The Three Phases of a Sensory Career

Plus the Facts, Figures and Things They Never Tell You**.....**

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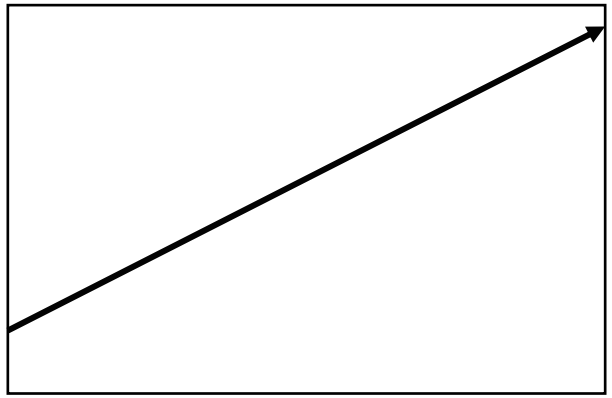
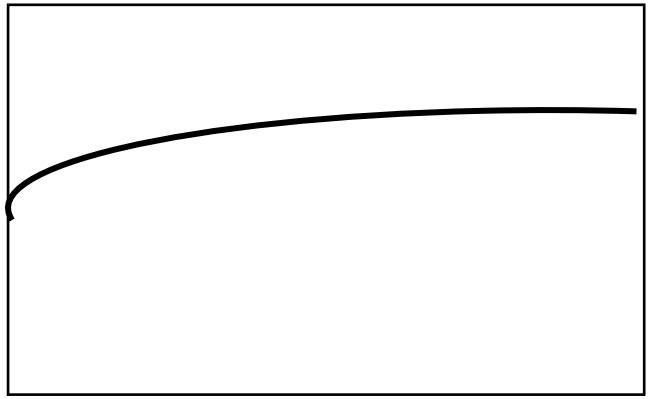
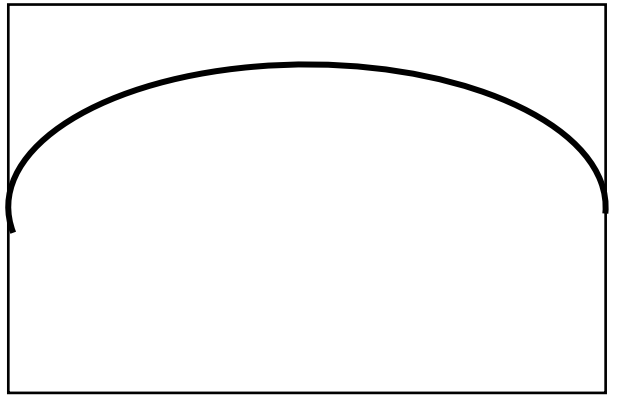
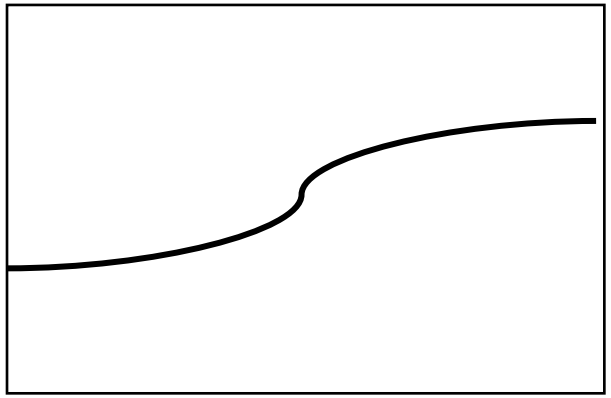
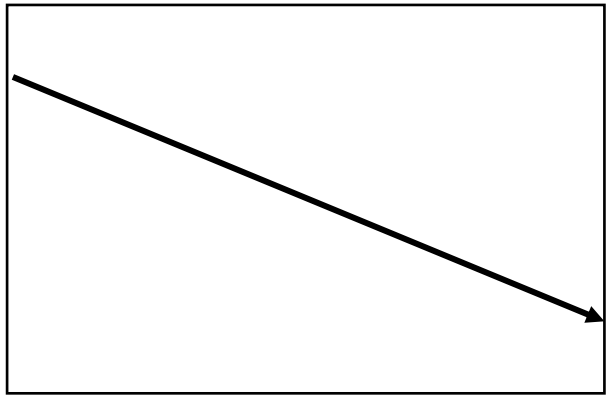
What will your career trajectory look like?











