

Alliance Consulting: human capital is an art

At the heart of human resources in the nutrition and health, cosmetics and foodtech sectors, Philippe Sibour, who has witnessed the evolution of both his recruitment consultancy business and these sectors over the last quarter of a century, outlines the future of nutraceutical executives.



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Philippe Sibour
CEO
Alliance Consulting

Actif's Mag: How do you see the nutraceutical industry? What implications does this have for your talent search activity?

Philippe Sibour: Before answering, I'd like to take a quick look back at what the nutraceutical industry was like over twenty years ago when I started offering my human resources skills. At the turn of the 2000s, the dietary supplements market did not exist in the true sense of the word. It was dynamic, of course, but it was highly fragmented, highly 'marketed', made up of a large number of companies attracted by this attractive market, but with neither significant capital nor qualified managers.

And when the European regulation on claims was enacted in 2002, almost all the players in this market suddenly found themselves up against a regulatory wall and facing a strong demand for science on the part of the national and European authorities. New requirements then arose in terms of the need for staff who were qualified in this or that field, but who were also capable of understanding what made nutraceuticals so special.

All these factors led me to take an interest in food supplements - I would remind you that this term, which is familiar to everyone today, did not exist a quarter of a century ago. I became interested because I realised that this sector not only needed to be supported throughout its value chain, but also needed a new 'matrix' approach, consisting of meeting specific needs in terms of science, marketing, industrial processes, regulations, and even advice on corporate strategy and finding partners. Because beyond the headhunting function that has been Alliance Consulting's primary mission, what has made us unique is our ability to ensure that all our skills work in synergy, which is a real challenge in terms of organisation. Our approach is to 'work' for a company as a whole, through an intervention that 'gets them moving'.

Actif's Mag: You've spoken several times about the value chain. How important is it for the nutraceutical industry for a human resources consultancy to position itself in this value chain and provide answers and solutions? Can the younger generation meet these needs?

Philippe Sibour: Nutraceuticals is a 'world' of its own, coming out of nowhere and carving out a place for itself in industrial sectors that weren't expecting it. And to consolidate this





position, I believe it is important for nutraceuticals to take ownership of this value chain.

To do this, we need to inject tailor-made managers capable of understanding the sector.

An example: twenty years ago, I was already advising CDMOs to open up to new professions, to take on staff with a business development focus. And to stop being 'content' to wait for the customer. A sales department should no longer be a simple 'order taker', but should interact with its environment and make proposals. The B2B approach has given way to a B2B2C positioning. In other words, whatever the industrial sector to which it belongs, a nutraceutical player must be focused on its end customer. They must not lose sight of the fact that it is the consumer who will drive the offer, and not just the nutraceutical industry.

Coming back to the CDMOs, as long as their functional structures are in place, it is important that they 'source' and recruit managers whose skills go beyond their soft skills. To achieve this objective of responding as closely as possible to the expectations of end consumers, managers need to have a clearer vision of what the market is, and to be more cross-functional.

In this sense, the younger generation has this transversality and a clearer vision of the market and its expectations.

Actif's Mag: What exactly are the nutraceutical industry's expectations? And its challenges?

Philippe Sibour: The nutraceuticals sector is highly interdisciplinary. It intends to put in place very diverse teams. Scientists, because science is a very strong driver. Marketing specialists to decipher consumer needs and expectations. Coordinating these fundamentally different skills and creating synergy is a challenge in terms of organisation. It requires leaders capable of fostering the cohesion of these multidisciplinary teams in order to promote innovation.

That's why we position ourselves as a consultancy rather than a recruitment agency. This consultancy activity means that we have to be attentive to the needs of the market so that we can respond with the best profiles.

The emergence of new technologies and new trends makes our job of recruiting nutraceutical experts even more complex. These new technologies include biotechnology and artificial intelligence.

Companies need to keep abreast of the latest advances and adapt to them quickly in order to remain relevant and competitive.

AI-driven platforms accelerate the identification of bioactive compounds and predict their impact on biological pathways. GPT models enable efficient data analysis and formulation recommendations. European players are using AI to create artificial influencers for viral education and marketing purposes, highlighting the diverse applications of AI in the dietary supplement industry.

Beyond the emergence of these new skills, there is also a strong demand for digital specialists capable of developing the brand media of new players by improving the diversity of content (targeted posts, videos, stories, etc.) and optimising websites via blogs, for example, in order to create a greater sense of belonging to the brand.

The nutraceuticals sector faces many challenges. Our role is to help it meet these challenges.

Actif's Mag: How are you responding to the new challenges facing nutraceuticals? And what place do you give to people?

Philippe Sibour: Perhaps it's because we're a human resources consultancy, and because people are at the heart of our business, that we've been able to develop by relying on three values that I believe to be essential, both for our clients, the nutraceutical companies, and for the talent we seek out. These values are listening, caring and tailoring.

We develop them in our consulting activities, which are becoming increasingly important.

By investing in talent development, fostering innovation and cultivating strategic partnerships with key external stakeholders, companies in the sector can overcome the current recruitment pressures we are seeing.

Our role is to ensure that the value of companies is not destroyed by a vision of reducing direct labour costs - even if such an economic decision may make sense in the short term. Bringing on board profiles that are 'too generalist' and do not have the right skills could potentially lead to a reduction in the driving force, one of the key factors in a company's performance. The high investment in training time, particularly during onboarding, is then combined with a drop in operational efficiency and a slowdown in internal processes, which can potentially compromise the company's ability to achieve its objectives.

In our experience, if this approach is not accompanied by a genuinely personalised career management policy - an à la carte approach, if you like - which also takes into account the 'well-being at work' component, the managers trained in this way either jump ship after one or two years, in the best of cases in order to gain in fulfilment and remuneration, or question their own investment.

In fact, we have a special place in the nutraceutical human resources sector. While we act as organisational and recruitment consultants, we also act as 'advocates' for the candidates we put forward. This means that we have to be close to them and make a success of this 'candidate experience'. •



Interviewed by Philippe Millet