

Confidence key to Platinum's victory

W eek nine saw both teams going back to basics with a straightforward business-to-business selling task for pharmaceutical giant Glaxo SmithKline.

The result here would arise from straightforward sales of Breathe Right nasal strips, with orders entered into the contestants' books.

Selling can be one of the toughest jobs of all, as you have to sell yourself, and make people empathise with you and want to do business with you.

When you're on a high, you can do no wrong, and your confidence and body language will enable you to sell ice to the eskimos. When you're off form, your performance nose-dives and you go home hungry and deflated. The best salespeople always have their research done, know their target markets, know their product and the competition, and obviously

APPRENTICE *round-up*



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know their numbers, margins and discounts they need in order to make a profit.

When Bill Cullen persuaded Renault France that he was the man to take over the then ailing Renault Ireland in the 1980s, he beat off competition from nine other Irish consortiums because, not only could

he talk about the automotive sector in Ireland – including the competition, pricing differentials and profit margins – but he could also do the same for the European, American and Asian markets.

Last week, CuChulainn lost the task ultimately because of the non-performance and lack of adaptability of its team members and, of course, because of offering sale or return (which a member mistakenly offered as part of the team's biggest order).

Communication fell down badly for CuChulainn, with no regular updates during the task, clashing personalities, crossing and duplication on duties and, sadly, an inability to use given discounts in the sales process.

Platinum were very lucky to win and could have lost through lack of attention, such as showing the purchaser the margins and numbers, and persisting with a failing strat-

egy of targeting hairdressers.

However, one memorable sales performance really showed how one succeeds in this arena – in pushing bulk orders, one can always give some free samples and incorporate them into the discount. The discount alone doesn't always work, but the tangible free samples usually are enough to get to the tipping point, show real value and, of course, what a nice person you are to do business with.

Five candidates are left and there are four tasks to go. Next week, the contestants enter tomorrow's world with international corporation Microsoft. This will be a tense programme with the prize now in sight, and Cullen doesn't disappoint when the candidates face him in the furnace of his boardroom.

Brian Purcell is a director of Insight Consultants and a judge on TV3's The Apprentice