Overview

- Definition of sensory evaluation
- Good habits
- Skills needed for success
- Five career options for sensory scientists
- Expectations
- Three phases of a sensory career in industry
- Phase I: What you need to know at the start of your career
- Phase II: Growth inside and outside the company: Is a change needed?
- Phase III: Solidifying your contributions and planning career closure
- Life after an career in industry
- Reference organizations to find your tribe
- Interview Questions

Definition

- *A scientific method used to evoke, measure, analyze, and interpret those responses to products as perceived through the senses of sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing* (Stone and Sidel, 1993)

- *Measurement, interpretation and understanding of the human response to perceived product properties (J. Hort*)

Start with good habits….



- Take all opportunities offered
- End of each calendar year: Update your resume – add something
- Plan what you want to add to your resume for the coming year
- List all your courses and training each year
- Contribute to a professional organization on a regular basis
- Know when you are in the driver’s seat and when you are in the passenger’s seat
- Don’t confuse your expectations with the reality of the sensory role

Sensory links the technical side to the business side in CPG* companies

Discrimination testing

Descriptive analysis

Qualitative consumer testing

Quantitative consumer testing

Sensory groups in CPG industry are playing an increasingly strategic role, with Sensory professional seen as a core member of the Team rather than a service or a support function.



*Consumer Packaged Goods, sometimes referred to FMCPG –"Fast Moving Consumer Packaged Goods"

Skills needed for success

HARD SKILLS	**SOFT SKILLS**
• Problem solving & critical thinking • Sensory methods • Analytical and integrative skills • Statistical • Project management	• Managing people • Effective communication • Business understanding • Customer service • Conflict management

In the beginning…



What do you expect when you start….?

People will readily share all the information I need ……

My sensory work will impact business decisions….I will be listened to…

My clients will be happy to learn about sensory ….

It will be great to work in a team…

They must value sensory… they've hired me….



What your employer will want from you….*

- Show up every day – in body and in spirit
- Be open to learning and changing from those around you
- Be enthusiastic and involved
- Be patient, change takes time
- Be prepared to fight the same battles over and over
- Be visible inside and outside of your organization
- Don’t complain….propose solutions, not problems
- Make the company’s priorities your priorities**
- Admit if you don’t know something, then figure it out

*From L. Rothman’s “Setting up for Success” presentation

** Keeping values and reputation intact

Five options for the sensory neophyte

Industry	Services	Consulting	Government	Academic
• Company size & products • Role of sensory function • Company culture	• Company size and services • Customers' requirements • Company culture & reputation	• Single or group • Service uniqueness • Demand for services	• Organization mission & scope • Role • Resources • Political support of services provided	• Role & Responsibilities – teaching and research • Qualifications required

Sensory in food and non-food can be quite different

- **Food**
- Shadow of Rose Marie Pangborn
- History of commodity grading and expert judging
- Traditional methods used
- Lab heritage
- Service to product developers
- Focus on sensory effects of ingredients and processing

- **Non-food**
- Psychology provides more of a conceptual framework
- Customized methods per product category and per company
- Consumer usage and relevance
- Clinical testing
- Related to marketing
- Support to claims

Selecting a company depends on hard data….



- Hard data
  - Size of the company
  - Number, variety of products, geographical reach
  - Internal assets of the company
  - Number of sensory scientists
  - Size and structure of sensory group
  - Reporting relationships of the sensory group

Selecting a company also depends on “soft” data…but harder to gauge



- Soft data
- Dominant function in the company
- Financial priorities in the company
- Top down vs. grassroots decision making
- Process orientation
- Autonomy
- Risk taking

It’s easy to get the hard data about a company’s sensory group







Lone wolf Department:
Single Sensory Scientist
All elements of function
on one person’s shoulders
Product preparation and booth area

Small Group Department
2-3 Sensory Scientists
Technician
Booths
Experienced panel or discrimination panel
On site/Off-site descriptive panel
Low cost consumer testing

Large Group Sensory Department
5-6 Sensory Scientists
Technician(s)
Support personnel
Booths
Internal panels, including descriptive
Consumer testing
Internal budget

