

The Importance of Professionalism

BY KEYNAE AGNEW

One of the benefits of serving on MANA's Board of Directors and the Health Industry Representatives Association Board of Directors is that I get to meet and speak with many other manufacturers' representatives.

They have lots of different ways to go to market, and the products they sell serve many different industries — but they all have one thing in common: They are proud sales professionals.



Reps know that building rapport between their customers, their principals, and themselves doesn't just get business — it gets *repeat* business.

Each of them expresses their professionalism in their own way, and I would like to share with you some things that I have learned about professionalism from my counterparts who span so many industries across the country.

Steps to Rep Professionalism Self-Paced Learning Tool

1. Plan Your Way to Rep Success
2. Connect With High-Quality Principals That “Get It”
3. Developing/Pioneering New Markets With Professional Manufacturers’ Representatives
4. Negotiate Agreements That Work for Both You and Your Principals
5. Work With Principals as Trusted Partners in Profits
6. Learn to Sell Professionally
7. Analyze Your Lines for Profitability
8. Leverage Technology to Maximize Productivity
9. Grow Your Business by Hiring Employees or Sub-Reps
10. House Accounts, Split Commissions and Other Territory Management Issues
11. Work Effectively With International Principals
12. Plan for Your Succession and Sell Your Rep Business

I’ve learned that there are many reasons that they have committed to professionalism:

- Customers and principals seek out professional rep partners.
 - Customers want to buy from professionals because the customer’s companies can only meet their commitments when their partners keep their promises.
 - Principals seek out professional rep partners because they know they can ride their rep partners’ coattails to gain customers’ trust much more quickly than they could on their own.
- Reps know that building rapport between their customers, their principals, and themselves doesn’t just get business — it gets *repeat* business. Customers know that trusted sources perform week after week, year after year, and are too valuable to displace for an unknown, untested, new source.
- Reps also know that their professionalism and reputation is their ticket to consideration when manufacturers interview new reps in their territory.
- Customers are always looking for ways to move their purchases away from unprofessional sources to professional sources. It’s not unusual for a customer to ask a trusted rep to find a source for products they don’t already sell. Nothing gets a prospective principal’s attention like: “I have a customer who wants to buy widgets just like yours, do you need a rep in my territory?”
- Professionalism builds a rep’s self-respect. Professionalism and self-respect are what get a rep up in the morning. Lacking those qualities is what would keep a rep up at night.
- Reps value the respect of their peers. A rep who represents Acme Widget Company in Ohio wants Acme’s rep in Pennsylvania to share best practices and make a referral if a line the Pennsylvania rep represents needs a rep in Ohio.

How do reps up their game when it comes to professionalism? Many use the “Steps to Rep Professionalism” self-paced learning tool in the member area of www.MANAonline.org.

Here are some of the other educational options that were valuable to me: industry mentors/mentoring programs, industry professional networking platforms/groups, continuing education platforms, and industry trade associations.

Another aspect of rep professionalism is making sure that the rep industry has young people entering our profession who can take our places when we retire.

Recently, I had the pleasure of being introduced to a woman in her sophomore year in college who had been steered in my direction for career guidance. She had a strong interest in science and was curious about the world of medical sales. She needed a mentor and I was excited to introduce this STEM-focused young woman to the benefits of a career as an independent manufacturers’ representative.

Professionalism is one of the key factors which I believe helped sustain my business through the challenging times we all faced last year and will help me thrive for years to come.

To all my rep counterparts, thank you for your professionalism. You make the rep industry look good, not just to prospective principals who are considering selling through reps, but also to the next generation of reps who will follow in our footsteps.

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