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Cx overview - the power of people. Those who pay you (clients) and those you pay (team). Creating a values-based culture

Values are invaluable

Your values define the practice and how it does business - they show potential clients why they should choose you to care for their beloved pet, as well as demonstrating to prospective team members why they should work for you.

Defining who you are and how you do things differently is crucial if owners and smallholders are to choose you over the competition. Aligning these values with real consumer needs is even better. Understanding your catchment area and target demographic will help you ensure that your values match those of your clients. Embedding them into everyone's job description and appraising the team against delivery of your values helps boost motivation and productivity. Living your values benefits everyone and drives footfall, which ultimately positively impacts on the bottom line.

Fundamentally your values should underpin every decision you make and every action you take, and your clients should be able to see them reflected throughout every aspect of your service and marketing. However, you can't just list five attributes that sound attractive, they have to be real and meaningful. Involve the team in creating your values - hold a workshop with everyone in attendance, facilitated by a third party agency if you want to get the most out of the process. By ensuring everyone contributes their ideas and shapes the outcome, you will define a set of values that not only reflect why your practice is special, but which everyone feels ownership for and commitment to.

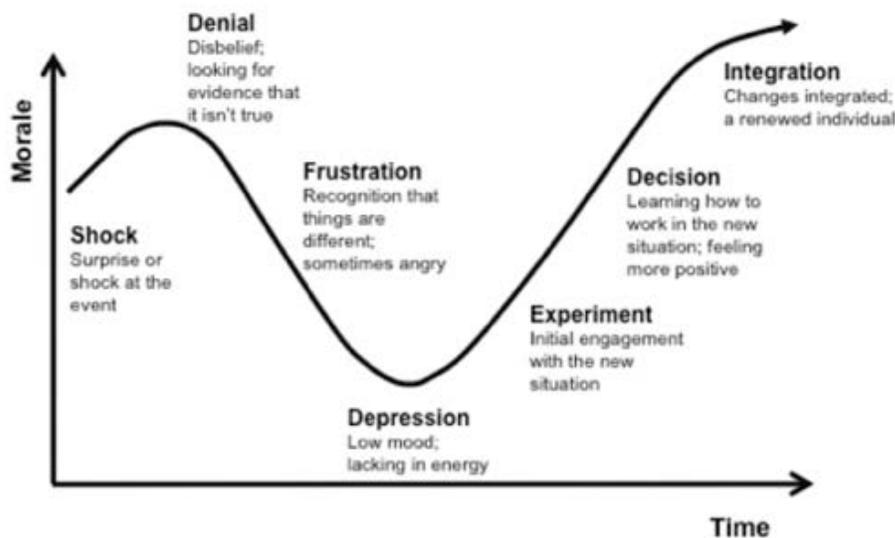
Managing change

The process of introducing values can sometimes be met with distrust or undermining behaviours. Obtaining buy-in for your vision and values from the entire team is essential if your value set is to be reflected in every conversation with every client, and at every touch point as they move through the practice. Engaging everyone, from receptionists, nurses and vets to practice managers will be key, but managing the introduction process smoothly first requires an appreciation of how people cope with change.

Change follows a predictable pattern - illustrated by the Kübler-Ross change curve, showing the main stages:

- Shock
- Denial
- Frustration / anger
- Depression / lack of energy
- Experiment - initial engagement
- Decision - feeling more positive about working in the new situation
- Integration

The Kübler-Ross change curve



Practical tools and processes to embed your values

Using 'Train Measure Manage' helps you deliver a great values-based customer experience. And consistently excellent customer care require focus and commitment:

- Train the team to the same standards to the same practice values
- Measure performance ongoing - what gets measured gets better
- Manage your team to keep motivation and performance levels high

Finding new team members with not only the clinical skills but also the communication and people skills to ensure they complement colleagues, engage with your values and prove popular with clients can be tough. Recruiting a new vet costs thousands and can take months, so it's crucial to get right - this is one key area where values are key. It's so important to recruit and develop team members who fit your practice, and with a few simple considerations you can minimise effort and optimise the chances of success:

1. Recruit people who fit with your practice ethos and share your values
2. Make your adverts eye-catching and reflect how it feels to work at your practice
3. Embed your values in the practice website, social media and all practice communications - not just as a list of words and phrases, but as real examples of the guiding principles in action
4. Focus on the non-clinical aspects of your potential colleague's skill set - the degree proves the person can do the surgery, emphasis on the softer skills such as empathy, confidence and enthusiasm are key when recruiting into a team
5. Create a comprehensive induction programme for new team members to embed them into the team and instil your values early on. Let them gain experience in every aspect of practice life and focus on the delivery of an excellent customer experience

Ultimately your values are your practice, without them you're just another business that fails to inspire loyalty and attract lifelong clients. Think of your values as a frame that supports the practice, not as a coat you lay over the top. Build from the core and your values will strengthen your team, delight your clients and really drive your practice forward.

Leadership not management

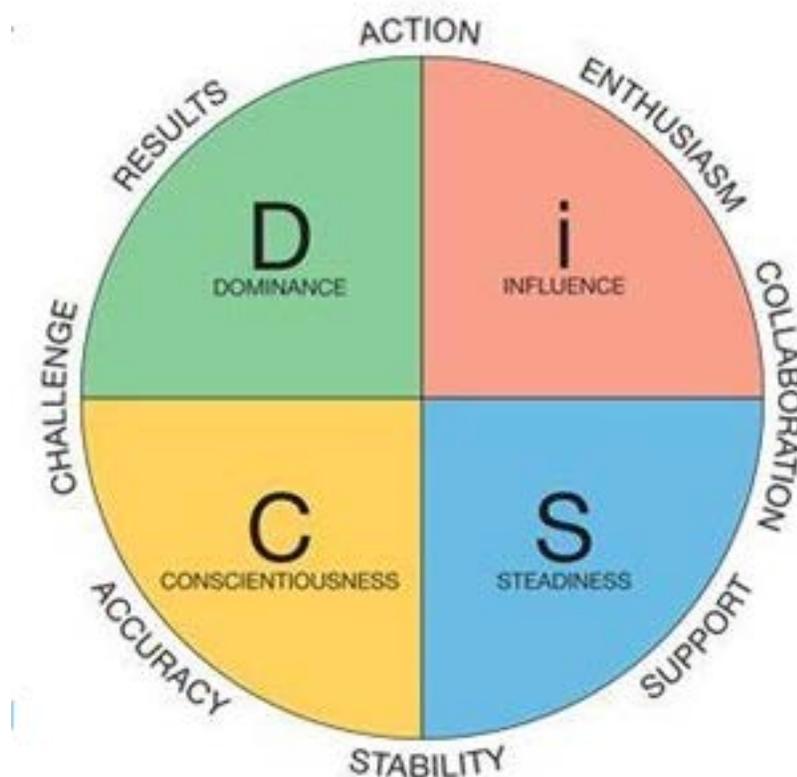
Managing people isn't the same as leading - teams deliver when they share the values of their organisation and managers, and are motivated to achieve excellence. Management style has a huge impact on business success, positively or negatively. If your team aren't delivering, it's time to take a good look at what you're doing and how it affects their productivity and passion. This session will help you get the basics of managing and leading right.

Leadership and management are crucially different, but both crucial

Managers at any practice are required to control people and / or processes in order to achieve a goal: 15% of clients signed up to the health plan, or team turnover rates down to <5% annually for example. On the other hand, 'leadership' refers to the way that you motivate and enable others to contribute towards success for the practice - influence and inspiration separate leaders from managers, not power and control. Practice values will play a significant role in defining your leadership - whether you're leading the nursing team or the entire practice, the values of the practice should guide your actions, and the needs of the client should underpin everything you say and do.

Understanding and influencing communication styles

In any team there will be different personalities and preferences; a wide range of behaviours and communication styles. Good leaders understand that they get the best out of colleagues when they flex their own communication style to complement that of the other person, and a good way to gain insight into these individual differences is by using the DiSC tool.



DiSC profiling is quick to undertake, simple to use and extremely accurate. The associated questionnaire takes just a few minutes to complete, and determines innate personality and behavioural preferences through four core areas:

- D Dominance, Challenge. D people are direct and strong-willed; assertive, to the point and just want the bottom line.
- I Influencing, Relationships. I people are engaging and great communicators; optimistic, friendly and talkative.
- S Steadiness, Consistency. S people are good listeners and great team players; steady, patient, loyal and practical.
- C Conscientiousness, Compliance. C people enjoy gathering facts and details and are always thorough, precise, sensitive and analytical.

The DiSC model finds that everyone's personality and behavioural style can be described using these four themes: you are either outgoing or reserved, and are either people or task orientated. Some people have a pure personality trait whilst many others have blends of two or more traits. Importantly, DiSC recognises that everyone is different - this isn't about putting colleagues in a box, rather about determining we are *predictably* different. Each of the four styles possesses a common set of characteristics and thus by understanding which ones shape your own preferences, as well as those of your colleagues, family and friends, you will be able to flex your style to reflect the preferences of others when it comes to:

- Strengths
- Motivators
- Fears

Practical leadership in action

Good leadership requires appropriate delegation, motivating the team by giving everyone a clear role and distinct boundaries and responsibilities. Each team member must have a job description that sets out the key aspects of the role and identifies how success will be managed. Annual appraisals should assess performance against these criteria, which should have practical elements grounded in the practice values. In an efficient practice there should be minimal overlap and no gaps between people and processes.

Managers then implement the strategies and actions that deliver the practice vision set out by the leadership team, once again using clear and consistent KPI measures and processes. Good managers enable regular communication between team members, both through formal team meetings and informal feedback loops. Good work should be openly praised, whilst any slips in performance should be discussed sensitively and always in the spirit of learning how to avoid the same mistake again. Sub-teams should also meet and communicate regularly (vets, nurses and customer care teams should all have their own regular meetings that feed into an all-practice meeting at least once a quarter).

Case study Glenbrae - measuring and improving clinicians' communication skills with ConsultTrack

In this session we'll share data from three-site Scottish practice Glenbrae Veterinary Clinic. The progressive management team are strongly focused on optimising communication between client and clinician and have seen great results after reporting and training programmes undertaken by Onswitch.

Clarity and consistency is key

In the age of Dr Google, clients are increasingly looking online for the answers to their pets' health care needs. Self-diagnosis and consulting with Internet forums and / or local paraprofessionals such as groomers, catteries, pet shops etc. are also likely to have taken place before the owner calls you or sets foot in the practice. All of which means that they are likely to be a little confused about what is best for their beloved pet. The very worst thing you can do is compound this confusion with your website giving different advice to your reception team, or your vets telling clients to just 'wait and see what happens in the next few days'. If an owner has contacted you, it's because she needs help, and the professional team at your practice should be best placed to give it. Clear advice and a consistent approach improve compliance with treatment regimes and help bond the client to the practice through a relationship of trust. Everyone in the team needs to be singing from the same price sheet!

7 Steps to better communication in the consult room

Perhaps the most important part of the client journey through your practice is their experience in the consult room - this is after all what they are paying for. Onswitch train and promote use of the 7 Steps - a simple and clear set of guidelines to help vets and nurses deliver superior consults, developed from the Calgary Cambridge model used in medical schools across the world. The model is based on the principle of building an open and trusting client / clinician relationship through a standard process - asking for information and listening to the client, collecting evidence through a physical examination, explanation of findings, recommendation and planning of next steps, followed by a decisive close:

1. Prepare yourself (make sure the room is clean and tidy, and the items you're going to need are close at hand - owners hate it when you leave the room mid-consult so read the notes and remind yourself what the patient is in for)
2. Create a rapport (introduce yourself, make eye contact, listen actively, engage in conversation and use the pet's name throughout)
3. Ask open questions (what, why, how - questions that require elaboration rather than a yes / no answer)
4. Carry out an obvious pet examination
5. Make clear recommendations (don't use phrases such as "I think..." "Perhaps we could..." and "let's wait and see...")
6. Check understanding and signpost next steps (studies show that compliance is good when owner and vet agree on the priority for the patient, but conversely it is poor when the vet does not address the owner's initial concern)
7. Book the next appointment / contact

Onswitch's monthly national ConsultTrack reporting tool measures consultation skill performance across the UK, with latest data showing a national average rating of just 38% out of

a possible 100%. It finds that step six, check the client's understanding and signpost next steps, is consistently the least-used.

Results from Glenbrae

The practice installed fixed cameras into consult rooms, notifying both the team and clients and ensuring that data captured was used confidentially and in line with UK data handling regulations. Collecting quantifiable data in this way has a number of benefits:

- Aiding personal development for the team by facilitating reflective learning
- Giving peace of mind to clinicians working alone late at night
- Providing evidence in the event of any customer complaints
- Monitoring and improving the customer journey

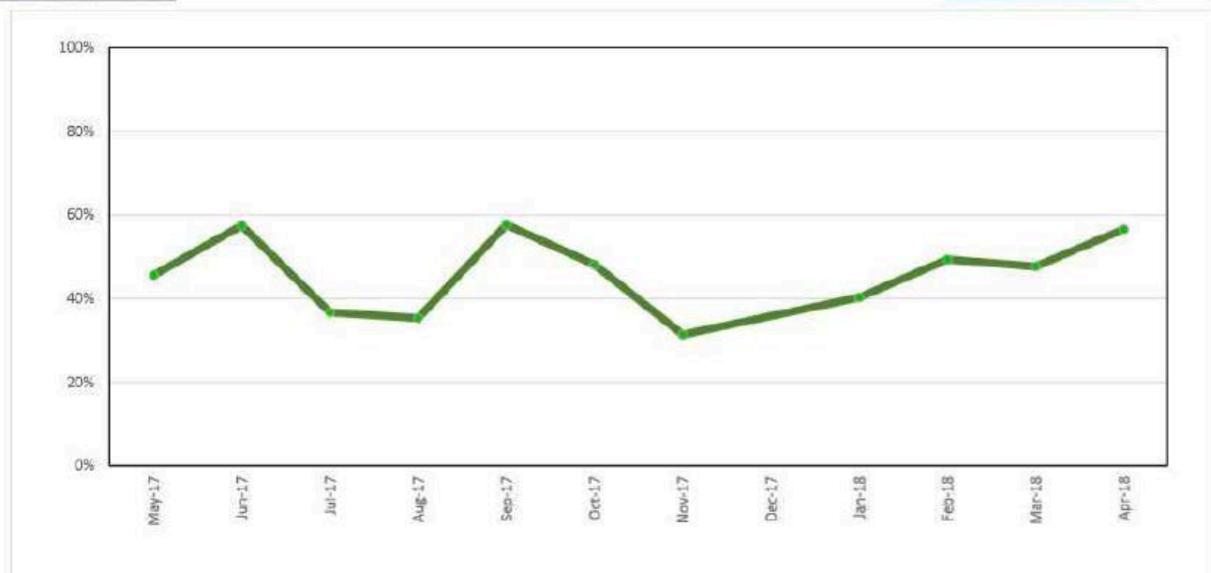
The main development areas evidenced through consult filming were as follows:

- Excessive length of consultations, especially revisits
- Clinicians talking to the computer, typing while the client talks
- Messy consult rooms
- Pre-consultation protocols not being followed
- Rooms not re-stocked by vets after use
- Little or no clear recommendations given
- Too much information, too many options provided
- Not showing clients out
- Poor communication and rapport



Glenbrae Group Overview

Apr-18



After initial apprehension from some of the team, vets and nurses now feel supported by, and supportive of, practice cameras and consult scoring. Onswitch scores data remotely each month,

providing detailed individual feedback for the team, driving improvements in the customer experience and boosting communication skills.