Hard to gauge the “soft” data



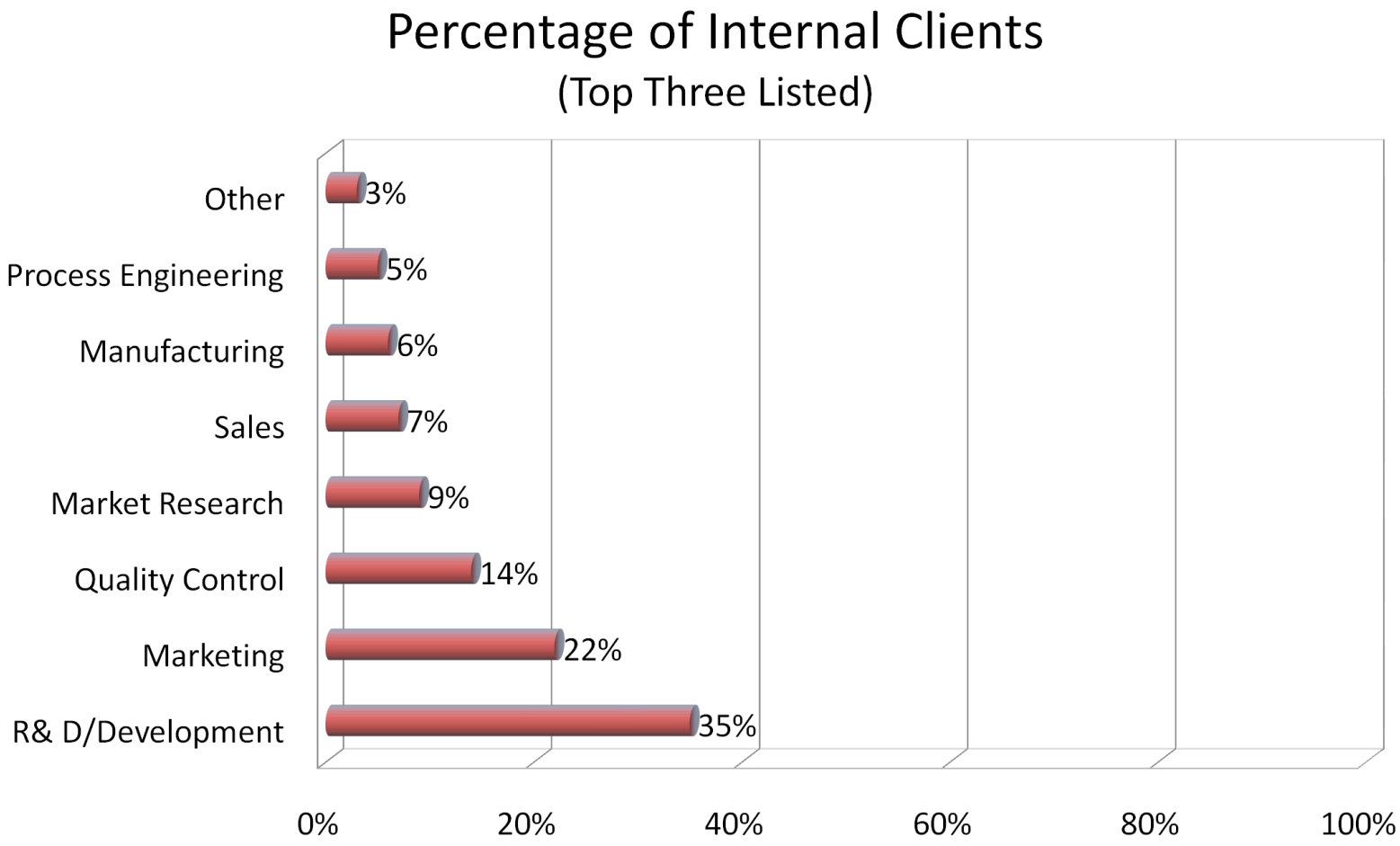
- What is the dominant function in the company?
- For what activities are resources applied?
- What soft skills are critical to success in the sensory role?
- What has the history of the company’s sensory function been?
- What matters in the sensory output: speed, volume, depth, usability, novelty… giving the “hoped for answer”?
- Sensory seen as a service function rather than a strategic function
- Conceptualization of sensory as rooted in home economics or expert judging, or an analytical service, …. or as a scientific enterprise usable for strategic purposes…as long as you give the answer the organization wants…

