully by exploiting scale and scope economies or by taking advantage of imperfections in the world's goods, labor and capital markets. But these ways of competing are no longer as profitable as they once were. In most industries, multinationals no longer compete primarily with companies whose boundaries are confined to a single nation. Rather, they go head to head with a handful of other giants. Against such global competitors, it is hard to sustain an advantage based on traditional economies of scale and scope.

MNCs must seek new sources of competitive advantage. While multinationals in the past realized economies of scope principally by utilizing physical assets and exploiting a companywide brand, the new economies of scope are based on the ability of business units, subsidiaries and functional departments within the company to collaborate successfully by sharing knowledge and jointly developing new products and services.

Collaboration can be an MNC's source of competitive advantage because it does not occur automatically—far from it. Indeed, several barriers impede collaboration within complex multiunit organizations. And to overcome those barriers, companies will have to develop distinct organizing capabilities that cannot be easily imitated. Morten T. Hansen and Nitin Nohria have developed a framework that links managerial action, barriers to inter-unit collaboration and value creation in MNCs to help managers understand how collaborative advantage can work. The framework conceptualizes collaboration as a set of management levers that reduce four specific barriers to collaboration, leading in turn to several types of value creation. Hansen and Nohria draw on the former British Petroleum's experience to illustrate the effectiveness of a collaborative approach.

Source: Morten T. Hansen and Nitin Nohria, "How to build collaborative advantage," *Sloan Management Review*, Fall 2004, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 22-30.