Common sense steps to clearer health care messages

Of course, time in the consult room is just part of the story, and the consultation must therefore be part of a seamless journey through the practice if it is to be fully effective.

Consistency and clarity can be achieved by taking simple, but effective, steps such as:

- Displaying prices clearly throughout the practice and on your website
- Ensuring new starters receive induction training in 'how we do things'
- Training the practice team together regularly in practical processes and team values
- Ensuring that everyone answers the phone using a recommended 5 Steps process to gather information efficiently and engage with the caller
- Focusing on key communication points such as the Pet Health Plan - everyone in the team should be clear how it works, what the benefits are and feel comfortable discussing it with every client
- Giving clear and detailed estimates about costs
- Explaining next steps appropriately and involve clients in making them
- Understanding the specific needs of every patient and client
- Exceeding their expectations

Case study Whitstable - successfully opening a brand new practice

In this session we'll explore the practical aspects of branding and launching a new practice, covering a wide range of topics including:

- Client communications
- The crucial role of values and ethos
- Recruiting team members that fit
- The role of social media
- Brand consistency
- Building word of mouth
- Realistic timescales
- Research and data collection
- Tools for measuring success

When husband and wife vet team Adam and Vicky Scutt decided to take the plunge and establish their own veterinary practice in Whitstable in the summer of 2016, they knew that branding would play a crucial role in raising awareness of the new practice and setting it apart from existing competitors. They also knew they needed expert help in building their brand and bringing it to life in a way that would immediately resonate with potential clients - in an area already well provided for, clients for the new business would have to be switched from their current practices and would therefore need strong reasons to do so (owners are notoriously slow to move unless they experience poor service).

Onswitch worked closely with Adam and Vicky through a series of crucial steps:

- Establish what kind of practice they wanted to create
- Undertake a detailed audit of the local demographic, mapping of competitor drive times and research with owners and local pet care businesses to establish that the pool of potential clients provided a good fit with the more premium positioning planned
- Produce mood boards and design concepts to capture the feelings / look / experience that the practice branding needed to bring to life
- Shape the practice's five core values:
 - Happiness
 - Sustainability
 - Community
 - Integrity
 - Friendliness

From here the practice ethos practically wrote itself, truly representing what Whitstable Bay Vets is about: 'We care for pets, their people and the planet'. And all of this happened before the logo was even designed!

When launching any new business, preparation and planning is key, along with a dogged focus on delivering an excellent customer experience at every client touch point. Unless you deliver a service that people actually want, and do it better than anyone else in the area, all the time, passion and money invested in your dream project will ultimately fail to deliver a successful commercial proposition. Thanks to an awareness building and client recruitment campaign that

began six months before the doors opened, Whitstable Bay Vets had paying customers on day one, and an average of 100 new clients have registered with the practice every month since.

With the opening of any new practice, there are usually three phases of activity:

1. Six months before opening.
Undertake design work, branding, values, website and social media building and local 'coming soon' communications via mail drops, local magazine editorials and banners on the building
2. 0-12 months of operation.
A sustainable practice requires 1,000 active clients for each Full Time Equivalent vet. Whilst this can take time to establish, it is crucial that within the first year there are at least 1,000 active clients on the practice books. It is vital that a new practice identifies which local competitors they will switch from, and which messages and media must be used to target them. In the UK there are two and a half times as many practices as there were in the year 2000, but roughly the same number of pets - any new practice will not simply absorb new owners, but rather must actively switch them from their current practices
3. Year two.
Activity in the second year of operation is about building the client base, adding a further 1,000 active clients to allow owners and vets to recruit permanent colleagues and limit dependence on locums to cover holidays and sickness

Typical pre-launch client communication process:

6 months before opening day

- Announcement on practice website and social media that a new site is opening
- Design and produce leaflets, posters and mail drops to be sent out three months before launch
- Ensure all brand messages and imagery is consistent across all sites
- Design and order any promotional materials: dogdanas, jute bags etc.

3 months before opening day

- Website begins taking new client registrations
- Coming soon banners outside the new building, targeting passing traffic
- Target the southern aspect of the drive time catchment area with mail drops to Key Opinion Leaders
- Facebook adverts
- Mail drops to houses in catchment area (1 in 2 households have a pet, all know someone who does. Low cost)
- Run a 'Register now and get x' campaign via social media

1 month before opening day

- Countdown banners outside the practice
- Social media countdown to launch day
- Press release to local media
- Hand out recommend-a-friend cards to all current clients when they visit

Opening day

- All team members wearing uniforms and name badges (and big smiles!)

- Hand out recommend-a-friend cards to all clients and visitors

1 month after opening day

- Communicate forthcoming practice Open Day / Fun Day via Facebook, posters and adverts / advertorials in local press
- Ask clients to leave reviews on social media and online
- Hand out recommend-a-friend cards to all clients
- Approach local media to feature the new practice

3 months after opening day

- Hold a practice Open Day / Fun Day - stalls, competitions, see behind the scenes, gift for every pet attending, bring a friend etc.
- Ask clients to leave reviews on social media and online
- Hand out recommend-a-friend cards to all clients

Lessons from Whitstable Bay Vets

The practice is built on five core values, and crucially these are evident in everything the team do - giving Whitstable Bay Vets a clear USP locally, driving client bonds and building loyalty. Vicky credits 'having an awesome team, especially the RVNs' as a key contributor to the practice's early success - indeed, the practice head nurse won 2018's Petplan Pet Health Counsellor of the Year award, selected from hundreds of entrants across the UK.

Three years in and the two-vet practice now has 3,500 active clients on its books, way ahead of the 1,000 per Full Time Equivalent vet needed for sustainable practice. The practice has grown rapidly through a clear and consistent focus on brand values and service quality - at the time of writing Google reviews show a rating of 4.9 from 82 reviews, with Facebook rating the practice 5.0 from 86 reviews.

Attracting and retaining the right people

Engaged team members are more productive and more likely to stay

Employee engagement impacts hugely on practice profitability and productivity - understanding what your team want, and delivering it, is therefore key for any practice manager or team leader.

Measuring engagement with the Gallup Q12

Gallup research has quantified the massive impact employee engagement has on attendance, productivity, profitability and accident rates. The Gallup Q12 survey is used across the world in businesses large and small - a simple questionnaire is hosted online and filled in anonymously by the team, with space for suggestions and comments. The wording and order of the twelve questions have been crafted to return the most accurate measurement of employee engagement, and ensure data is robust and comparable over time. Each of the twelve questions is answered on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree), thus capturing the nuances of personal experience and highlighting strengths and opportunities for the practice.

Employee engagement is a key metric for all businesses to measure and track. Gallup research proves that engaged individuals have:

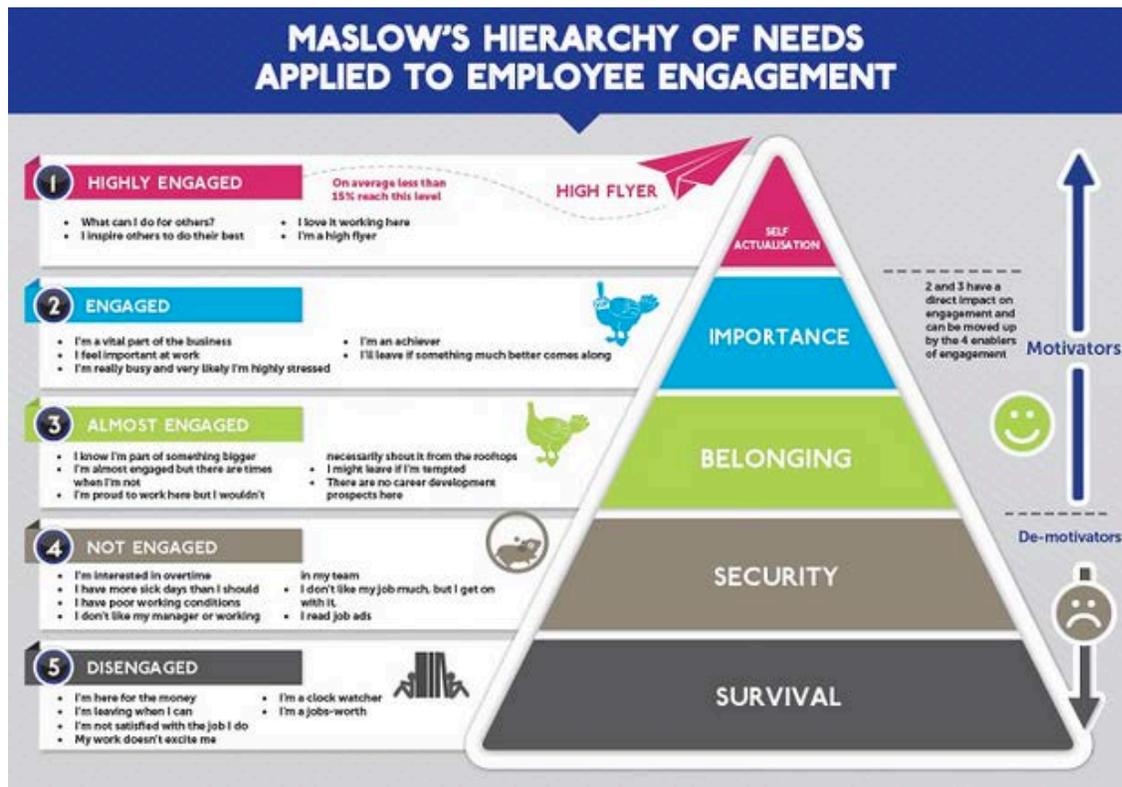
- 37% lower absenteeism
- 21% greater productivity

Engaged teams perform better too, with:

- 25% less turnover
- 22% improved profitability
- 41% fewer patient safety incidents
- 10% higher customer metrics, delivering a superior experience for clients

Engaged people are motivated by the values of the business and work together to deliver great things. However, contrary to popular belief, engagement isn't delivered through generous salaries and benefit schemes, it comes when people feel respected and listened to, when they can see that they are supported by managers and colleagues and feel inspired to push for excellence. In the veterinary sector recruitment is time consuming and costly, so it makes sound business sense to invest the required effort in keeping the good people you already have. Engaged people will also recommend your practice to their network, bringing in like-minded great people without the time, expense and effort of a full recruitment cycle.

Levels of engagement can be linked to a basic hierarchy of employee needs - having just enough personal boxes ticked results in a very low level of team belonging, with disengaged members of the practice team just barely surviving at work:



Practical steps to boost engagement

- Commit time, money and focus to developing a comprehensive induction programme, for every new member of the team. This programme should place equal importance on how to do things, not just what to do; setting out practical examples of what great customer care looks like (always use the animal's name when sending out booster reminders, for example). It should include hands-on training in optimising the customer experience both over the phone and face to face, with regular refresher sessions undertaken by the whole team.
- Find out when your busiest times of day are on the phones (it's probably Monday morning!) and put extra staff on accordingly.
- Answer the phones away from the front desk so that your customer care teams have dedicated jobs and can give their full attention to either answering calls or helping owners in the practice; not doing both at once, and consequently doing neither particularly well.
- Ensure that everyone in the team is engaged with, and motivated by, your business' vision and mission. If you don't know what makes your practice special and unique, how are your team, or your clients, supposed to? Your vision should shine through every aspect of your communications and service and underpin everything you do; brought to life in every communication with your clients by the team (remember how crucial people are to the customer experience.)
- Annual appraisals and bi-annual development reviews should be in place for every member of the team; with performance goals clearly pegged to customer care delivery and fit with the practice vision.
- Regular team meetings keep everyone informed of practice priorities and values, whilst ongoing training, both face-to-face and online (using tools such as www.cxclub.care) ensures that vets, nurses and customer care colleagues all have the skills and the confidence to market the practice effectively in every conversation with every client.

Recruitment - top ten tips

When it comes to looking for a new role, research proves that actually vets just want fair pay for fair hours. They are increasingly looking to achieve a positive work - life balance through flexible working, allowing them to accommodate other interests, hobbies and family commitments. This session will share UK and Australian research with undergraduates and newly qualified vets to help you better shape your own employment and support provision to match the changing needs of your team. The UK experience proves that if you want to build a stable, strong team, it's time to connect with future colleagues today.

Vets' expectations have changed, but practices haven't

The last major national study in the UK into veterinary recruitment, 2015's vetfutures research project, concluded that the three factors with the greatest bearing on choice of career for students and new vets are:

1. Intellectual satisfaction
2. Location
3. Supportive environment

These findings are backed up consistently by Onswitch's own research with newly qualified vets and undergraduates - they are looking for a fulfilling job with a social support network (family and friends nearby) and with enough experienced colleagues to ensure that help and encouragement are available as required.

Gallup has been measuring employee engagement for decades. Its data is very clear - building strong connections between employees and their work / colleagues delivers benefits for both parties. Creating a team-centred culture is crucial in recruiting and retaining great people, but it's not just forcing people to take turns bringing cakes in once a month, it's about building a relationship of trust.

Finding team members with not only the clinical skills but also the communication and people skills to ensure they complement colleagues and prove popular with clients is so crucial. Recruiting a new vet costs thousands and can take months, so it's vital to get right. In this session we'll look at some basic principles for recruiting and share top tips to help you minimise effort and optimise results.

1. Reply to all applicants and give feedback
2. Recruit people who fit with your practice ethos and share your values
3. Focus on the non-clinical stuff - emphasise softer skills such as empathy, confidence and enthusiasm, key when recruiting into a team
4. Use EMS placements to check out potential future colleagues and build your practice's reputation as a great place to work
5. Develop a structured New Graduate programme to support and develop recently qualified vets into competent and effective colleagues
6. Make your adverts eye-catching and reflect how it feels to work at your practice - this is what new graduates are looking for, not a list of kit. Talk about the RVN team
7. Ensure your website reflects the vibrant, supportive and unique place your practice is
8. Promote the unique and special aspects of your location

9. Create a comprehensive induction programme for all new team members that will embed them into the team and the role early on, gaining experience in every aspect of practice life and focusing on delivery of an excellent customer experience
10. Embrace recruitment apps such as GuavaVet to reduce money spent on agency fees

In the UK veterinary recruitment is increasingly taking on a more disruptive approach. At Onswitch we tell clients to encourage sixth form work experience students, offer vet student placements and graduate schemes - all great ways for practices to 'grow your own'. We know that more and more younger vets are choosing to locum, valuing the flexibility it offers. Locuming offers flexibility and new experiences, but be aware that there are some downsides for you as a locum - unfamiliarity with protocols and clients can be stressful, team support networks are lacking, colleagues may treat you with disdain as an outsider.

Tools such as the GuavaVet app match requirements to available roles very effectively. Working like a dating site, GuavaVet aligns the expectations of both vet and practice to give the best chance of success. Choosing a role that allows flexibility has never been easier - we advise vets to think about the hours they'd like to work and the sort of career they'd like to have and don't be afraid to be honest about these with prospective employers. Mismatched expectations are perhaps the biggest cause of breakdown in employer-employee relations, so both sides should aim to do all they can upfront to minimise the chances.