The Sensory function can support different internal and external clients in a company…

- R& D
  Developers, Quality
- Sales
- Marketing, Market Research
- Legal via claims and patents

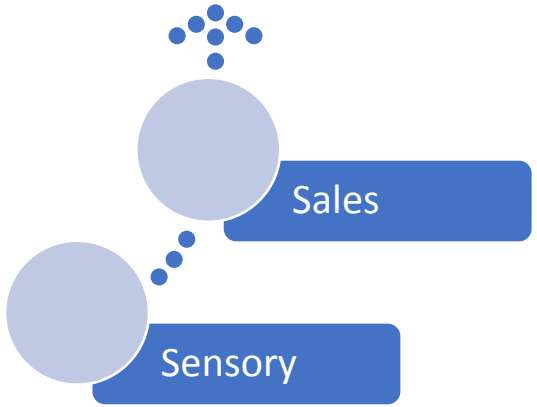
Ask where sensory outputs go and how they are used……

Who are sensory's more frequent internal clients?

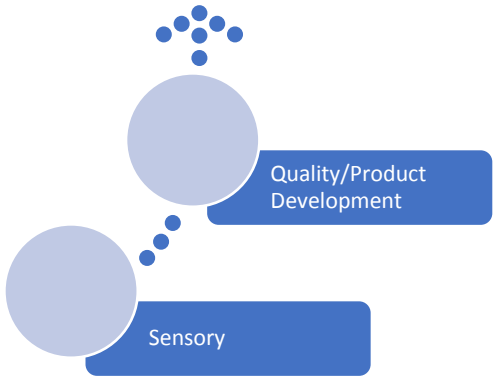


* 2009 Survey with 102 respondents

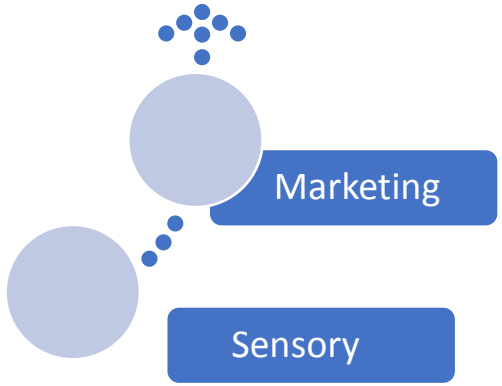
Reporting structure of sensory within a company is varied….



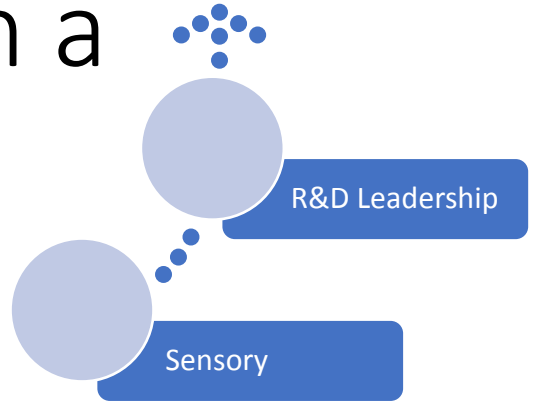
--Is Sensory presented accurately and completely?



