



CLARITYES1 PODCAST #6: 5 WAYS TO INCREASE SAM TRAINING RELEVANCE

Welcome back to the ClarityES1 podcast series. I'm your host, Chris Deren and after a couple of decades of helping field teams develop into their full potential, I can say that we've learned a lot, especially about strategic account management and how to get it right.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in rolling out a SAM learning and development initiative is making it relevant for those involved. The Cambridge dictionary defines the word relevance as "the degree to which something is related or useful to what is happening or being talked about."

I think that's a good place to start when figuring out how to design and deliver SAM training and coaching that truly resonates because of how relatable it is.

I also think this doesn't happen nearly as often or consistently as everyone wants it to and that's where I'd like to focus in this podcast, on 5 things you can do to get that relevancy meter all the way to the right.

So, let's dig in.

#1: Start with a compelling story around change

Before generating any SAM development content, training, tools, coaching or strategies, you need first to capture your audience's attention. On one hand, the rising complexity of calling into strategic accounts, pressure to outperform the competition and the overall rapid pace of change in the SAM world could lead one to believe that any new training and support programs would be met with open arms.

After all, most SAMs agree that on any given day, they could use the additional insights and guidance and the really good ones are always open to anything that gives them an edge. But without a compelling story associated with your learning and development initiative, they don't yet know that what **you** specifically have to offer is of any relevance to what they're experiencing in the account environment.

If you take the time though to make that connection, to illustrate what's shifting in the marketplace of accounts and customer stakeholders, what the trend lines are, and what's prompting the need to move off the status quo, you are effectively getting them mentally on board and ready to embrace the change that the roll out of **your** SAM program will help them manage. This is what converts the perception of your efforts from being a tactical disruption to their time to a critical component of staying ahead with their accounts strategically.

#2: Build from the point of account engagement back in

One of the surest ways to increase the relevancy of SAM training is to make it reflect the very nature of the conversations SAMs are having in their strategic accounts. This one takes a bit of extra investment, but the impact is high. It's also the reverse of how many programs are rolled out. There have been a few too many SAM initiatives built internally with the best of intentions and goals and pushed out externally only to fizzle out because the audience had to stretch too far to see the relevancy to *their* accounts and customer conversations.

If a SAM in the pharmaceuticals sector for instance, is dealing with the complexity of an integrated delivery system and the shifting nature of decision -making around drug spend and risk with more senior executives, a generic account management training program simply won't cut it. They might pick up a couple of useful tips here and there but the needle won't move for the collective SAM organization. If by contrast, the effort is made to extract the most successful best practices from others calling on the same type of stakeholders with similar issues and it's built into the content, tools and coaching in ways that accurately reflect the challenge as it exists, the audience experience and feedback is very different, even game changing.

#3: Make new SAM approaches part of the daily culture

When the topic of reinforcement and follow up is raised, it's usually in the context of making the training stick for the long term which of course is a good thing. But if it's done the right way, it also increases relevancy. Why? Well, the establishment of relevance is not a one-time event.

The external marketplace issues and complexities that led to our first two suggestions of telling a compelling story and building from the outside in continue to exist on a daily basis. So, when follow up sessions, coaching and other strategies designed to embed the learning so it becomes second nature and natural as part of the SAM culture continue to reflect those realities, relevancy increases. It makes SAMs feel like the organization sees it like they do and is helping them stay ahead of the effort curve by providing learning content, guidance and tools that they can readily apply to the specific environments they are calling on.

#4: Make the investment to tailor content by role and customer environment

More and more these days, strategic account management is becoming a team sport. Depending on the sector, global trends, new sources of competition and even merger and acquisition activity, have all contributed to the need for tighter collaboration amongst both core and extended team members around the account.

This means that there's truly no one-size-fits-all when it comes to SAM learning and development. In manufacturing, SAMs need to be in lock step with sales engineers and product managers, relationship managers in corporate banking need strong alignment with product specialists, SMEs and case managers. Pharmaceutical SAMs have to have increased coordination with medical teams and field reimbursement. So yes, we're suggesting that to make the experience highly relevant, SAM programs need to be tied first to the industry, then to the nature of the team interactions that yield the best results in the account and finally, to the individual role.

The trick here is to strike a balance between SAM approaches, models and frameworks that are globally consistent, yet locally relevant but also tailored in ways that give each account-facing team member the sense that the program was built with them and their role on the account team in mind. This can include customized case studies, account archetype profiles, stakeholder research content and other assets that include sections tailored for specific account team roles.

#5: Give leadership what they need to demonstrate relevancy on a regular basis

And the best way to do this is to provide sales leaders with digital tools, prompts and other coaching assets that make it easier for them to refer back to parts of the SAM program that directly relate to the account-based discussion and topic at hand. This can be as simple as a set of coaching scenario cards tailored by account archetype, stakeholder profile and situation with known best practices. With so much on their plate, sales leadership will appreciate the ability to do quick recalls of content and/or coaching advice that comes directly from the SAM program you initiated. And when SAMs see the habit of leadership referring back to the program or process on a consistent basis, it sends that relevancy signal and pushes that meter all the way to the right.

When SAM learning and development programs succeed in moving the needle of customer engagement effectiveness, credit can and often goes to how the initiative was communicated, how it was rolled out, what reinforcement and coaching mechanisms were put in place among other critical success factors. But the degree to which SAM participants felt the program truly

reflects what they experience in account environments on a daily basis is undoubtedly the most important component of increasing the relevance of what you deliver.

Thanks for listening to the ClarityES1 podcast series. Until next time....