Quantitative research undertaken with hundreds of UK vets by Onswitch and GuavaVet in March 2017 finds that:

- Flexible working is increasingly attractive (19% of vets now work part-time)
- Locuming is now an active and attractive lifestyle choice, not the last available option that it once was
- Half of locum vets do not use an agency to find work, instead calling on a network of personal contacts and recommendations from friends and colleagues
- A third of locums work between 1 and 7 days a month with a quarter working more than 22 days a month
- The most popular advertising channel for recruiting vets and VNs is online (69.5%)
- Many practices no longer advertise due to disappointing experiences in the past - not enough quality candidates, poor response and too expensive.
- 16% of practices have spent over £5,000 on vet recruitment in the last year
- By contrast, when it comes to recruiting for RVNs, 57.8% spent below £500 on recruitment, with just 4.3% having spent over £5,000. Clearly in the UK, RVN recruitment does not enjoy the same level of financial support and focus as vet recruitment does

New Client Acquisition and Marketing Bash Halow, CVPM, LVT

Acquiring new clients is vital to your business and its value. Here are some things you can try that will introduce more people to your business.

How Many New Clients Should I Be Seeing Per Month?

Our industry measures new clients in two ways: 1) the number of new clients per DVM per month and 2) the number of new client invoices as a percent of total invoices. As a rule of thumb, I would say that if you are seeing 15 new clients per DVM per month or if 5% of your invoices are from new clients, you are running with the pack, but as one practice consultant once said, “Why strive to be average?!”

Referral Programs

Clients should know about your referral program before they refer a client, not after. Post any referral program you have on the bottom of your invoice, on your website, and on your in-house marketing material. Try sending clients that refer a gift such as a bouquet of flowers from a local florist. The gift will make a far bigger impression than a credit on the client’s account and will give visibility to another local business.

Write Original Content

During the lecture, we’ll discuss how you can get this done in the limited time you have. Broaden your mind when it comes to topics worthy of writing about. Clients tend to have tepid reactions to clinical articles on topics like heartworm disease, the value of flea protection, and so forth. Instead write stories that are of interest to pet owners living in your community. Here is a list of topics that our company has written that have garnered the most interest from online communities. See if they spark your imagination.

- Dr. Gateman contracted Lyme disease. Read his story.
- I Found A Nest of Baby Rabbits While Mowing The Lawn. This is What I Did.
- Why Does My Dog Eat Grass?
- My Pet Is Wetting the Bed. What Should I Do Now?
- I’m Afraid There’s Something Wrong With My Older Dog, But I’m Afraid Of Finding Out.
- Red-tailed Hawk Population Is Soaring In New York City
- Kill Rates At Our Local Shelter Are Down by 90%!

Target An Audience On Facebook

Use Facebook to target a specific audience within a certain distance of your business and ‘boost’ your online content to that audience. Review those that have reacted to your article and invite them to ‘like’ your practice. This will increase the number of followers you have on this platform and the reach of future messages.

Move Closer to Your Online Audience

Social media is by far the best way to grab the attention of potential clients and to keep existing ones engaged and loyal to your brand, but you have to use social media as a socializing tool, not a marketing tool. Draw Facebook fans into a dialogue about your posts. A post about the best way to pill a cat might invite readers to share their pet pilling tips or troubles. Be sure to participate in the discussion thread as a voice of support and experience. Try not to be so clinical when talking online. Think of the forum as a business casual affair.

Think New Client.

New clients are not going to type your company's URL into their browser and look for a telephone number; they are going to start with a generic search (something like vets near me, or veterinarian, town, state, zip) or type in whatever pet service or question that they have (Where can I get shots for my dog? Why is my cat sneezing so much? What to do if my dog is wetting the bed?) Your job is to build content that shows you have the solution to what clients are looking for; get that content in front of clients; and then give the client a clear action step to follow when he or she arrives at your site. In many ways, your website should be like the perfect receptionist. It should greet the client professionally and pleasantly; be knowledgeable about whatever concern the client has; and then encourage the client to make an appointment. Don't think of your site and the information you have on it as a pancake batter spreading out in a pan; think of it as a pipeline that traffics clients down a specific path, to a specific outcome like a coupon for a first time exam discount, a phone call, an email, or commentary on your latest blog post.

Mobile-friendly Sites

At some point, probably all of the attendees at this lecture will do a search on a particular topic using their smart phone. If that search results in a page that is not optimized for the phone or looks bad on a phone, the attendee will move on to the next search result. It's imperative that your site looks good and loads correctly on a phone. Approximately 50% of all your potential new clients will view your site on their phone.

Track Your Success

Get your IT person or your website developer to help you understand your website's analytics. You should regularly look at the number of hits you are getting on your site, what pages are being most often viewed, what content is generating the most interest, and whether or not people are using your call to action pages like your 'contact us' page or your query forms. Additional valuable information is your 'bounce rate', a gauge of how compelling your content and your site are to your audience. Veterinary sites typically have a higher bounce rates than retail sites because the people coming to the site generally find what they are looking for relatively quickly and move on.

Google Ads

The reported average cost of client acquisition using Google is around 70 dollars per phone call, but it's my hunch that veterinary practices are spending much more than that because marketing teams are inexperienced with this industry and because tracking efforts are spotty. In my opinion, it takes an exceptionally skilled and dedicated marketing team to make the investment in Google ads work. At this time, we are not investing in Google ads. We are relying instead on building original content and then promoting it on Facebook. We are however leaning heavily on Google Analytics to explore the success of our site and for insight into our audience as we continue to look for ways to effectively advertise on Google.

Test Your Website

It wouldn't hurt to have your IT or website person do an SEO test on your site to look for ways that it can be improved in the eyes of search engines, but take results from the test with a grain of salt. Most of these online tests are built by companies that are interested in selling website services, so they benefit from finding even the tiniest of concerns. Lean on an experienced website developer to sift through the meaning of your site's score.

Build Authority

Google is interested in offering their clients the best answers to their questions. Google believes that websites that get a lot of traffic and hold the attention of visitors (low bounce rate) are sites that must have the best content or are an 'authority' on the topic. Remember that building authority with Google, that is to say 'proving to Google that you are an authority in veterinary medicine', is the long-term purpose of all the content you write. Each time you write a post, build it with the intent of engaging the reader, getting them to explore other links on your site, and getting them to share the content, call you, reach out to you by email, or comment on the content.

Prepare Your Practice for New Arrivals

As a group, pull back and reassess your new client experience. New clients that walk in your door will be taking their first whiff of your air, their first look at your lobby, their first listen to how they are greeted and talked to, and their first time sitting in your chairs. Challenge stale paradigms like 'puppy packs'. Few people are interested in a sleepy lecture about the necessity of annual stool samples or what the letters in a DAPPV vaccine stand for. Pick one or two things you would like the new client to know about your business (ways to finance veterinary care might be helpful) and then spend the rest of the time gushing over the pet and genuinely making the client feel welcome. Move all the other information you want the client to know online, then after the client leaves the practice, send out a thank you email that includes links to the content you want them to view. Remember that all of our email boxes are bursting at the seams, so it is wise to

spend some time thinking about what this email says and what it looks like so that it sticks out.

Conclusion

In the very near future, if you are not visible online, you can kiss the prospect of new clients goodbye. Private practices are already behind the 8 ball when it comes to the capital required to hire online marketers and to run more formal, successful online marketing campaigns. Play to your strength as a local business and move into the social forums of your neighborhood. There you will stand out not just as a vet, but as a fellow citizen and friend.

Hire and Hire

Bash Halow, CVPM, LVT

If your practice manages to make it into the future it will be because you've found a way to clone your passion for helping clients and patients in your team members. Finding, hiring, training and retaining great employees are a core component of an outstanding company. In this lecture we'll explore ways to find, hire and build a remarkable healthcare team.

The Value of a Mission Statement and Job Descriptions

In essence your decision to go out on your own and start your own practice was a statement: 'I have something unique to offer. I have chosen to provide oversight to the care your pet receives because I want to ensure you quality. The outcome of your pet's health is so important to me, I want to take full responsibility for every part of the service you receive at this hospital.'

You had a vision of yourself in the future as part of something great. Make sure that you can distinctly articulate the quest you are asking team members to sign up for when they take a job at your practice. Great people want to be part of something great and want to work with others like them. The Mission is the first few words in an ongoing dialogue of the amazing things your team can and will accomplish working for you and with one another.

Job Descriptions Aren't Lists

You don't just want veterinary stuff done; you want it done in a particular way. Explore how you would like work undertaken in the job description. Taking time to think about what you want done, who will do it, how much time he or she needs to do it, what your return on investment will be for such labor, and so forth means that you write better ads, attract better people, screen better, ask better questions in the interview, and provide succinct direction. Job descriptions can frequently save you thousands of dollars in payroll. Can you guess why?

Start with Respect

I make this point with our client care team members in mind. Why is it that this most difficult job is given to those for whom we have the least regard and for whom we provide the least training? Many practice owners will participate in hiring the hospital's technician, but the client care reps, well, 'the senior front desk person handles them'. At some practices, doctors won't even bother learning the names of the folks that work the desk. Their passive dismissal of the group as a whole is what typically fuels our industry-wide front-versus-back war. We silently bless prejudice against a group that has done nothing to win our disfavor except show up to work, receive little to no training for what they do, and quake beneath an intense day of multitasking and demanding clients.

The same is true for other classes of folks that work for us: our assistants and kennel team members. Not appreciating the effort that others invest in our practice isn't so much rude as it is foolish. The difference between an appreciated versus non-appreciated staff member is discretionary effort, that extra bit of work that 'turned-on' employees provide while on the clock. It can generate tens of thousands of dollars of sales and savings annually.

Where to Look

I recently arrived at a Chipotle counter to face three young people in their late teens. Each was bright eyed, well groomed, well spoken, efficient, cheery, trained and probably minimum waged. Absent were cell phones, piercings, tattoos and apathy. Where were such gems found? Look on the Chipotle website under the 'careers' tab and you'll see. There you'll find a link to a YouTube video celebrating the day-to-day life of a young person that works at Chipotle. There you'll see young people who are part of a greater good, who have a purpose, who are confident about what they do, who enjoy one another's company.

Savvy companies understand the best place to find talented young people is *online*. Realize your job ads as YouTube videos, social media posts, and optimized blog pages. If you are not netting a whopper of a candidate to work at your business, it isn't because all fish are small, rather that you're throwing your line into the wrong part of the stream.

Write a Great Ad

Write an ad that describes the importance and value of the job that you are trying to fill. Let the prospective candidate know that you appreciate their interest in applying for the position and that you are eager to meet them. Most people want to do something cool and be singled out as good at it. Tee up that scenario with a well-written ad. When candidates send in their resume, thank them and show them how glad you are to meet someone who may soon be an extremely valuable and respected member of your team. Remember that even the candidates that don't get the job may discuss your business with others. Be mindful that this is both a job search and an exercise in public relations.

Screen Effectively

In the lecture, I'll share with you some online tools that will help you efficiently and effectively communicate to appealing candidates. These tools 'up the ante' for the more ambitious candidates and help you separate the merely good from great.

There's No Getting Around Your Responsibility to Train

If your practice is like many others, training isn't training; it's sitting next to someone who's been there longer and watching. It's pick it up as you go. It's follow along as best you can.

Effective Leadership For The Time Challenged Bash Halow, CVPM, LVT

Several factors contribute to your inability to stay on top of your workload and your life. Let's explore possible reasons why you can't seem to get ahead and what you can do to remedy things.

They Handed You a Bad Job Description

While practice managers ideally should manage, they are rarely given the chance. Most are relied upon to fix things when they break; fill in here and there when employees callout; and start, stop, and then start again side projects as the chaotic business of veterinary medicine pulls them in every direction.

Practice managers are the owner's backup plan when someone wants to cry and the owner doesn't feel like getting her shoulder wet; they're the person you ask, 'When you have time, can you please...', and the person that drags out the garden hose to water the backyard shrubbery when leaves are looking limp. Practice managers have been asked to paint the parking lines in the driveway, run to Costco to buy paper towels, and put a picture of the stray kittens online so someone will adopt them. This isn't a professional job description; it's a list for a handyman with a weird fetish for fur on his shirt.

Multitasker or Enabler?

We have a tradition of celebrating multitasking in our practices and most managers boast that multitasking is a skill of theirs, yet research clearly shows that we make more mistakes when multitasking than we do when we are able to focus and complete one job at a time. I have this theory that the reason we celebrate multitaskers is that they make our broken workflow and business model functional. Multitaskers (read managers) are the ones that continually run around our practices helping to gloss over the fact that our team isn't fully trained, our hospital not fully staffed, and part of our business model has never been figured out. If we're strapped for time, is it because we're rushing around keeping our broken business operational?

No Plan

A big reason why you have no time is because you have no plan. With no clear direction or big goals, you have no way of assigning relevancy and importance to your tasks. Sit down as a leadership team and listen to an audiobook on strategic planning and then work out a six-month list of goals for your practice. Taking a day to discuss the 'big rocks' you need to address in order to be profitable, happy, and productive is one of the most uplifting and cost effective things you can do as a leader. Leaders that take time to plan emerge with renewed energy and focus.

Office? Really?

Who else do you know that goes to an office where a cat walks across their computer keyboard and erases their last hour of work? Who else shares an office space with a washer and drier and five 10 pound bags of food that are waiting to be returned to Royal Canin? Maybe we're not the best managers of our time, but part of the problem is that our office set up isn't necessarily primed for quiet reflection.

A Minefield of Distractions

You want to know where your time goes? I'll tell you. Two hours every day goes out the window chitchatting with coworkers, and another 30 minutes gets poured into the takeout menu as it circulates through the office. Now, top that 30 minutes with another 30 while everyone tries to figure out why Dr. John didn't get his miso soup. At least 45 minutes of your day goes up in smoke when a 5 minute meeting with the owner digresses into whether you should or should not repaint the lobby; and then kiss another hour goodbye when you walk out front to get the mail, but discover that your favorite client is waiting in a lobby chair. Lastly, before you know it, it's Judy's birthday. Again. That was fast. Now you can say adios to another afternoon of your life as you step into your car and drive to the ShopRite for a cake, candles and card. You don't have a working day; you have a day filled with time-wasting detours with your real job crammed in between.

Eliminate this Chinese Water Torture of distraction by working a day from home. You'll get 3 times more work done, provided you can resist the temptation to do laundry and the dishes instead. Looking to finish the inventory? Clock out early on Friday and reschedule yourself to work on Sunday when no one is in the building. With no one around to bother you, you'll be able to focus and get the work done without interruption.

You're Depressed

Happy people like to live; they like to work; and they like to move forward. Unhappy people find it harder to start tasks, harder to complete them, and get dragged down by their joylessness. Look at your office. Is it full of clutter? Is it dirty? Are there piles of unfinished work lying around? That kind of slop isn't a sign of a busy manager; it's a billboard-sized banner that says you're stagnating and depressed. Insurance covers therapy. Try a few sessions and see if you can't be reunited with your love for life and your work.

Rethink Your To-Do List

Practice managers are best utilized as managers, not gal Fridays. In my opinion, the role of practice manager should focus on these goals:

- Grow a team that engages clients and promotes the sale of high quality veterinary medical services and products;
- Ensure even and efficient workflow throughout the practice;

- Provide team members a work environment in which they can acquire a sense of ownership and pride in their work;
- Grow revenue, reduce expenses and increase profit.

Job descriptions for managers that include things like back up the computer systems, make the schedule, or market the practice on Facebook, are ones that accumulate more and more tasks over the years and ultimately swamp the manager in a sea of undone work and despair. Challenge the tasks you are asked to do. If they are not directly tied to fundamentally important goals like service, care, revenue, growth, and team health, put them at the bottom of your pile. If today's goals aren't directly lashed to the pillars of your Mission, let them go. It's easy and cheap to find someone to go to Costco. It's equally easy to find someone who can do a schedule or to do data entry in QuickBooks. What's hard is finding someone who can mobilize a team, who can inspire employees to work their hardest, and who can create a business that truly stands out from all the rest. I appreciate that you're willing to shovel the sidewalk after it snows, but you tell me if that's the best way for you to make our practice profitable, our clients happy, and our employees fulfilled. Go ahead. Make your case.