--Focus on product
--Work with product developers
--Work with factory

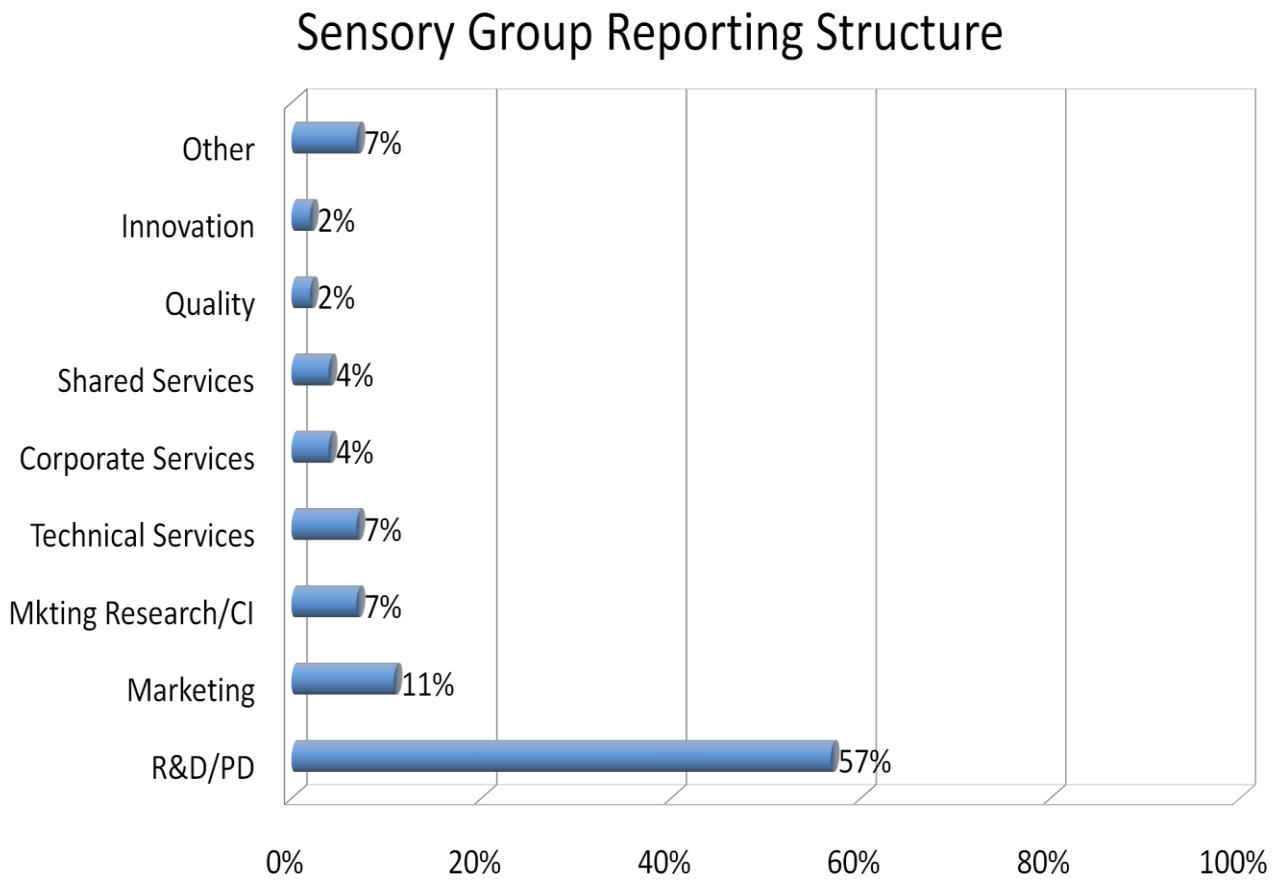


--Consumer focus
--Product gets lost



--Best option
--Access to organization's strategy and resource allocations

Who does sensory evaluation report to*?



