

Leading the Way Small to Medium Pharma

This month sees the first of three articles in Pf to explore the world of the small to medium sized pharmaceutical company. We will be looking at the benefits, or otherwise, experienced by representatives working for these companies, as well as the commercial and financial implications. We will also investigate what it takes to work in the small to medium sized pharma sector.

The Reality is Better than the Perception!

When it comes to working for a pharmaceutical company, does size really matter? Are the perceived benefits of working for a large company actually borne out by the day to day reality? To answer these questions, we turned to a recent Pf industry wide survey.

In the 2003 Company Perception, Motivation and Satisfaction Survey, readers were asked to rate companies according to their desirability to work for (not including their own). The results for small to medium companies were interesting:

Out of the Top 10 Most Desirable Organisations to Work For, as voted by 2000 readers of Pf, only two were from the small to medium sized sector.

But, when asked how satisfied employees are with their employer, those who worked in small to medium sized organisations had 27% greater levels of satisfaction.

In addition to this, Merck- a medium sized pharma company- was rated as one of the Financial Times 50 Best places to Work in the UK. This is particularly relevant, because the FTs results are based on employees' views rather than external opinions.

This would suggest that those individuals working for smaller companies find them highly desirable to work for – but that to the wider industry this is something of a well kept secret. This prompted us to do a little investigating into what it is that makes working for a smaller company so attractive once you are actually there.

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Of course the term 'small to medium' is rather a relative term. These companies are by no means 'small fry' in the world of business. Such companies include the likes of LEO, Merck, Napp, Schering Health Care, and Solvay, whose field forces number around 100 each, and whose turnovers can be as high as £72 million each. However, we suspected that there is probably a big difference in the working lives of those employed in this sector, as compared to those working for the bigger pharmaceutical companies. We asked sales professionals from Merck and Solvay for their opinions.

Stuart Ellison Smith, Business Manager at Merck, explains what it takes to succeed in this sector, and the type of people who thrive in it:

"In this sector fieldforces tend to be smaller, so as a representative on territory you tend to be much more visible, and this only works for you if what you are doing on a day to day basis is impressive! In a large organisation, with ten of you on a territory you can 'plod along' if you choose to, but in a smaller company this is simply not an option. You need drive, an enthusiasm for responsibility, and to care genuinely about the business. This absolute reliance on representatives who have this self starting, responsible attitude, means that a lot of representatives find that they work their way up through the ranks of a small to medium sized company relatively quickly. This is because their efforts really stand out on territory, and their successes are easily identified and attributable. Of course there is a flip side to this, which is that if you prefer working as part of a large team, or to be measured on activity rather than sales, then this may not be the sector for you.

The key to being a successful sales person in a small to medium sized pharmaceutical company is definitely to thrive on accountability and autonomy. This involves taking on a lot of personal responsibility, but the benefits are very real. The focus on the individual's performance and success means that personalised career paths and individual recognition, are a very big part of the company culture."

Umbereen Mirza, a medical representative in Birmingham, left Solvay to work for a much larger pharmaceutical company, but returned to Solvay a few months ago. For her, the benefits of work-

ing for a smaller company are very clear. She told us:

"Because I am the only rep on territory, whatever goes on, I am responsible for it! If I don't go out to work – I don't get any bonus! Its also really great not having to worry about having to stick to strict zones while on territory – I am free from the constant pressure of having to make sure I am not working the same area as other team members on any particular day.

The main benefit of working for a smaller company though is the culture. You definitely feel more valued and not just a number. At Solvay head office everyone is known by their first names, which is very different to any head office I've been to before. Your efforts are also very readily recognised through the network of management and senior

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management via emails, phone calls etc. It means that being noticed by those at the top is a much quicker process."

It would seem then, that the main differences in working for a small to medium sized pharmaceutical company, are the autonomy and accountability you are afforded, and also the culture of individuality you find yourself in. These are factors that influence every day of your working life. Do these benefits really outweigh those of having a heavy-weight organisation behind you? In the next two editions of Pf we will be looking at these issues in greater detail. □