Additional Tips

- Turn the schedule over to the staff.
- Lock the hospital cat out of your office.
- Ditto, the dog.
- Clean up the clutter. It's subliminally bogging down your mind.
- Hire a local bookkeeper, trained in accounting to do your books and help you to keep an eye on expenses. She'll pay for herself in simple financial oversight.
- Create a new rule: If team members want to talk to you, they have to write out the reason they need to talk before they enter the meeting. Writing out their concerns will help them to organize their thoughts, or better still, will help them figure things out for themselves.
- Work from home one day a week.
- Schedule yourself on the floor in the morning and in the evening. Seeing what goes on and fixing things in real time will do wonders to eliminate larger issues that later will consume your time.
- Start each day with a checklist.

Conclusion

I hear a lot of excuses in my line of work. I patiently listen, but make it clear that at the end of the day there's only one person in my practice that can see to it that I have a healthy team, great care, great service, and healthy profit: my manager. If you have yet to figure out how to spend more time doing the job I believe you should be doing, you should reach out to me for additional input at the conference. It's critical to your practice that you get out of the weeds and into your work.

Veterinary Medicine State of the Union
Bash Halow, CVPM, LVT

Consolidation, technology and an eroding middle class (Pew Research Center 2015) are reshaping the future of veterinary medicine. The animal health landscape of 2020 and beyond includes very successful, well-managed, private practices; a significant number of publicly-held and corporate practices that focus on affordability; and a dwindling, beleaguered, collection of low margin practices that have failed to plan in the face of obvious warning signs. Veterinary healthcare leaders interested in a long, lucrative and successful career should plan for change now and take a proactive position in leading their hospitals and the profession.

In this paper, we'll look at the most significant factors that will define our future marketplace; what the career of a veterinary manager will look like in such a world; and changes that practice managers can undertake now for themselves and for their practice that will ensure optimum success.

The future of veterinary medicine will be influenced by the following trends:

- Better informed, more devoted pet owners with less money than the pet owners of today
- Consolidated groups of practices, both publicly and privately owned, and an increase in low margin, bare-bones practices
- An increase in fixed and non-fixed business expenses that drives down margin and that most significantly impacts non-consolidated practices
- Increased veterinary management acumen and better leadership in general
- Credentialed technician and talent shortages
- A widening technology gap between large companies and small businesses that puts the latter at a note-worthy disadvantage

More Devoted Pet Owners with Less Money

More pet owners consider their pets to be members of their family than ever before. In a 2011 Psychology Today article *Do We Treat Dogs the Same Way As Children In Our Modern Families?* Author Stanley Coren PH.D, F.R.S.C. writes:

A new online survey by Kelton Research, involving about 1000 people, shows that the status of dogs as family members is changing. It appears that in the minds of the Americans who responded to the survey, dogs are becoming more important as family members, particularly as children. Most recognize that this represents a change in attitude since nearly 60% believe that their dogs are currently more important in their lives than were the dogs that they had during their childhood days. (Coren 2011)

According to the AVMA, 51% of pet owners allow their pets to sleep in the same bed, another 31% buy their pets holiday presents, and an overall 63% of pet owners think of their pet as family (AVMA 2012). According to a study that was conducted by the Pew

Research Center in 2010, 85% of respondents said that they considered their dog to be a part of their family and 78% considered their cat to be one (Pew Research Center 2015). Wall Street, taking note of the exploding popularity of sites like *LOLcats*, *Corgi tumblrs* and social media outlets alive with pet photos also recognizes an American populace that loves, if not adores their household companions (Or 2014).

However according to the AVMA Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook the number of pet owners taking their pet to the veterinarian decreased by 8% for dogs and 24% for cats in 2012. Between 2007 and 2012 there was a nationwide 13.5% decrease in veterinary cat visits. One reason respondents cited for not going to the veterinarian? Money (AVMA 2012).

Today's American is worth far less than they were in 2003. According to The Atlantic:

Median net worth has declined steeply in the past generation—down 85.3 percent from 1983 to 2013 for the bottom income quintile, down 63.5 percent for the second-lowest quintile, and down 25.8 percent for the third, or middle, quintile. According to research funded by the Russell Sage Foundation, the inflation-adjusted net worth of the typical household, one at the median point of wealth distribution, was \$87,992 in 2003. By 2013, it had declined to \$54,500, a 38 percent drop. And though the bursting of the housing bubble in 2008 certainly contributed to the drop, the decline for the lower quintiles began long before the recession—as early as the mid-1980s.” (The Atlantic 2016)

According to the Social Security Administration, as of 2014, 67.2 percent of wage earners had net compensation less than or equal to the \$44,569.20 raw average wage. By definition, 50 percent of wage earners had net compensation less than or equal to the median wage, which is estimated to be \$28,851.21 for 2014. In 2014, 75 percent of Americans earned \$55K a year or less (Social Security Administration 2014). To put all of that in perspective, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services draws the poverty line for a family of four at \$23,850.00 (University of Wisconsin Madison Institute for Research on Poverty n.d.)

If the American public continues to humanize pets in the future, there will be a solid demand for veterinary care, but it must be affordable to a growing population with less money than it has today.

The Opportunity in Consolidation is Dramatically Changing Our Industry

Veterinary consolidation is trending up. According to the 2013 AAHA Pulsepoints, 6.9% of respondents identified themselves as being a part of a multipractice group, three times the percentage reported in 2011 (AAHA 2014). In 2014, Summit Partner's NVA, with a run-rate earnings of 69 million dollars, was purchased by Ares Management for an estimated 920 million dollars or 13.3 times EBITDA (Or 2014) That's more than double the 4-6 times multiple seen in most sole practice sales. In March of 2016, VCA agreed to buy an 80% share in CAPNA (Companion Animal Practices of North America, a group of 56 free

standing veterinary practices) for 344 million dollars or 10.7 times a 2016-projected EBITDA (The Fly 2016).

This is significant. How does a 60-something veterinarian turn away from an offer that's double what he or she would otherwise be offered? Alternatively, how do younger veterinarians, potentially saddled with debt, but eager for a chance at ownership, compete with the prices that buying groups can and are offering? How does acquisition change a practice's culture and its management's autonomy?

Since the sale of NVA and CAPNA, Vetcor Inc. and PetVet Care Centers could be next. With only 5.5% of veterinary revenue being produced by VCA, Wall Street views consolidation of veterinary practices as a big opportunity for private equity investment (or 2014). Consolidation will likely reshape a significant part of the veterinary landscape of the future and while that's not necessarily bad, it's certainly very different from what exists today.

The Rise of On Demand Veterinary Services

In May of 2016, a congress of professionals met at the University of Michigan to discuss an alarming fact: today's recently graduated veterinarians have a 2-to-1 debt to income ratio (Williamson 2016). Some of these veterinarians, looking for ways to take control of their debt and gain autonomy over their lives, are taking a fast track into business ownership and/or independence. They're hiring a single, on-demand employee and taking their practice mobile (Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine 2014). In some cases, the veterinarians are dispatched by a central office, lowering the veterinarian's time invested in managing client load and scheduling. Central offices, or the young veterinarians themselves, leverage facile digital marketing skills to outcompete brick and mortar vets for premium online visibility. These practices' low-cut pricing structure puts additional competitive pressure on stand-alone practices.

Sites like Petcoach pay veterinarians on a case-by-case basis to answer online veterinary questions. Their aggressive marketing means that Dr. Google just added one more associate to a list of veterinary resources that will outcompete your practice for top search engine results and the next new client. It means that sole practitioners can completely eliminate the need to own a brick and mortar facilities or even the infrastructure to book appointments.

An Increase in Fixed and Non-fixed Expenses

Comparing practices in the AAHA Pulsepoints 4th and 8th editions (2006 and 2014 respectively), 25% of veterinary practices saw an increase of expense-to-gross ratio by 5.1% or greater (AAHA 2014) with decreases in surgery, sedation and anesthesia, hospitalization, euthanasia and other medical income. Additionally average transactions, active clients per veterinarian, and new client numbers were all lower than the 2011 averages (AAHA 2014). Surprisingly Pulsepoints reports that expenses for web presence,

online reputation, and digital communication and marketing account for 1 to 1.5% of a practice's annual gross revenue, roughly the same amount of money we used to spend in the old Yellow Pages days (AAHA 2016), but I can't imagine that that is true and I expect as we get better at calculating the money we're investing for visibility and marketing, including payroll hours, we'll determine that our expense in this area is much higher.

Decreases in revenue may have something to do with the increased expense-to-gross ratio. Online price shopping forces practices to lower margins on what used-to-be more profitable pharmacy and over-the-counter products. The rise of low-cost, spay-neuter clinics and other not-for-profit (and some times publicly funded!) facilities providing low cost veterinary care have impacted our service sales. Additionally, there is the aforementioned decline in veterinary visits.

It's important to point out that when one looks at overall net profit as a percent-to-gross revenue, AAHA Pulsepoints indicates that 25% of practices earned 5% more (or greater) in 2014 than they did in 2006, while 25% of all practices in the same study had a 5% decrease (or greater) in net return between 2006 and 2014. But there is also an indication that overall non-veterinarian staff per FTE veterinarian is down. If practices have reduced the size of the staff in response to the recession or if practices are swapping out hard-to-fill credentialed nurse positions for non-credentialed personnel, (Wu 2015) that could indicate that higher net returns are due to austerity (AAHA 2016).

Credentialed Technician Shortages

DoveLewis Emergency Animal Hospital, a provider of veterinary professional education (On the Floor @Dove), recently discussed their decision to include non-credentialed employees as members of their professional nursing team as a response to an acute, ongoing shortage of credentialed technicians.

“The shortage for credentialed and licensed techs is widespread and while some states have not been affected, most have been. The BIG issue – the industry is simply not retaining technicians. Their career span is a short 5 years. We lose them to other careers, commonly they go to human healthcare nursing where they can make significantly more.” (Maxwell 2016)

Anecdotally, Kenichiro Yagi, BS, RVT, VTS (ECC, SAIM), a familiar face on the speaking circuit, says he frequently hears audience members expressing concern about technician shortages. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, veterinary technicians or technologists with a 2 or 4-year degree respectively, earn a mean pay of \$15.30/hour or 32K a year. That's *at least* 10K dollars per year less than the starting pay of a registered nurse (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016).

Tech shortages mean higher payroll costs to retain credentialed staff, retention issues as valuable team members migrate to practices with better benefits and opportunities (consolidated groups), and/or increased training responsibilities for the practices as they struggle to cobble together nursing teams from non-credentialed team members.

Increased Veterinary Management Acumen

Our future's successful veterinary practices won't owe their staying power to dumb luck. Though some practices with strong leaders will fail, none will succeed that don't embrace effective, informed leadership as part of their business model. Leaders in these practices can be former client care representatives, assistants or technicians, but they won't be without a passion for leadership or a solid education in veterinary management through organizations like the VHMA.

The days of winging it are through (indeed have been for some time). Tomorrow's practice managers won't be in training wheels. They will be informed, experienced business leaders proactively responding to market pressures.

A Widening Technology Gap

Today's small business must manage an increasingly large web presence that includes online reputation management (reviews), SERP (Search Engine Rank Position) and an ongoing dialogue with clients on social media. Additionally Google, the web's most popular search engine, primarily ranks websites by original, popular content forcing businesses to regularly update their websites. I think most would agree that those online responsibilities alone are a formidable obligation, yet a new responsibility looms on the horizon: leveraging online user data.

In a NY Times article titled, Facebook Is Using You, the author states:

'Facebook made \$3.2 billion in advertising revenue last year, 85 percent of its total revenue. Yet Facebook's inventory of data and its revenue from advertising are small potatoes compared to some others. Google took in more than 10 times as much, with an estimated \$36.5 billion in advertising revenue in 2011, by analyzing what people sent over Gmail and what they searched on the Web, and then using that data to sell ads. Hundreds of other companies have also staked claims on people's online data by depositing software called cookies or other tracking mechanisms on people's computers and in their browsers. If you've mentioned anxiety in an e-mail, done a Google search for "stress" or started using an online medical diary that lets you monitor your mood, expect ads for medications and services to treat your anxiety' (Andrews 2012).

As online users, we have a profile we create, but data-aggregation companies like Google and Facebook are creating one for us based on what we search for, what we write in emails, who are online friends are, what we buy, what we search for, and literally every key stroke we make on the computer, tablet or smart device. This information is used to create the world's most effective marketing tools to be sold to the highest bidder. Not a bad world to live in... *unless* you can't be the highest bidder.

If you thought it was hard to keep up with posting on Facebook, look out. The next wave of marketing options available to you will be the most effective selling tools in the history of the world, but they will cost money and small veterinary practices, already cash-strapped and challenged for time and expertise in this area, will find it hard to both keep up and pay up.

The Practice Leader in 2020 and beyond

Scenario 1: Success

Five years from now you will be directly responsible for a practice that is consistently growing and financially healthy. You will have achieved this by reviewing the internal and external forces at work on your business and on the market and made successful, confident, proactive business decisions. You will have grown the business to keep pace with your growing talent and your increased salary demands. You will have built a vertical pathway for yourself and many members of your team.

Yes, your clients will have less money, but you will have put together some payment strategies for them that put great care within reach. After all isn't that what these people who think of their pets as 'family members' want?

Yes, you will have higher expenses, but your leadership skills will have honed a team that puts forth its best effort. Clients will pay the additional money; they'll wait the additional time; they will elude the online ads of your corporate competitors because you matter when it matters most: face-to-face, in the lobby, in the exam room, and on social media (Wu 2015). As one veterinarian recently said to me at a conference, "No one can compete with what I do for my clients in the room". You will be successful because you will have actualized your team to be a walking, talking billboard of your mission statement. Technology is all well and good, but no future, however bleak, will dethrone client connection as reigning supreme.

You'll be known in the community through your presence online, through your practice owner's (and your own!) charismatic leadership. You'll be thought about, talked about, and connected with as a *personality*, not a practice.

You'll be happy. So will your team members. In general, happy people are a magnet. Happy people in a *business* are a *business* magnet. As a leader, you'll pay attention to your workplace culture.

In a highly competitive world, the need to constantly inspire employees will change the perception of what inspires. Leaders will realize that fresh, changing environments with powerful, authentic stories on the walls is more inspiring than expensive art collections. In the future, more attention will be paid to marketing and branding internally to connect employees to the company's mission and the impact employees have on their customers. Including individual employees in the brand story and allowing them to become a part of history in the making will be

an effective employee engagement strategy. (Roby 2015)

You'll be on a constant look out for opportunity. You'll have hooks in the stream to catch the best employees, the best new clients, the best deals, the best opportunities for your team to learn. When people ask you what an entrepreneur is, you'll tell them that it's a business person that trusts their gut and takes big risks and you'll reference a few stories from your own practice and your own career as a way to expand upon that definition.

It is likely that your practice will be part of a loose union of similar practices that share proprietary management strategies and pricing information, broker buying deals, and potentially collude on exit strategies for some if not all of the members of the group. A portion, if not all, of your future practice management continuing education will come from within the group or from outside parties that structure education (and its cost) to specifically meet your group's demands. Your group will scratch the backs of preferred vendors and they'll scratch yours, but because of your group's size, your 'scratch' will cover more 'back'. The future education for you and your team will be more effective, specific to your needs, and in part bank rolled by vendors eager to do business with you and your group.