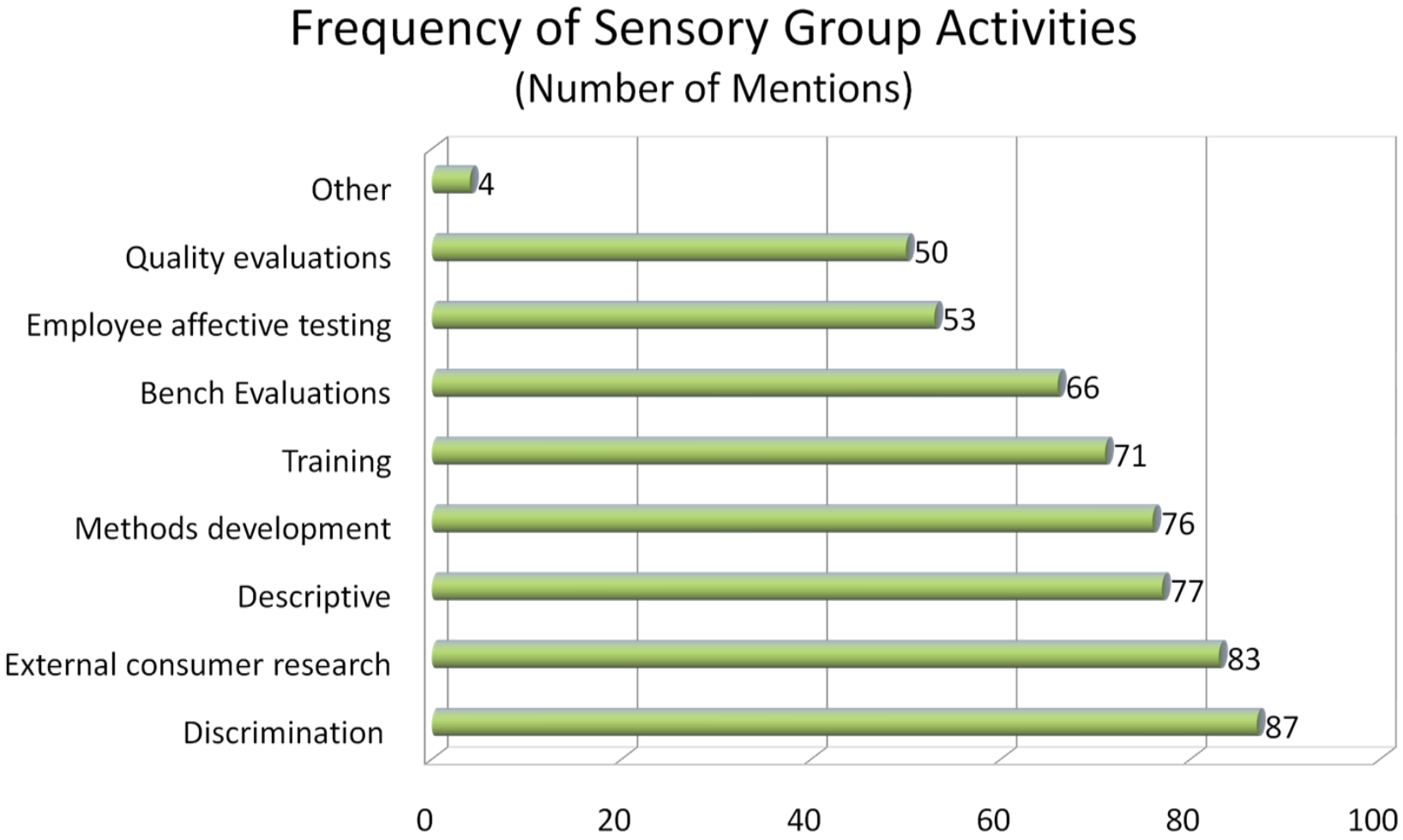
* 2009 Survey with 102 respondents

Methods used by a sensory group reveals what their focus is and what is valued in the company…



*Chart borrowed from C. Ward

What types of tests do sensory groups do most often?



* 2009 Survey with 102 respondents

First phase of a sensory career: Setting the foundation

- Acquire practice of applying testing knowledge and skills to solve company's problems and meet business needs
- Practical skills in navigating competing agendas within a company
- Learning how things get done within an industry
- Learning how to design and implement tests within resource constraints and risks and deliver value to customers
- Develop soft skills – impact and influence, risk taking, telling the story
- Connecting with external colleagues



External connections: Highly recommended and a measure of your engagement in the profession

- Standards Organizations:
  - ASTM –Non-Profit Standards writing organization E18
  - ISO – Global standards writing organization
- Industry Organizations
  - IFT-US based Food Science and Technology Organization, Sensory Organization large – 1000+ and strong
  - AChems
  - Cereal Scientists
- Professional Organizations
  - Society of Sensory Professionals
- Meetings/Conferences
  - Pangborn – Global Conference (900+)
  - ESN – European Sensory Network
  - Sense- Asia…..UK (IFOst) …France…..



Middle of your career: Is that all there is?



Mid-career in sensory



- Skill and knowledge accumulate
- Want to try new research approaches, learn new tools
- Enlarge contribution to your function and organization
- More complex, more creative, and/or more visible projects
- Contribute to external professional organizations to develop your skills, your reputation and your network
- Feel limits: resources, projects, roles, responsibilities, advancement opportunities.

Mid-Career decisions…

- Stay with company?
- Consider: Take a management role or stay on the technical track?
- Go outside of company to find a different company with more opportunities or a better fit?
- Leave industry and work as a sensory scientist in a service role, or consulting?
- Consider: Re-train and start in a new industry, examp clinical research, marketing
- How to stay engaged in the sensory role?





Last phase of a sensory career: Hang in there or go somewhere else for growth?



