

# Stop Assuming, Start Enabling: Three Goals for Better Performance

By Steve Gielda and Gabe Holmes

Help teams think, communicate and engage more effectively

As commercial teams set their 2026 performance goals and finalize strategic plans for the year ahead, familiar challenges tend to resurface. Every year, many of the same gaps re-emerge: Sellers fall back on familiar messaging, opportunity strategies are built on assumptions rather than evidence and deals stall for reasons that could have been anticipated and prevented.

For learning & development (L&D) and commercial training leaders in life sciences, the beginning of a new year is more than a planning milestone. It is an opportunity to re-focus the organization on the thinking that drives execution, not just the skills that support it. Sales performance is shaped by how well individuals analyze situations, challenge assumptions and align solutions to customer and organizational priorities.

Sustainable improvement, therefore, requires training and reinforcement that strengthen these capability muscles, not just product knowledge.

Below are three priorities that L&D leaders can champion to help their field sales teams think more critically, communicate more strategically and engage more effectively in the moments that matter.



## Priority #1: Help Sellers Challenge Their Assumptions

Salespeople make decisions based on the information they think they have:

- Who the key decision makers are.
- What the customer values.
- Why the opportunity will (or won't) move forward.

The challenge? Many of those beliefs are assumptions, not facts. And once an assumption is formed, confirmation bias makes it feel true.

In life sciences, where buying decisions often involve multiple clinical, operational and financial influencers, unquestioned assumptions can derail even well-positioned opportunities. Yet most traditional sales tools and account templates simply ask sellers to document what they already believe — reinforcing bias rather than challenging it.

L&D can shift this pattern by embedding critical thinking checkpoints into planning and coaching practices. For example:

- Replace “Who is the decision maker?” with “Who is shaping the decision and how do we know?”
- Replace “What does the customer want?” with “What evidence do we have that this is their priority now?”
- Replace “We have a champion” with “What makes this person willing and able to advocate when we're not in the room?”

Simulations and scenario-based exercises can take this further by forcing teams to uncover influence, validate motivations and re-evaluate strategy under changing conditions — mirroring real-world dynamics.

## Priority #2: Strengthen Confidence to Win on Value — Not Price

When deals stall, sellers often default to price concessions. But in most cases, the real issue is uncertainty about how to articulate value in the customer's terms.

Life sciences customers increasingly expect solution partners who understand the impact on clinical workflows, staff efficiency, patient outcomes and financial sustainability. Yet many representatives are more comfortable describing product features than connecting those features to measurable operational or clinical benefits.

L&D leaders can address this by integrating business acumen and value articulation into skill development:

- Help sellers identify which clinical, operational or financial metrics matter most in their segment.
- Teach them to frame value as progress toward business outcomes, not product attributes.
- Provide coaching tools that prompt the questions “Which stakeholder metric improves if this solution is adopted?” and “How would the customer measure success 90 days after implementation?”

As sellers grow more confident linking their solution to what the customer values, price becomes a smaller part of the conversation. Confidence — not discounting — becomes the differentiator.

## Priority #3: Shift from Product-Centric Messaging to Outcome-Centric Engagement

The pressure to communicate product strengths is real. However, in complex buying environments common in life sciences, customers don't simply want to hear what the product does — they want to understand how it advances the outcomes they care about.

Training that focuses on memorizing features and messages often leads to transactional interactions. Training that focuses on understanding context and advancing progress leads to partnership conversations.

L&D can support this outcome orientation by:

- Framing training around customer challenges and pathways to improvement, rather than product attributes.
- Coaching managers to ask in every pipeline review: “What business problem are we helping the customer solve?”
- Encouraging sellers to use planning tools not just to record information, but to strategize how to influence decisions across stakeholders.

When sellers learn to orient discussions around outcomes rather than offerings, they are perceived not just as representatives of a product but as strategic contributors to patient and organizational success.

## Making Strategic Goals Stick

A new year naturally inspires motivation — but motivation alone doesn't create new habits.

Sustained performance improvement requires:

- Reinforcement over time, not one-time training events.
- Coaching that focuses on thinking, not just pipeline status.
- Metrics that track behavior change, not just activity levels.

L&D leaders who shift from delivering content to enabling capability play a pivotal role in helping sellers reframe how they analyze opportunities, communicate value and engage with stakeholders across the care continuum.

## Conclusion

Performance improves in measurable ways when sales teams stop assuming and start examining; stop defending price and start articulating impact; and stop leading with product and start leading with outcomes.

In 2026, let's commit to building lasting capability — the kind that drives sustained growth and measurable business impact. ■



Steve Gielda is president and co-founder of Ignite Selling. Email Steve at [sgielda@igniteselling.com](mailto:sgielda@igniteselling.com) or connect through [www.linkedin.com/in/sgielda/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sgielda/)



Gabe Holmes is business development manager at Ignite Selling. Email Gabe at [gaholmes@igniteselling.com](mailto:gaholmes@igniteselling.com) or connect through [www.linkedin.com/in/gabeholmes](https://www.linkedin.com/in/gabeholmes).