Scenario 2: Your Practice Will Have Been Purchased And You'll Come With the Package

You may be one practice in a group of a dozen or so, or part of a larger company that includes 50 or more practices. Your practice's owner may or may not have shared his intent to sell with you and on the day of the transition you may have been completely caught off guard. Don't hold a grudge against your former boss. This was his or her chance at retirement and a way to ease him or herself out of the veterinary work schedule over a few years.

Your salary was sustainable so the new owners kept you in place. Besides, the new owners wanted to make sure that the transition went smoothly and there was as little disruption to business as possible.

You may be asked to focus more closely on things like payroll and inventory costs and asked to take more aggressive measures to reduce both. In this new world, decision-making will likely be more collaborative and time consuming.

You may have easy access to hard-to-come-by resources like HR and legal advice, marketing materials, and the support of other managers of your caliber and experience level. As a part of a larger group of practices, you will attend regional or district meetings where you'll find inspiration and reaffirmation of the company's goals. Such meetings will provide you a chance to shine and grow in entirely new ways and be the first step to a larger, more influential position within the company.

Scenario 3: Fading Into the Sunset

Another scenario is that we wake up in 2020 and find you growing transparent. Waiting for the future to happen to you, then reacting to it, will put you and your company in a constant position of catch up. Choosing to focus on the day-to-day without ever proactively planning and leading towards a better future is an abdication of your real role and a PTS pathway for your practice. Choose to coast along as though it is business as usual means that both you and your practice will fade off into the sunset, will mean that hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of business value will spill through your fingers, means that you will have donated your market share to your competitors.

Scenario 4: New Horizons

There's also a chance that you will be pressured to retire or that you will work yourself out of a job. Practices of the future will be pinched between a universe of online price shopping that stymies price increases and growing expenses. Businesses are trending towards the lean in mean. In an article published in the Seattle Times, the author writes, "*A decade ago, (new businesses) in Washington (State) employed five or more people. Now, they're hiring only about three workers, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data.*" (Martinez 2014) Your future employer may love you, but they may not be able to afford you. With your tremendous experience, knowledge base, and education, a position with a larger private or corporately-owned veterinary practice may be possible, but competition for the salary that comes along with such a job is likely to be stiff, not only from within the ranks of organizations like the VHMA, but from outside our industry, as young talented MBA graduates scour the job scene for work.

Possible Career Options. Where Else If Not In A Veterinary Practice?

I know of many individuals who have graduated from private practice to gone onto veterinary business ownership, financial management, veterinary business acquisition, 'consulting', bookkeeping, website design, online support, team training, and sales for veterinary supply, communication, equipment, and pharmacy companies.

But graduating, or perhaps better put, shifting into fields adjacent to veterinary management will not be an option for everyone. If the salary for such jobs is high, it's likely that the applicant pool will be very competitive and the screening process extensive (Wolfe 2016). In America, those with advanced educational degrees earn more than Americans without advanced degrees. Older men and women without advanced degrees are more likely to be challenged to find well paying work and are more likely to withdraw from the employment pool altogether (Strause 2012). It's not entirely necessary to know what line of work you will be in five years from now should your practice management position go away, but you can still prepare for a potential new career by completing your college degree, earning a more advanced one, or finding ways to assist practices with their online presence, marketing, online security, recruiting, training and work culture needs (Uzialko 2016).

There's very good chance that you will cobble together a workweek as an on-demand laborer. Successful businesses of the future, small and large, will adopt the 'Hollywood

model' of getting work done. They'll assemble smart, expert teams around a short list of goals, and then when the work is finished, disband the group (The Economist 2015).

Businesses of the future will need to take advantage of the wealth of competitive advantages that lie in analytics, collaboration, marketing and online presence (including cyber security, cloud-based services, mobile responsiveness), but their 'lean and mean' models will look to on-demand outside resources for help in this area; a boon for the skilled manager that not only understands how to make adaptations and updates in these areas, but who can do so in the context of the specific needs of the veterinary practice.

(Uzialko 2016)

You may be part of America's vast number of sole proprietors numbering in the millions. You'll be your own boss, helping practices here there and everywhere with things like bookkeeping, financial oversight, software support, marketing, training, inventory and so forth all by way of the Internet. You'll work from home with a load of laundry turning in a nearby room or a chicken roasting in the oven for when the kids get back from soccer. You'll also be responsible for constantly looking for work, paying all of your education and business expenses out of pocket, and forced to face the same small business pressures you once had as a practice manager.

The Impact On Professional Organizations

Organizations like the AVMA, State VMAs, the American Animal Hospital Association, and the VHMA exist to bring lobbying efforts, consistency, camaraderie, and high standards to the profession. Up to this point, these organizations have been clear leaders of the industry.

However, if the future includes more consolidated groups of practices that are self-determining, with their own thoughts on standards, their own lobbying efforts, and their own tracks of continuing education pointed specifically at internal goals, do the membership demographics of professional organizations change? If consolidated groups of practices leverage their size to capture hard-to-come-by sponsorship dollars for their own purposes, does that impact how professional groups are funded? Today's professional organizations have tight budgets and are staffed with small crews. Will these organizations be able to meet the demands of their future members or will their efforts be eclipsed by the support and training that comes from within consolidated practice groups?

Will large vendors, eager to hold the attention and loyalty of their clients, develop their own manager groups, continuing education, and on-demand medical and management resources? Will there be other certificate programs for practice management, leadership and so forth that come, not from our Industry's standby organizations, but from veterinary, for-profit companies?

Problems For Corporations

It is also not inevitable that corporations, merely because they have more money and a growing portion of the market share will emerge as the winners in veterinary medicine. On April 4th, 2018, according to the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, “A group of 95 workers at VCA-San Francisco Veterinary Specialists made history by becoming the first large group of private-sector veterinary workers in America to form their own union and affiliate with the ILWU.” While unionization of our industry is likely a long way off, if in the future at all, pockets of unionized works could lower larger companies’ profit and monkey-wrench otherwise straightforward planned operating procedures.

Also, the future of technology, what it will be able to do and how it will be employed, is just as murky for corporations as it is for the private practice owner. Corporations, like private practices, will have to adjust, but the private practices, because of their size may be in a position to be more nimble and quick in their response.

The Way Forward

It’s not all Sturm and Drang. Nimble, smart, privately owned, well-managed practices will always be a part of our future veterinary landscape. Why? Because great service and genuine care will never go out of style and people who consider their pets to be family will do whatever it takes to make sure that they are well. These gifted practices have already begun to structure tomorrow’s success. Here is a list of what they are doing today.

Identity and Goals

Success begins with a clear idea of what you want to be and how you’re going to be it. Future, privately owned practices won’t be run-of-the-mill; they’ll stand out. They will exemplify great service, overt caring, and expertise. The teams of these practices will be smart, engaged and engaging. Leaders of these practices will ask one question and answer it thoughtfully, ‘What are the defining and distinguishing elements of our practice?’ This question is often explored, but too-often incompletely answered in the mission statements we have written for our businesses.

As a business owner, your job is to inspire your team members to think and act like owners. Practice owners take on ownership because they believe they have an untapped potential for care, for work, and for success. Teach your team members to think and act like owners by grabbing at the same potential that lies dormant within them and inviting it to be displayed in your work setting. Give them a picture of the future that you see and a picture of themselves living and working within it.

Don’t look into the sky for inspiration to write your Mission Statement, look at the things you and your team members do daily in your practice that fulfill you most. If you’re going to be in business in the future, you won’t be a practice, you’ll be a personality; not a cliché, but a business entity with a heart and a mind. For future practices, work won’t

be endured; it will be completed and celebrated as another step in the ongoing maintenance and creation of something amazing.

I have a theory that sports teams perform better than business teams because sports teams have a short list of clear goals and business teams have sprawling, murky, nuanced goals. What are you trying to accomplish? What are the services and products that your practice offers of which you are most proud? Which are the ones that provide the best care to your patients? Who should know about such services? How should your clients find out about them? ‘What are you trying to accomplish and how are you going to accomplish it?’ should be a question that you ask yourself and your practice team on a regular basis. Focusing on a short list of goals provides leaders a chance to hone coaching skills within narrow confines; a chance to crawl, and then walk before breaking into a full run. It brings specificity to celebration, to winning, and to achievement. A written list of goals that succeeds at moving your practice in the direction of the mission is essential to your future success and value.

Plan

Once you have a short list of clear goals, work with all members of your team to develop a written plan for how you will achieve it. Practice owners and leaders shortchange themselves when they assume that strategic planning is onerous or unnecessary. Emphatically, it is neither. A short list of what is vitally important to work towards is freeing for a taxed management staff and liberating for a team that can often feel pulled in too many directions. Use the strategic planning tools at www.halowtassava.com for more help in undertaking the straightforward and enjoyable task of planning.

Build a Team

As a child, I was scrawny and picked upon. One summer’s eve our neighborhood’s favorite dad called together a game of flag football and much to my complete delight, he not only singled me out to be on his team, but called me into a private huddle where he uploaded me on a strategy of how we were going to win. Before each scrimmage, he directed me to go to a particular place in the field where he threw the football to me and I, to my sheer amazement, caught it. Subsequent to that, I was tackled merciless, but I got up from the dirt smiling more broadly than I had in my entire life. That man had given me a chance to noticeably and successfully contribute to the efforts of a winning team.

That’s a dynamic that exists in all teams in which members work with their heart and soul and it’s one that will exist, on some level, in your successful practice of the future.

Team building is straightforward. Hire people you want to see succeed and then provide them training, individual attention, and caring oversight to help them shine. The problem is that that responsibility is time consuming, emotionally draining and sometimes a trial of one’s patience. Nonetheless, there is no way around it. Build into your plan for the future a methodology by which you accomplish the above, not by which you search for an easier, but ultimately unsuccessful, workaround.

Learn and Leverage the Online World

The online world provides small businesses an unprecedented, cheap, extremely effective way of engaging existing clients and capturing new ones (Dugas 2012), but it requires an investment of time and skill. It's very likely that leaders will have to outsource this responsibility to someone in the future, but that will not absolve them of understanding enough about how effective online marketing works to oversee the process. Future practices will have tighter budgets, so it's essential that their online marketing dollars be efficiently spent. To that end, all practice managers should hold their breath and take a plunge into learning how to build an effective online presence.

Practices should shift the way they search for new team members to best connect with affordable, young talented people almost all of who can be found online. Find ways to celebrate and highlight your team's efforts through social media. Consider buying help-wanted ad space on social media sites. Film short videos of your practice team in action as a way to inspire young people to join your force.

Clear Patient and Client Care Standards

Your team members' job isn't client education; it's client connection. Education is secondary to stopping, listening, empathetically reacting, and then making a straightforward recommendation to the client based on your standards of care. Your future practice will distinguish itself because each of your team members, in their own, individual way, will be a caring mouthpiece of your practice's expertise, organization and experience; but most importantly each member of your team will be a source of connection, an extension of the kind of relationship every practice owner wants to cultivate with his or her clients. When you train, make sure your team members know what you want them to do, but emphasize that they are to do it within the context of being present and open to client needs.

Boots on the Ground

It is said that George Washington returned from some battles with more than 17 bullet holes in his waistcoat. One of our greatest leaders in American history didn't bark out orders from his office in Mount Vernon, but mounted his horse, rode amidst the troops, and fought alongside all of his men. Get out of your manager's chair and onto your feet. There is work to be done at your desk, but the more important work is happening in the lobby, and exam, treatment, surgery and kennel rooms. Get to it.

Look in the Mirror

On some level, you're a contributing reason why your practice growth efforts stall. Insight into how you may be holding your team (and yourself) back are critical to your practice's (and your) long term success. Find a way to gain insight into who you are and why you do what you do. In all seriousness, you might try a therapist. They're trained to

help people 'see' themselves and to figure out why they do what they do. That kind of knowledge is essential if you are going to improve.

Face Facts

You may have problems as a leader, but you're not the only reason why your team's efforts stall. Many of you know of one, two or several members of your hospital that drag the entire place down. You're not crazy. Those individuals really are a wrong fit. Terminate them.

Act

Your story and the story of the business that you run is an unfinished manuscript the last page of which has today's date on it. Take up your pen and decide where this story is going to go, which characters you'll introduce and which ones you'll kill off; how you'll behave and where you'll be in this brave new world of tomorrow.

Success in the movies follows a familiar pathway: the main character loses everything; a defining moment when the same character commits to change, a montage of images showing the character's short-term triumphs, and finally the last five minutes of the film where the character lives happily ever after. Real life seems much different.

Your future success is inevitable if you stop gauging it by material accomplishments. Think of adversity and failure, not as setbacks, but as part of a path forward and upward, because, indeed, they really are. You can be the weakest person on the team and still catch the football; you can eat a mouthful of dirt and still stand and smile. Even stumbles launch you forward.

Real life is better than the movies. In real life, we have the lead role, we understand everything that the main character thinks and feels, the photography is amazing and the audio is in Sensurround. Best of all, the popcorn and soda are much, much cheaper.

Just do the part where you choose to change. Commit. Choose a path. Act. The future doesn't have to happen to you. You can happen to the future.

Workflow or Fumble and Best Hospital Management Practices in America **Bash Halow, CVPM, LVT**

In 2017, a nationwide study found a common through line of management practices in America's best human hospitals. Here's what they found worked at getting these practices to score the best marks in customer service.

Mission Statement

Practices often fail to uncover the extensive benefits of a strong mission statement because there are few clear examples in our profession of how they work to transform businesses, but managers should look to books on the success of Disney, Apple, and the Red Cross for inspiration. The best practices in America worked to keep mission statements portable and easy to remember. Single sentences were sometimes best. Examples like *Every Patient Every Time*, *Think Different*, *Take Time To Sit*, and *The Patient Comes First* are some of my favorites. The best hospitals also helped team members connect the mission to their day-to-day efforts by getting them to see how the very best of their work was a direct extension of the mission.

Defined Their Goals

Hospitals uncovered what clients appreciated most in a service experience and then specifically targeted those goals. This is what they aimed for:

- Overall satisfaction
- Clear instructions from the medical team
- Responsiveness
- Clear discharge instructions
- Follow through
- Empathy

By exploring the broad term 'great customer service' in more detail, they were able to better train team members and measure progress.

Made the Mission Portable

Hospitals that had lengthy mission statements gave team members handy catch phrases to help guide their actions throughout the day. A wonderful book on the management success of the Mayo clinic chronicles how the simple phrase 'The Patient Comes First' transformed their facility and branded it as the premiere place for care in America and the world. Even janitors at the Mayo understand that their first priority is the client, not cleaning.

Encouraged Interdisciplinary Rounds

Hospitals found that rounding increased the team's awareness of what was going on in the practice and how to work together to meet the needs of patients. Doctors, nurses, and other support team members all participated in the process improving not just care and communication, but the sense of community.

Challenged Workflow

When I worked as a tech, I loved starting rooms. I loved talking to clients, getting the patient history, and working with the doctor to best serve the client. Now as a practice advisor with hundreds of hours of experience watching veterinary teams at work, I'm convinced that tech-started-appointments are a waste of time. They almost never improve the customer experience and generally decrease our success with managing the patient's services. They also increase the risk of errors by omission and by dropped communications. More on this during the lecture.

Encouraged Interdisciplinary Collegiality

Hospitals had teams focus on care, not on rank, and subsequently increased workplace satisfaction, culture, and care.

Added Teaching Tools To Rooms

The most successful hospitals understand that clients are often overwhelmed with anxiety, illness, and/or the complexity of their own medical cases. So these hospitals included learning tools in the rooms like dry erase boards, models, and videos to help patients understand the medical treatment plan and what to expect moving forward.

Hired For The Best

Armed with more specific expectations of what they wanted from their medical team, human resource departments had more success with hiring.

