
It All Happened So Suddenly

For several weeks, the sales operations team had been gearing up for the first launch of a physician relationship management database program for the sales force. The change management issues, including training and incentives that would induce salespeople to invest the initial time to set up their physician contacts, had taken weeks of planning. Tomorrow, one of the most visible aspects of the program will launch – a nationwide webcast for the sales teams and district managers to demonstrate the application. The sales operations team responsible for the demonstration has four people and a team leader, Hunt Jackson. In the midst of today's rehearsal, Hunt suddenly collapses.

One member of the team, Jane Midee, trained in CPR, immediately tries to help Hunt as the rest of the team watches helplessly. An ambulance quickly arrives, and Hunt is rushed to the hospital. His condition is critical as he has suffered a massive heart attack. The team stands stunned in the room, uncertain what to do. They are a very close group, and they have become closer the past few weeks as they have worked under the obstacles inherent in an unpopular project.

After the ambulance left, the team sat in the conference room talking. "The worst part is, Hunt hated the fact that the sales team was looking for any excuse to cancel this launch." John Ayam, one of the systems trainers said with regret in his voice. "He is going to be so bummed when he wakes up."

Suddenly Erica Bianchi, an applications developer on the team, looked up from the paper she was staring at and said, "Why are we assuming that we would cancel tomorrow's launch?"

"Well, let's start with the fact that Hunt was doing a big part of the presentation," Jane replied. "And let's add to the fact that I don't know if I feel up to it myself given I was just giving Hunt CPR!"

"But wait a second," John leaned forward, "I know it sounds like it could be tough for us to pull it off, but I know that Hunt would want us to..."

What Should We Do Now?

After a few more minutes of debate, the quietest person on the team, Harrison Chong, finally speaks. “I think we should do it, but only if we can do a really great job. Hunt really cared about this project – he worked on it day and night.”

“Well, I wrote the piece that Hunt was going to do.” John, the systems trainer volunteered. “I bet if I practice with you guys I could pull it off.”

Jane frowned, “If we’re going to pull this off, I think we need to make sure that Ben Johnson, the head of Sales Operations, is comfortable that we’re going to do this.” The team nods in agreement. “After all, he may be expecting us to cancel it.”

Just then, Ben enters the room. “Guys, I know you’ve had a really bad afternoon so if you want to call it a day, go right ahead. I’ve spoken with Hunt’s wife, and he is in stable condition. He will likely need to have quadruple bypass surgery once he is stabilized.”

“Ben, we were just talking,” Harrison surprises everyone by speaking first, “and we aren’t ready to call it a day. Tomorrow was really important to Hunt, and we would like to go ahead with the launch.”

Ben is taken aback. “I hadn’t officially canceled it yet, but I assumed we were cancelling it. Are you guys sure you can handle this? I doubt we will get any sympathy from the field if it doesn’t go well. They are in no mood when it comes to this new system.”

“Hunt would want us to go ahead.” Erica asserts. “We’re going to start our practice and rehearsal now.”

Ben says, “Ok, but I’d like to see a dry run myself tonight. How about I give you guys a couple of hours, and then I will come back?”

The team starts a rehearsal. When Ben returns, he gives them several areas for improvement. He again offers the option of canceling, but the group asks for more time. At the next rehearsal, Ben leaves more confident.

The next morning, the team runs the webcast effectively. They handle several tough questions from salespeople who believe they have found potential flaws in the application. They even handle some tough questions from senior sales executives well.

Case Study Activity

With your case study team, discuss the following questions:

What characteristics of resiliency did this team demonstrate? How do those characteristics compare with the characteristics cited in the prework article?

What were the obstacles that they faced?

What strengths did the team have that supported resiliency?