- Topped out in terms of advancement within a company
- Stay with sensory but go to a different company?
- Decide: Technical or management?
- Change focus, re-train, and segue into a different role: product development, clinical research, health research, statistician, human resources, marketing within an industry?
- Prepare for changing to consulting and academia
- Invest in activities outside of sensory altogether and hang on until retirement
- Leaving a career in sensory depends on emotional and financial considerations

Starting Salaries – Derived from 2017 IFT Salary Survey

- Median Salary for Food Service $92,000*
- Median Salary for Men $106,000
- Median Salary for Women $81,789
- Median Salary for Food Scientists in their 20's (M&W) $60,000
- Median Salary Highest:
  - Management $132,500
  - Purchasing $113,000
  - Education $114,179
- Median Salary Lowest
  - FR&D/Science/Technical $90,000
  - Other $80,055
  - Consulting $70,000

- Salaries of Professionals with Different Education Degrees
  - Bachelor's degree (41%) $76,795
  - Master's Degree (26%) $88,000
  - Doctorate Degree (22%) $112,250**
  - MBA $120,000

- Median with 0-1 year experience $50,000
- Median salary for Product Developer $83,000
- Median Salary for Sensory Scientist $76,000

* IFT Data from October 2017 Salary Survey, N = 2,535 out of 10,817 surveys sent.
**Salary is from 2015 data

The Summary



- Drive your own career
- Have good habits
- Ask questions
- Be realistic about what the career in sensory can bring
- Learn everything you can; never stop learning
- Monitor/track your growth and learning
- Be in tune with your values and sources of energy
- Connect externally
- Never stop challenging yourself

Join to find your tribe



- ASTM astm.org
  - $75 annual membership; $50.00 activity fee; Meets in Spring & Fall in US; outputs - standards; co-ordinates with SSP every other fall. 215 members
- IFT IFT.org
  - Annual membership - Early career: Year 1: $80; Year 2 $120; Year 3 $160; Student $450; Premier $209
  - Annual meeting in June-July; SED Division first sensory organization, about 1000+ members; Local meetings, courses and events
- Society of Sensory Professionals ssp.org
  - Annual membership $100; Student $20
  - Meetings every other year with ASTM. Local/regional meetings.
- Sensometrics
  - 25£ GBP (US $32.89) basic membership; 105£ (US $138.14) annual membership
  - Global membership; last meeting in Montevideo, Uruguay; heavily statistics
- Other Professional Organizations (only to name a few)
  - American Society of Cereal Chemists (AACC); America Oil Chemists Society(AOCS) ; American Dairy Science Association (ADSA)
- Meetings; Conferences
  - Pangborn; ESN; NIZO; Achems; UK, France, Italy……



Questions to you can ask in an interview…

- How many people in your sensory group? How has the sensory group changed since you started to manage? What are your plans for changing the group in the near future?
- What sensory contribution has the organization valued the most?
- What has been the most surprising thing that sensory has learned?
- What is the total number of tests sensory has done in the past year?
- Who are your main clients?
- What resources does sensory have? (panels, booths, database of participants…)?
- Who has the budget for sensory tests? Do you anticipate the budget to be the same next year?
- How long have people been working in the sensory group?
- How does sensory contribute to product quality? To new product development?
- What research, if any, does your group do?
- What conferences does your group go to? What meetings/organizations do your people attend/belong to?
- What external resources (consultants, field services, etc.) do you work with if there is an overload in the sensory test load.
- What is the main source of sensory's credibility?
- If there is one thing you could change about the sensory group what would it be?
- What is the most impact on the business that sensory has had?
- What is the most impact on product development that sensory has had?
- What would be the ideal sensory group/function in your estimation?

Questions an interviewer might ask you….

- Why sensory? What got you interested in sensory?
- When did you realize you wanted to pursue a career in sensory?
- Describe your formal education in sensory….what did you enjoy the most? The least?
- What practical experience in sensory have you had?
- What in this practical experience was the most valuable to you?
- What do you think the most important contribution you could make to the group?
- What are you most looking forward to in working in the company?
- If you had the ideal sensory job, what would it look like? What would you be doing?
- What is your favorite sensory method and why?
- When you have a a disagreement about an approach to solve a sensory question, how did it get worked out
- How would your best friend describe you?
- What do you consider your strengths….what do you want to work on?



Make yourself happy in a career tasting!