Terminated Those That Didn't Fit In

Lastly, the hospitals were more resigned to terminate any team member that wasn't willing or able to live up to the businesses' high expectations.

Conclusion

Veterinary business owners frequently short change themselves on fundamental, proven management protocols because they are too busy being veterinarians to explore their merit. As the Texas A & M professor and author of the book, Management Lessons From the Mayo Clinic told me in a phone interview, "If you let my grad students come to your practice and run the place for 3 weeks, I could dramatically improve your productivity. Doctors are regularly dismissing the value of great management practices because they are too busy focusing on medicine. But you remind them," he added after a pause, "that the Mayo brothers were just like them. They started off as two doctors with one practice and a dream of being the best. The difference is that they believed in the value of business management systems to help make their vision a reality."

Let Me Go Over This Estimate With You & Managing Workflow When You're Not An Octopus

Bash Halow, CVPM, LVT

Introduction

In this lecture, we'll explore how we go over estimates with clients and learn how to convey our sympathy and concern in the context of service and price.

Many team members struggle with discussions about money because they do not believe there is parity between the service and its cost; they do not understand how the price of the service was derived; or they project their own financial situation on the client assuming that if the team member can't pay for the service, neither can the client. Some team members have been yelled at by clients who were upset about price; some have read online reviews in which the practice was called out for being 'all about money'; team member may have witnessed pet owners choosing euthanasia because they can't afford care; or watched clients leave the practice because they could not afford to return. All of this contributes to our anxiety when discussing price.

In our interest to demonstrate that we care, that we are fair, and that we are transparent, we have concocted elaborate ways of talking about money, but in so doing, we ironically end up appearing that we are *only* concerned about money. Here are some ways you can alert clients to how much something will cost without distracting from your practice's genuine concern for the patient and his or her owner.

Understand Your Practice's Pricing Strategy

Markup is not profit; margin is. If you work at a practice where the cost of a lab test has been tripled in order to determine the client price, you may be thinking that you are taking unfair advantage of a client. Not so. Here's an example. Let's say that a test costs us 3 dollars and we multiply it by 3 in order to come up with a client price of 9 dollars. Contrary to what you may be thinking, the profit margin on this test is not 200%. Profit *margin* is determined by the equation $\text{price} - \text{cost} / \text{price} = \text{margin}$. The formula for markup is $\text{price} - \text{cost} / \text{cost} = \text{markup}$. Using the above example, you can see that the markup for the lab test is $(9 - 3) / 3 = 2$ or 200%, but the *margin*, the real profit of the test, is $9 - 3 / 9 = 0.66$ or 66%. While markup makes it appear that we are earning multiples of profit on our cost, margin demonstrates that only a fraction of our revenue is profit.

'Wait', you protest, 'if your margin formula is correct, we're still making 66 cents of profit for every dollar that we earn.'

No, we're not, because out of those 66 cents, we must pay for salaries (typically 40 cents out of every dollar earned goes to staff salaries), and fixed costs (things like rent, utilities, cleaning supplies cost 20 cents for every dollar that we earn). Can you now see that of the 66 cents you earned as a business, you only get to keep 6 cents? That's hardly the formula for a practice that's ripping off its clients.

Understanding why you charge what you charge will help you enter pricing conversations with more confidence. You won't appear so uncomfortable during the discussion, and the client will more likely believe that you are being honest.

Believe In Your Value

Many practices make the mistake of enumerating every line item of the procedure as a way of showing transparency. What you ultimately end up doing is telegraphing that you are out to capture every possible client charge.

Rather than focusing on the things that you are selling, talk about the care you are providing. Discuss the cost of a catheter, not as a small, 1 ½ inch plastic tube, but as part of a collection of products and services that you are using to ensure patient safety. As one pricing expert explains, "It's easy to argue that the cost of a small plastic tube; it's more difficult to argue that tube's cost when it's part of a package that saves lives."

As a team, practice talking about estimates in terms of the service that you are providing, not the product you are selling. Don't charge an office visit; rather, sell a comprehensive physical exam because the former sounds like the price of admission, while the latter describes the true value of what it is you are doing.

Demonstrate Confidence

Don't review estimates that you don't understand. Don't sell services in which you have no faith. Selling services that you don't understand is an insult to the practice owner and leaves the practice open to error and oversight. If you question the price or the value of what you do, talk about it with your leadership team. No one at your hospital wants to be a part of something dishonest. If you have a question of value, bring it up. It will be an opportunity for you to learn or to improve a part of the practice heretofore not addressed.

When talking to owners, make eye contact, listen, keep an open body posture and take your time. The owner may be concerned about money, but they are definitely concerned about their pet. Make sure that you demonstrate a regard for each.

Watch a Pro

Every practice has one or two team members that are excellent at talking about money. Watch them in action and listen. You'll pick up some great pointers.

Prepare the Client For the Expense of Owning A Pet

The end stages of life of a pet can be mentally and physically exhausting and expensive. Nearly every pet owner will navigate these emotionally tough times. Prepare them by discussing pet insurance. Offer information on the topic on your website. Reach out to third party payment plan companies and consider allowing these companies to manage your clients' debt. In my experience, these companies do a great job at collecting money from clients and absolve you of

the time, expense, and emotional drag of collecting funds. Alert clients to future, upcoming expenses. “Mr. Halow, Rye is nearly 8 years of age. Next year, we’ll do a senior wellness panel for her to ensure she’s healthy. Here’s a handout on the topic so can learn more.”

You and your clients may both be squirming when it comes to a discussion about money, so it’s in everybody’s interest that you face this problem head on. Share your success stories during meetings so that you can learn from one another and improve. As a practice, you are eager to be as accessible and as affordable as you can be. Find ways to share that truth with your clients and remind one another of the value of what you do.

Managing Workflow When You’re Not An Octopus

Several factors contribute to your inability to stay on top of your workload. The first is your job description that I’ve come to believe is nearly impossible to do. Asking employees (especially managers) to fix things when they break; fill in here and there when employees callout; and start, stop, and then start again side projects as the chaotic business of veterinary medicine pulls them in every direction is not just unkind, it’s sort of impossible.

We have a tradition of celebrating multitasking in our practices and most team members boast that multitasking is a skill of theirs, yet research clearly shows that we make more mistakes when multitasking than we do when we are able to focus and complete one job at a time. I have this theory that the reason we celebrate multitaskers is that they make our broken workflow and business model functional. Multitaskers are the ones that continually run around our practices helping to gloss over the fact that our team isn’t fully trained, our hospital not fully staffed, and part of our business model has never been figured out. If we’re strapped for time, is it because we’re rushing around keeping our broken business operational?

No Plan

With no clear direction or big goals, you have no way of assigning relevancy and importance to your tasks. Sit down as a team and listen to an audiobook on strategic planning and then work out a six-month list of goals for your practice. Taking a day to discuss the ‘big rocks’ you need to address in order to be profitable, happy, and productive is one of the most uplifting and cost effective things you can do as a member of your team. Everyone will emerge with renewed energy and focus.

Office? Really?

Who else do you know that goes to an office where a cat walks across their computer keyboard and erases their last hour of work? Who else shares an office space with a washer and drier and five 10 pound bags of food that are waiting to be returned to Royal Canin? Maybe we’re not the best managers of our time, but part of the problem is that our office set up isn’t necessarily primed for quiet reflection.

A Minefield of Distractions

You want to know where your time goes? I'll tell you. Two hours every day goes out the window chitchatting with coworkers, and another 30 minutes gets poured into the takeout menu as it circulates through the office. Now, top that 30 minutes with another 30 while everyone tries to figure out why Dr. John didn't get his miso soup. At least 45 minutes of your day goes up in smoke when a 5 minute meeting with the owner digresses into whether you should or should not repaint the lobby; and then kiss another hour goodbye when you walk out front to get the mail, but discover that your favorite client is waiting in a lobby chair. Lastly, before you know it, it's Judy's birthday. Again. That was fast. Now you can say adios to another afternoon of your life as you step into your car and drive to the ShopRite for a cake, candles and card. You don't have a working day; you have a day filled with time-wasting detours with your real job crammed in between.

Are You Depressed?

Happy people like to live; they like to work; and they like to move forward. Unhappy people find it harder to start tasks, harder to complete them, and get dragged down by their joylessness. Look at your office. Is it full of clutter? Is it dirty? Are there piles of unfinished work lying around? These are signs of a team stretched too thin and ultimately of unhappiness. Though you may not be a manager of your practice, you can still instigate a discussion on how to improve. Take the challenge. Be an inspiration of change.

Phone Home Run

Bash Halow, CVPM, LVT

You've labored over your Facebook page, fretted over two thousand dollars you spent in pet-related community=event sponsorships, agonized over a decision to cancel your yellow page ad: most of us have a blind marketing strategy. You close your eyes, throw a marketing barb out there, and hope that you hit your mark. A substantial amount of time, money, effort and concern is invested in marketing our practice with all efforts bent towards a single end outcome: get the phone to ring.

And yet...take a second to review how much time you've spent managing how that phone should be answered, the kind of person that should answer it, and what should be said at the moment it is picked up.

Travel this country from shore to shore, step into any veterinary hospital and the set up is likely to be the same. Someone is out front answering the phone and handling the clients, and some people are in the back handling the pets. It's the same set up left over from when 'old doc Adams' was in business 40 years ago; when a cat spay was 55 bucks and a vet visit was once every so many years for a rabies vaccine. Today, veterinary medicine is incredibly sophisticated. The managing of patient records alone is a gargantuan task and yet, we have the same business plan. We hire someone with a 'bubbly' personality to sit out front and pick up the phone, while the rest of us hang out in the back waiting for the clients to come in and...someone up front to pick up the phone.

All that money invested in getting that phone to ring and we leave it to one or two, not-very-well-trained (though probably very well-intended) individuals. Then we add insult to injury by asking them to answer the phone in conjunction with these other responsibilities: personal secretary, switchboard operator, faxer, medical-records-coordinator, food-order-taker, international-health- certificate-signer-offer, greeter, teacher, accountant, cashier, rabies-tag-organizer, etc.

Effectively communicating to our clients is not impossible, in fact, it's not even hard, provided we take a moment and consider what we are trying to accomplish and have the right tools at hand to succeed.

A Great First Impression

When is the last time you called a business and the phone rang and rang? What was your perception? You weren't thinking, 'oh those poor employees, I'll bet they are really working hard'. Quite the opposite, you imagined a disorganized workplace or worse, apathetic employees who didn't care about you. Regardless if it's true, people are making immediate presumptions about who you are and the kind of business you are running if the phone rings too long. A presumption that is completely antithetical to your Mission and goals.

A Greeting that Matters

What's in a greeting? A 'this is Mary' or announcing that they have called ABC Animal

Hospital is so basic, that I would argue it's not worth paying a human to do. If that's all you want to accomplish with a phone greeting...the introduction to a switchboard... then allow a robotic switchboard operator to handle it. The first sounds of a phone call should communicate how much your practice cares. It doesn't matter if you are busy with three or four other projects, answering the phone in a rush of words 'abcanimalhospitalthisisMaryhowcanIhelpyou' is completely antithetical to your goals. Everyone on the team must be aware of this and be willing to assist with the sometimes over-whelming workload of phone calls. Prioritizing phone calls and client care is something the entire team (owners, doctors, technicians and assistants) must understand. In fact, during the first week of training, all team members should be taught to prioritize responsibilities in this order: employee safety, patient safety, and client wellbeing. In other words, provided you are not going to injury yourself, others or patients, you should look out for opportunities to directly assist clients whether they are on the phone or in the practice.

A Tone of Voice that Conveys Understanding and Concern

The people who are calling up your veterinary practice are probably a lot like you: well-intended folks who love animals. In this case, they're calling up because they would like some help in caring for those animals. They may be under some stress about the well-being of their pet or how much the services are going to cost, so they might not be as pleasant sounding as you would like them to be. Still, underneath this 'noise', their heart is as full as yours. Letting them know that you care by investing in how you sound will go a long way in defusing any negative emotionality they may be feeling on their end. Additionally, you will make your practice stick out from the roster of practices they may have decided to 'shop' before yours. I would argue that the level of customer service any of us experience on a day-to-day basis is so rudimentary that the smallest efforts you can make on your end will make your practice shine.

Showing that Your Practice's Services and Products Address the Client's Needs

How many times have I called practices, told them that my pet had diarrhea, and was provided general guidelines for what I should feed my pet over the next 24 hours? How many times have I told a client care representative or technician that I was concerned about fleas and been given a lunch-and-learn lecture on the flea life cycle? We are more than information booths at veterinary practices. Our job is to listen to clients' needs, show them that we care, and teach them how our services and products satisfy their concerns. Forget about training client care representatives how to be mini-veterinarians. Skip your interests in being non-committal about a veterinary visit. We are in the business of providing medical care. When clients call up for our services, invite them to take part of them. Period. If you are too concerned that a veterinary visit is not worth it given your belief that the problem is too small, then discuss changing your practice's fee structure with the practice owner or seek out additional education with a veterinary professional so that you understand the value of a visit. Instead of making a pact that you will turn away cases you feel are too minor to address, make a pact that you will make every veterinary visit worthwhile to your clients. No one benefits from keeping your clients at arm's length. Your practice owner has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in her quest to provide veterinary medical care, love, and concern to the animals in the community.

Now invite the community into your practice so that all of you can make good on that commitment.

Catalyze an Appointment

Ending a conversation with ‘well if you’d like to come in, it’s up to you’, underlines your own belief that the veterinary visit lacks value. People don’t make phone calls to veterinary hospitals because they have nothing better to do with their day. They call because they are concerned. Teach them that they can allay their concerns by making a veterinary office visit and that you and your team will do everything you can to make the patient comfortable, answer the client’s questions, and mitigate whatever problem is going on. Instead of fretting about what should or should not be seen, work as a group to evaluate the client and patient experience and do everything you can to improve its take-away value. Remember that all the hours you spend improving your own knowledge base, the services that the practice offers, the improvements to the facility itself, and the commitment you have all made in one another as a team, is wasted if no one gets a chance to experience it first hand.

Phone Shoppers

Veterinary team members should be trained to take control of phone shoppers; not an easy thing to do when one is on the receiving side of a series of questions like, ‘How much is an exam? How much do you charge for a rabies vaccine?’ These questions leave you feeling like you have too little conversational wiggle room.

Train team members to politely stop the caller. “I’d be happy to go over the prices with you. Before we start, can I ask your name? We’re always so happy to hear from new clients I’d like to know you, even if it is over the phone. Carol! How nice of you to call us. My name is Bash. Let’s get you the information you need. What is your pet’s name? Brewster! How nice. Is he a dog, a cat...? A cat! Nice. I have three!”

Always ask if you can follow up with the caller to see how they make out with their shopping experience.

Challenge the Status Quo:

As I said earlier, lots has changed since ‘old doc Adams’ days. Today’s veterinary offices provide as wide of a range of services as do human hospitals, yet the work systems we have in place for handling the additional volume and complexity of services remain the same: someone up front who answers the phone and two people in the back who treat the patients. Communication has changed so dramatically and increased in volume so much, that we simply must rethink the way we handle this new burden if we are going to be successful. Practices today are experimenting with Live Chat, Facebook, Twitter, texting, YouTube, Pet Portals, and email as an alternative to the telephone when communicating with clients. It is likely that these last few years of rapid changes are only the beginning of many more years to come of additional changes and increased complexity to the way we communicate. Stop putting someone out front and someone in the back because ‘that’s what you’re supposed to do’. Stop relegating the responsibility all of us have to greet, care and welcome our clients to our practice to one or two over-

taxed individuals. Sit down as a group and think about the process by which these clients in need come to us and how we tell them 'you're in good hands'. The discussion will be the first step in a journey all of you take to help these animal-loving folks feel more secure and to create a nurturing care facility for patients in need.

