

Pharma vet charts consultancy course

There's a perception—a nonsensical one, really—that marketing higher-ups who depart an in-house pharma gig for the world of consulting do so because they crave a slower pace and less all-encompassing set of engagements. To anyone who still thinks this is true, we introduce Dennis Urbaniak.

Urbaniak, managing director of Accenture Life Sciences, arrived at the consulting giant in February after 19 years at Sanofi, where he ran the US diabetes commercial franchise and developed a new social-media engagement strategy, among other activities. To hear him tell it, his current role offers him just as much opportunity to innovate and effect change as any internal one ever could.

As one of the world's biggest and furthest-reaching consultancies, Accenture is no stranger to pharma and life sciences. Indeed, Urbaniak first got to know his current colleagues as a client. It was the similarities between the two organizations, in fact, that ultimately prompted him to look into joining Accenture.

"The Sanofi culture had two things that stood out as we went through dramatic growth: It was a highly collaborative environment and a very entrepreneurial one," he notes. While working in conjunction with physicians and health systems on a project involving population-based models, Urbaniak sensed an opportunity to apply those learnings across a broader range of healthcare entities. Given the strong working relationship that already existed, Accenture was a natural destination.

Urbaniak's desire to build a modern-era life sciences consultancy, to innovate on an even grander scale, didn't surprise anyone who knew him well. Gayle Sirard, managing director of Accenture Life Sciences,

Dennis Urbaniak
Managing director,
Accenture Life Sciences

2010–2014
VP, US diabetes, Sanofi

2008–2010
VP, innovation and new
customer channels, Sanofi

witnessed the Sanofi/Accenture collaboration from a front-row seat and was impressed by its leader.

"While many people were talking about innovation, there was a fear to change or an uncertainty on how to embrace it," she recalls. "Dennis built a very diverse team, set it up for success and was willing to take on risks and change how traditional work was done." Urbaniak also impressed Sirard on a personal level: "I'm amazed that someone who is recognized as a deep thought leader has no ego."

More than six months after his arrival at Accenture, Urbaniak remains awed by the depth of brainpower and resources at his immediate disposal. At the same time, he notes that there's little precedent for what he and his Accenture teammates are attempting to do.

"The idea is to work with commercial teams who are looking to change how they go about their business," Urbaniak explains. "How can they utilize real-world data and deeper analytics to make more informed decisions and get deeper insights about serving customers?" Urbaniak also hopes that

his practice will offer a different type of partnership than pharma companies have traditionally enjoyed with their outside consultants: "Most of the time, people want to offer a service or project. We're interested in outcome- and performance-based results."

While Accenture doesn't reveal details about client relationships, Urbaniak says that early response has been enthusiastic. And so, in and around the hours he logs as a parent of five and inveterate Howard Stern fan (he once appeared on air while visiting the studio to check out collaboration software), Urbaniak will attempt to chart this new course.

"Before I came here, I thought, 'I'm going to be a little bit selfish and go do something on a bigger scale,'" he says. "The way I describe this job is that it's the closest thing I'll get to starting my own business in a large organization. Opportunities like this are rare."

—Larry Dobrow

"This job is the closest I'll get to starting my own business in a large organization"