Common Illnesses & Injuries in Dogs and Cats

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Please note: It is ALWAYS safer to have the pet be seen by a veterinarian if the owner is concerned at all.

Vomiting/Diarrhea: If your pet is vomiting, do not allow it to eat or drink anything for 8-12 hours.

Many pets will “tank up” on water and end up vomiting more. If the vomiting or diarrhea is frequent, seek medical attention. After 10-12 hours you can offer your pet a small amount of water (1/4 cup). If your pet is able to hold that down you can offer 2tbsp of a bland diet (boiled chicken, white rice, low fat yogurt, low fat cottage cheese). After an hour you can offer another 2tbsp and a little more water. If at any point your pet continues to vomit (even before you offer food), seek medical attention. You should feed a bland diet for about 2 days (or until there are normal stools) and then SLOWLY mix back in the regular food over 2 days. Small dogs, kittens or puppies can become dehydrated quickly. Diabetics or geriatrics with other conditions are also a concern. *Any blood in the diarrhea or vomit is an EMERGENCY.*

Hit By A Car: ALWAYS an EMERGENCY. Even if your pet looks “fine”, there can be trauma to the chest or abdomen that you cannot see. Because of your pet’s adrenaline rush you may not see signs for several hours and, by then, it’s an emergency. Take your pet IMMEDIATELY to a veterinarian.

Steps if Your Pet is HBC:

- 1) Do not get bitten by your own pet
- 2) Use safety measures if getting your pet out of the road
- 3) Have someone sit with the pet if possible to minimize motion, but do not add stress to the pet (don’t bear hug pet if they won’t tolerate it)
- 4) Use large blankets as gurney if needed
- 5) Call veterinary clinic and let them know you are on your way
- 6) Drive safely to veterinary clinic

Bite Wounds: ALWAYS an EMERGENCY. No matter how little the wound looks, until the hair is clipped away and a veterinarian is able to look at it, you cannot really tell. Bite wounds become infected very quickly, particularly when made by a cat. If nothing else they are painful and the pet should be prescribed pain medications and antibiotics. Be sure to place a bandage over any bite wounds that are excessively bleeding and bring your pet in immediately. Bite wounds of particular concern are those over the chest, neck, under-belly and near any joint. Because of state laws, please bring your pet’s rabies certificate (not just the tag) with you to the clinic.

Broken Bones: ALWAYS an EMERGENCY. When a pet breaks a leg it’s not fair to keep the pet home and have it suffer until your regular veterinarian is available. If your pet is limping on the leg, it is likely not broken. Most pets with broken legs will not use the limb. However, while limping is not an emergency it can be very painful. Making your pet wait 12-24 hours for medical treatment may not be fair. If the pelvis is broken they will wobble/stagger when they try to walk, if they try to walk at all. It’s always safer to bring the pet in if they are limping or holding up a leg. Do not give any human pain medications (Tylenol, aspirin) to your pet.

Poisons/Toxins: CALL ASPCA POISON CONTROL IMMEDIATELY: 888-426-4435 or another animal poison control center. There is a \$65 fee. Most veterinarians will end up having to call the poison

center and charge you the fee anyways, so call ahead of time. The ASPCA will be able to tell you if what your pet ingested is toxic, how to make your pet vomit and whether you need to see a veterinarian or not.

Bloat/Gastric Dilatation Volvulus: Occurs in large/deep chested dog. The stomach twists and starts to “bloat”. Signs include: trying to vomit, gagging up white foam, restless, won’t lie down, panting, pacing, groaning in pain, distended abdomen. This is an EMERGENCY and you need to bring in your dog ASAP!

Urethral Obstruction: Occurs mainly in male cats where the urethra becomes obstructed with crystals or other debris. The male cat is unable to urinate. Urethral obstructions can occur in other animals as well, so it’s important to always watch your pets when they eliminate. Signs include: Vomiting, frequent squatting in an attempt to urinate, crying in pain (yowling in cats), tense/painful abdomen, refusal to eat. Owners often mistake urinary obstruction as constipation. This is an EMERGENCY and you need to bring in your pet ASAP!

Thrombus Cat (clot cat): Occurs mostly in cats, usually those with a history of heart disease or heart murmurs. A blood clot becomes formed and lodges in various parts of the body (typically cutting off blood supply to the lower limbs). Signs include: inability to walk, crying/screaming in pain, “floppy” legs, cold feet, breathing difficulties. This is an EMERGENCY.

Near Drowning: Occurs in both dogs and cat usually around pools. If you witness an animal that ends up submerged, even for a short time, it is important you take the pet to a veterinarian IMMEDIATELY. Signs may not be seen for several hours and the concern is that the animal could have swallowed water into their lungs. Signs include: coughing, nasal discharge, vomiting, breathing difficulties.

Heat Stroke/Hypothermia: Heat stroke mainly occurs in dogs, but can be seen cats also. Hypothermia can occur in both animals. Both are an EMERGENCY. Attempt to cool down (spray the animal down with cool water), or warm up (blankets/towels) until you’re able to get to an emergency clinic. Do not use ice or very cold water. Bringing down the pet’s temperature too quickly can cause worse effects than being overheated.

Seizures: Seizures can be a scary thing to see for the first time. If it is your pet’s first seizure you should always bring them into a veterinary clinic immediately. It is imperative you protect yourself. Some pets may become highly aggressive during or after the seizure. They may not know who you are. Be sure to toss a blanket over your pet’s head before picking them up to transport them. This will help protect you from being bitten. Most seizures last a short time...under one minute. If your pet is actively seizing for more than 2 minutes there becomes concern that your pet may suffer brain damage by overheating itself. Be sure your pet is in a safe location when it seizes. Move it off of furniture or away from stairs. Do not worry about it swallowing its tongue as this does not occur in pets. Seizures can happen for a variety of reasons. Most commonly it is from either idiopathic epilepsy, toxins or a neurological issues (brain tumor). Cats rarely have seizures. Middle age dogs, between 2-6 years of age, are prone to epilepsy particularly certain breeds like beagle and labs.

Ocular Injuries: Eyes are important. While it may just be a minor eye infection unless you have the ability to diagnose such an infection it is always better to be safe than sorry and get your pet in to see a veterinarian right away. Pets do not understand that scratching at their eye can cause worse problems, like a scratch to the cornea. Even a mild eye infection may cause the pet discomfort which may result in self mutilation. Eye problems can quickly spiral out of control, so any problem with the eyes should be addressed immediately.

Vestibular Disease (old dog vestibular/rolling dog): The vestibular system lies within the inner ear. Anything from a tumor, ear infection or an idiopathic syndrome (meaning no known cause) can cause it to become unbalanced. Usually older dogs are affected. Signs are usually described as a head tilt, staggering to walk or a complete collapse. When the owners look at the eyes they generally notice the eyes bouncing quickly from side to side. This is called nystagmus. Owners often describe that it looks like their dog suffered a stroke. While not all the causes are emergencies per se, it is very difficult for the average owner to determine if it is truly a vestibular issues versus a more serious neurological issue. It is always best to have your pet seen right away.

Ear Infections: Rarely are ear infections an emergency, but they certainly are uncomfortable. In 'worse case scenarios' the ear drum can rupture leaving the pet deaf. This is why it is important to look inside your pet's ear a once a week to ensure that no discharge or foul odor is present. Some owners describe their dog as keeping them up in the middle of the night shaking his head. While it is perhaps not an emergency, it is obviously uncomfortable and should be addressed that evening (ideally), but no later than the morning. Sometimes pets can shake their heads so violently that they break the blood vessels that live in the flap of the ear. The ear flap itself will fill up with blood and become swollen and painful. To avoid this from occurring to the pet it is always best to have even the most minor ear infection dealt with immediately.

Anal Sac Infections: Both dogs and cats have anal sacs. The anal sacs are two tiny sacs that live just inside the rectum at 4:00 and 8:00. When the pet defecates the anal sacs are expressed. Sometimes, for unknown reasons, they are not always expressed during defecation. Pets will try to scoot across the carpet in an effort to release them. If they remain unexpressed the anal sacs can become impacted and infected. This causes great discomfort to the pet. Generally they may cry at their rectum, cry when trying to defecate and sit down a lot. If left to go on for too long the anal sacs will form infectious material and eventually rupture causing severe pain and infection to the pet. If you notice any redness or swelling around the rectum it is always best to have it looked at immediately before it gets to be a massive infection and/or ruptured anal sac. If your pet is scooting excessively but no redness or swelling is noted you can get them seen generally within 24 hours for a manual expression (a groomer or veterinarian can do this for you). If you are not sure it is best to have your pet seen right away.

Dental Disease/Mouth Tumors: Dogs and cats of any age can have dental disease, broken teeth or tumors (both cancerous and benign) of the mouth. While most of these are not emergencies they can be uncomfortable. It is important to check your pet's mouth ideally once a month and look at the teeth and the gums. If you notice a lot of tarter, a protruding mass or broken teeth it's best to get them in to see a veterinarian sooner than later. Certainly any excessive drooling or not wanting to eat should be addressed sooner.

Allergic Reactions: Any pet can suffer an allergic reaction to a variety of chemicals, insects, dust, etc. Most animals will start off by appearing very itchy. The pets face may start to swell and hives may be noted on the body and legs of the pet. The pet may pant, rub their face on the ground, appear agitated, not settle down or vomit. Facial swelling can get so bad the pet may not be able to see. While some veterinarians will just have the owner try giving diphenhydramine, that is not always the safest thing to do. There are a handful of pets who will become agitated on diphenhydramine. While most allergic reactions can be handled with diphenhydramine, there is a small percent that will develop life threatening anaphylaxis reactions. Signs of anaphylaxis reactions include changes in heart rate, respiratory rate, breathing problems, shock, seizure, coma, death. This is why it is recommended that all allergic reactions be seen by a veterinarian immediately. While not all

allergic reactions are life threatening, they certainly are uncomfortable. A veterinarian is able to provide faster treatment with other types of medications than just home treatment alone.

Failure of the Organs: There are a myriad of diseases that can cause the organs to fail within the body. Most commonly we see organ failure in older pets and most commonly we see heart failure (dogs and cats), kidney failure (more common in cats) and liver failure (dogs and cats). As your pet gets older it is important to really ensure that they are eating the same amount, not drinking too much, not urinating too much and that their bowel movements are normal. Any change in your pet's behavior may indicate a problem. When we think about organ failure the most common signs are as follows:

HEART FAILURE: Increase respiratory effort, coughing, lethargy, not wanting to eat

KIDNEY FAILURE: Increase in drinking water and urinating more, not wanting to eat, vomiting, lethargy

LIVER FAILURE: Not wanting to eating, jaundice, vomiting, lethargy

While not all of these are emergencies they should be addressed in a timely manner particularly if your pet is older. Certainly any acute onsets of collapse, massive vomiting or breathing issues are considered emergencies.

Cancer: Cancer is the number one killer of dogs, but also affects cats in high numbers as well. Most cancers are not emergencies. They are usually slow growing tumors that cause the pet to slow down until some subtle signs are noticed (lethargy, not wanting to eat as much, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing). As your pet gets older it is important to address any changes in behavior or any signs of illness in a timely fashion. Older pets can get benign tumors that grow on the skin (more common in dogs than in cats). It is important that these tumors are looked at by a veterinarian to ensure they are not cancerous. While it is a shock to find out your pet has cancer there are many options for treatment of cancer in pets today. There are some types of cancer that can cause life-threatening emergencies (hemangiosarcoma most commonly). A cancer emergency would usually present in the form of acute collapse, bleeding from the nose/mouth or respiratory problems.

Triage for Front Office Staff: How to Handle the Surprise Visit

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TELEPHONE TRIAGE

The initial triage may actually occur over the phone. Because the veterinary personal cannot rely on their sense of touch, sight and feel of the patient, employees that are tasked to handle telephone calls should have strong clinical knowledge, excellent listening and communicating skills and a sense of intuition. A telephone triage log of the calls should be kept. Because it is a legal document the log should be stored for several years depending on the state laws. Remember that the recommendations you offer to the client can have legal ramifications and it is important that you document the conversation to protect both yourself and the clinic.

Each employee should ask the same initial questions of each client that calls in for non-routine appointments in order to ensure that each call is handled in a thorough manner. After the initial information is gathered the questions may vary depending on what the presenting complaint is.

Each clinic may have a different policy on what advice can or cannot be given over the phone. No matter what the clinic's policy is, all owners should be instructed to come in with their pet no matter how insignificant the problem may appear. Because of owner error in interpreting their pet's condition, it is impossible to appropriately triage an animal over the phone. For example, owners frequently cannot tell if their pet is seizing versus trembling out of fear. The safest suggestion is to always advise the owner to bring the pet into a veterinary hospital immediately. For legal purposes, it is important that the telephone triage log reflect this recommendation with each phone call. Any medical treatments suggested to clients over the phone must be documented in full in the telephone log.

Once you have suggested to the client that they bring in their pet for a medical treatment you should provide the owner with information about how to safely transport their pet to the clinic. This may include placing pressure on a bleeding wound, putting a quick bandage on a bleeding area, keeping the animal immobile or instructing the owner how to make a muzzle at home to ensure they are kept safe. Telephone triage is also important because it allows the medical team to prepare for the arrival of the patient at the hospital. Intravenous fluids, catheters, oxygen and crash cart supplies can be readied prior to the patient's arrival.

PRIMARY ASSESSMENT

The primary assessment will determine if the animal is a true emergency and needs immediate treatment or if it is stable enough to wait. The primary assessment should ideally begin with the triage interview where you obtain information on why the owner brought the pet in.

There may be a couple of circumstances that would prevent you from performing a triage interview. Treatment should be initiated on any pet that requires immediate resuscitative status. Examples of this would be cardiac arrest, active seizures, severe blunt trauma, anaphylaxis, uncontrolled hemorrhage and severe head trauma. Owners of these pets should be informed in a clear concise manner of WHY, WHAT and HOW MUCH.

Unless your patient is in need of resuscitative measures immediately you will have ample time to conduct the triage interview and initial assessment on the pet. Assessing all systems should be done in a clear conscious manner. The technique you develop for performing the primary assessment on your patient should be the same technique you use for each patient. While it is often "easier" to simply jump right to the area of complaint (like a broken leg) you cannot forget to perform a full physical exam on each patient. Each full physical exam should only take under five minutes and should focus on R.A.P: Respiration, Alertness and Perfusion. When you have completed the physical exam you will have a better idea of how critical the patient is and whether you need to start immediate treatment or whether

your patient is able to wait and, if so, for how long. If you have done your physical exam appropriately you will have assess the three major systems: cardiovascular, respiratory and central nervous systems.

Respiratory

Any change in an animal's breathing is an emergency. Owners often mistake labored breathing as "panting" or shallow breathing as "sniffing." When performing a physical exam it is important to step back and simply look at how the patient is breathing. Your sight will be one of the most important tool at determining if the patient is having difficulty breathing or not. If there is any question on the degree of respiratory dysfunction the patient should be given oxygen supplementation until treatment and diagnostics can begin.

Mucous membrane color is also an important tool in determining respiratory function. Though not completely accurate (because lighting, anemia or icterus hides the appearance of cyanotic membranes) any presence of cyanosis issue which needs to be addressed immediately.

A pulse oximetry machine measures the oxygen saturation of hemoglobin, which is a very insensitive measure of oxygenation. Normally animals should have a range from 98-100% on room air. The drawback to a pulse oximetry machine is that, at times, it is not very accurate. Patient movement, poor perfusion, hair, or any color other than pink mucous membranes (icterus, cyanosis, anemia) can cause the reading to be inaccurate. However, the pulse oximetry machine continues to be a fairly quick and easy test to use to determine overall oxygenation.

Alertness

Upon initial presentation the level of consciousness (LOC) should be assessed.

Alert:	Normal behavior and is responsive
Depressed:	Awake but subdued. Uninterested in environment
Delirious:	Awake but altered perception. Responds inappropriately to stimulus
Stuporous:	Remains in sleep state. Only aroused by strong stimulus
Comatose:	Deep unconsciousness. Unable to rouse despite stimulus

An animal may be conscious, but have abnormal mentation such as slow or inappropriate response to stimuli. Any patient that has a declining LOC is an emergency and the overall prognosis of the patient worsens. Because a normal healthy animal is usually anxious at a veterinary clinic, any level of depression or any animal that is very quiet should be concerning and may indicate an emergency.

Perfusion

The most common conditions that can cause a change in cardiovascular status are hypovolemia, anemia, sepsis or cardiac dysfunction. Mucous membrane color may be altered from a normal healthy pink to a muddy, grey or pale color. Any change in mm color is a life-threatening emergency. Capillary refill time should always be under 2 seconds. During cardiovascular collapse you may see an increase to 3 seconds or greater.

Heart rate may be either increased or decreased. Pulse strength may be either bounding or weak. Both the heart rate and pulse rate may be irregular or nonsynchronous. One of the key indicators in the early stage of shock is an elevated heart rate. Some patients may have an elevated heart rate because of excitement, but the overall patient must be assessed. There are numerous potential heart arrhythmias and while some may be not life-threatening, until the patient receives a full cardiac workup all arrhythmias should be considered life threatening. If during the physical exam a heart arrhythmia is auscultated, the patient should have a electrocardiogram (ECG) performed.

UNIQUE TRIAGES

Reproductive Emergencies

Certainly the female herself may be stable, but there could be a reproductive emergency that jeopardizes the health of the unborn neonates. When a reproductive emergency arrives at the clinic,

ideally all puppies/kittens that had already been born are brought to the clinic as well. This way they can be given right back to the mother to nurse when she is finally done delivering. Upon arrival the neonates that have already been born should be removed from the mother and kept in a warm, clean area. This way the focus can be given only to the mother.

Ocular Emergencies

There are four true ocular emergencies: acute blindness, acute red or cloudy eye, acute painful eye and anything dangling from the eye. As a rule of thumb, if an owner calls with concern regarding their pet's eye it is best to have them come in to assess whether it is truly an emergency. Upon arrival at the clinic, the pet should be triaged in a similar manner to all other pets. However, depending on the nature of the eye problem the pet may need immediate treatment. If there is any wait for the pet to be seen it is imperative that the owner be given an Elizabethan collar so that the pet does not cause further injury to the eye. Often times pets will paw or rub at the injured/diseased eye. Preventing further injury is imperative.

Neurological Emergencies

Neurological emergencies require rapid assessment and quick treatment in order for the best prognosis to occur. The three most common neurological emergencies are: acute spinal cord injury, acute brain injury and tick paralysis (seen mainly in Australia). Other neurological emergencies include all types of seizures.

If a neurological injury is suspected you should advise the owner to minimize the pet's motion and come to the clinic as soon as possible. After your full physical exam you will want to perform a brief neurological exam. This should start with the pet's level of consciousness. Any change in their LOC is an emergency that needs immediate attention. You should pay particular attention to the pet's eyes and whether the pupils are the same size, have normal reaction to light and that they do not have nystagmus or anisocoria.

When standing you should check for conscious proprioception deficits (CP). You should also check for deep pain with hemostats. The pet should immediately withdraw their foot even with the slightest pressure. If the pet is delayed in responding or does not pull back at all there is a neurological deficit.

While acute brain injury cases may be easier to label as an "emergency", acute spinal cord injuries may not. Owners may arrive with these pets being carried and describe the injury as "must have hurt his foot". A good triage nurse will remove the pet from the owner's arms and fully assess the pet for themselves. As a rule, any animal that shows any neurological deficit should have immediate treatment initiated. It is well documented that the prognosis of the neurological pet decreases dramatically the longer the pet had to wait before treatment.

Neonates

Neonates are very delicate. Approximately 11-34% of kittens and puppies will die within the first 12 weeks of their life. When a client calls with a medical emergency involving a neonate it is important that instruction be given to the client on how to appropriately transport the neonate to the hospital. Ideally the sick neonate should be brought in separately. This is to minimize the risk of disease transmission and stress to the rest of the litter.

It is imperative that anyone transporting a neonate be instructed on how to keep them warm during transport through the use of hot water bottles and warm blankets. Thermoregulation is a severe problem in the neonate. Upon entering the hospital the neonate should be immediately addressed and placed into a warm environment. The owner should not be expected to be responsible for warming the neonate once in the hospital. A normal neonatal temperature is between 98-100°F.

Exotics

Birds, ferrets, rabbits, chinchillas, reptiles, etc should be brought in immediately if they are lethargic, not eating or having non-normal stool. Exotics, in general, show little to no signs of illness until they were very sick. Birds that are not perching, fluffed for extended period of time, lack of droppings, blood in the droppings, breathing heavy or “sneezing” excessively are considered an emergency. Certainly if there is trauma or loss of blood of any amount the bird should also be brought right in. Birds do not have a lot of blood to lose so immediate attention is required should blood be seen. A healthy bird should be perched, alert, moving and not fluffed for more than a minute. Birds frequently eat and groom themselves throughout the day. Stool should be semi-formed and in a ball or squiggle and can be many different colors depending on the dye in the food (red, green, purple). Generally the stool is grey/black. Urates are always white in color.

Ferrets should be triaged in a similar manner to dogs and cats. You should look at the eyes, check the mucous membrane color, listen to the heart and lungs, feel femoral pulses and take a temperature. Tenting the skin to check for dehydration is important.

Rabbits, guinea pigs and chinchillas are all prey species and can die from the stress of being handled. All three are normally alert and active. They constantly eat and should defecate small moist, but solid fecal pellets. An owner should be told to bring in their pet if it has shown even a decrease in eating for half a day or if they are noticing less fecal pellets. Owners should also bring in their pet if the fecal pellets become watery or become too small and dry. Fecal pellets indicate a lot about the overall health of the pet.

With the exception of the rat, rodents should never be removed from their cages since a loose rodent can easily escape and never be found again. If they must be removed from their cages they should be handled in a small enclosed exam room to avoid escape. Most will bite when scared or painful so handling them with a small towel or protector gloves is helpful. Triage should start with just observation. A full physical should be done, but likely with smaller rodents it will be impossible to obtain a temperature. Hair coat and body condition will tell a lot about the animal’s health. All rodents are active and alert. Stools should be moist, formed pellets. Fecal health is a good indicator to the overall health of the rodent.

Generally there are very few reptile emergencies unless it is related to trauma. However, owners may feel it is an emergency because they just noticed the signs of a chronic disease that has been occurring for awhile. When a reptile is transported without a heat source they can quickly become cold. Certain diseases may cause them to become lethargic hindering their ability to find appropriate heat sources. This is why when a reptile presents to a clinic it should likely be given a heat source immediately upon arrival. The heat should ideally be in the center of the cage so the reptile can move away from it if they do not want it. Since most veterinary facilities are ill-equipped to deal with the long term care of reptiles it is best if the patient is stabilized and transported to an appropriate facility when possible.

COMMON DISEASES/INJURIES

Vomiting/Diarrhea: Small dogs, kittens or puppies can become dehydrated quickly. Diabetics or geriatrics with other conditions are also a concern. Any blood in the diarrhea or vomit is an EMERGENCY. If the pet is vomiting, do not allow it to eat or drink anything for 8-12 hours. Many pets will “tank up” on water and end up vomiting more. If the vomiting or diarrhea is frequent, owners should seek medical attention.

Hit By A Car: ALWAYS an EMERGENCY. Even if the pet looks “fine”, there can be trauma to the chest or abdomen that you cannot see. Because of the pet’s adrenaline rush owners may not see signs for several hours and, by then, it’s an emergency. Owners should be instructed to IMMEDIATELY drive to a veterinary hospital.

Owners should be informed to: 1) Not get bitten by their pet 2) Use safety measures if getting your pet out of the road 3) Have someone sit with the pet if possible to minimize motion, but do not add stress to the pet
4) Use large blankets as gurney if needed

Bite Wounds: ALWAYS an EMERGENCY. Until the hair is clipped away and a veterinarian is able to look at it, it is not possible to tell how extensive the wounds are. Bite wounds become infected very quickly, particularly when made by a cat. If nothing else they are painful and the pet should be prescribed pain medications and antibiotics. Bite wounds of particular concern are those over the chest, neck, under-belly and near any joint. Because of state laws, please bring your pet's rabies certificate (not just the tag) with you to the clinic.

Limping/Broken Bones: If the pet is limping on the leg, it is likely not broken, but it is painful and should be addressed in a timely fashion. If the pelvis is broken they will wobble/stagger when they try to walk, if they try to walk at all. It's always safer to advise them to bring the pet in if they are limping or holding up a leg. Owners should be instructed not give any human pain medications (Tylenol, aspirin) to the pet.

Poisons/Toxins: Have the owners call an animal poison animal center immediately. Most veterinarians will end up having to call the poison center to get current recommendations on how to treat the pet.

Bloat/Gastric Dilatation Volvulus: Occurs in large/deep chested dog. The stomach twists and starts to "bloat". Signs include: trying to vomit, gagging up white foam, restless, won't lie down, panting, pacing, groaning in pain, distended abdomen. This is an EMERGENCY and owners need to bring in their dog immediately!

Urethral Obstruction: Occurs mainly in male cats where the urethra becomes obstructed with crystals or other debris causing the cat to not urinate. Urethral obstructions can occur in other animals as well for other reasons. Signs include: Vomiting, frequent squatting in an attempt to urinate, crying in pain (yowling in cats), tense/painful abdomen, refusal to eat. Owners often mistake urinary obstruction as constipation. Always an EMERGENCY

Thrombus Cat (clot cat): Occurs mostly in cats, usually those with a history of heart disease or heart murmurs. A blood clot becomes formed and lodges in various parts of the body (typically cutting off blood supply to the lower limbs). Signs include: inability to walk, crying/screaming in pain, "floppy" legs, cold feet, breathing difficulties. This is an EMERGENCY.

Heat Stoke/Hypothermia: Heat stoke mainly occurs in dogs, but can be seen cats also. Hypothermia can occur in both dogs and cats. Both are an EMERGENCY. Owners should be instructed to cool down (spray the animal down with cool water), or warm up (blankets/towels) until they are able to get to an emergency clinic. Instruct them not to use ice or very cold water. Bringing down the pet's temperature too quickly can cause worse effects than being overheated.

References Available Upon Request

2019 APVC proceedings

Finessing the customer experience - it's all in the detail

People buy from people - if anyone on your team makes clients feel undervalued, ignored or patronised then those customers won't come back. They'll also tell their friends. An excellent customer experience isn't a 'nice to have', it's essential if you want to attract and retain clients. Every other business sector understands the commercial significance of the customer experience, so why don't we? This session will share research and case studies from UK practices to illustrate and quantify the potential business opportunity for your practice.

Every single piece of research done with pet and horse owners, smallholders and farmers alike confirms that the most important factor when choosing a veterinary care provider is convenience. They want to be able to get to and contact the practice quickly. They want the phone answering when they call, and they want to receive advice tailored to the needs of them and their animals. They want to book appointments online, access test results quickly and speak to an expert quickly when needed. It sounds obvious, but so many practices overlook the basic principles and important tiny details that have such a vital impact on the customer experience.

First contact resolution

With 90% of initial client contact taking place on the phone, this is one crucial area where people and processes need to be optimised. The Onswitch Index programme calls over a thousand practices across Europe, Scandinavia and Australia every month. The evidence shows that many practices are still not grasping the vital importance of providing potential clients with the service they seek over the phone - yet these are people who have researched local practices and chosen you to call. They need veterinary care and they've chosen you to ask - why wouldn't you do everything you can to secure their business?

In this session we'll look at real data from practices that have used both the Onswitch Index reporting programme and the 5 Steps to measure and improve the quality and consistency of their telephone customer care:

1. Give a great greeting
2. Use the name of the owner as well as her pet / horse
3. Create an emotional connection
4. Provide additional information - leaflets or website
5. Offer an appointment

Demonstrating genuine care and building rapport with potential clients at this early stage of the customer journey is essential if you are to turn an enquiry into a loyal lifelong client. Owners have plenty of choice when it comes to picking a veterinary practice and research finds that they are much more likely to choose those that are interested in the pet and really want to help.

Finessing face-to-face contact

Small animal practices should aim to convert 40% of calls into paid consults, but even once the owner is in the building her continued custom is not guaranteed. New and established clients alike will notice all the little things about your team, processes and building that you might miss, so it's important to pay attention to the detail when it comes to delivering an excellent customer experience. Areas to consider include:

- Is the practice exterior clean and tidy? Is parking available and well signed?
- Do notices and signs look fresh and recent, or dog-eared and faded?
- Are your out of hours contact details and opening hours clearly displayed on your website and on the door?
- Are posters and leaflets well organised and neatly displayed, or is there an overwhelming amount of information on show?
- Do cats and dogs have separate areas to wait, with high shelves and blankets available for nervous cats?
- Do the reception team welcome all visitors with a smile, even when they are on the phone? Positive body language and eye contact are so important when building rapport
- Does the practice feel calm and welcoming, or is there an air of mild chaos? (Loud TV, clutter, shabby paintwork and no uniforms)
- Is there a photo board showing all members of the team? Does everyone have a name badge? Are clinicians' names displayed on the consult room doors?

Each of these things, and many more important details, plays a role in shaping the client's impression of your practice. Taken individually they may be so small as to be thought insignificant, but together they *are* your practice - a business that hasn't provided toilet paper or dry towels for customers might just as easily be overlooking other details in the operating theatre.

Listening and hearing

Of course the customer experience isn't just about housekeeping; it is shaped by a wide range of senses and emotions. We'll also consider the importance of communication, sharing tips for active listening and handling difficult situations, such as KLARDOC:

Keep calm

Listen	Put assumptions aside and really hear what the client is telling you
Acknowledge	Repeat what you have just heard, for clarity
Refine and Define	Summarise the key facts, aside from the emotion
Overcome	Present possible solutions and alternatives
Close	Thank the client and detail the timings of any further action

Almost always, a 'difficult' conversation stems from the fact that your client is frustrated, confused, worried or distracted. Understanding her state of mind and looking at the situation from her perspective will usually help inform a solution, and it always helps to use calming, reassuring language:

- Don't use technical language or practice jargon
- Keep your body language open and professional
- Speak at the same pace as her
- Repeat key words and phrases back to her
- Use open questions to ascertain what the problem is
- Ask politely for clarification of the issue, don't assume

Customer experience - top ten tips

In this session we'll look at simple but effective ways in which you can ensure the customer experience your team provide is second to none, culminating in a set of top ten tips for optimising client care:

1. Make sure your practice is easy to find online. Investing in Search Engine Optimisation and ensuring your website is mobile-friendly are important considerations for practices looking to stand out from the competition and illustrate your unique benefits and approach at this vital first stage of the customer journey
2. Look at your practice branding and client communications with fresh eyes - is the design dated and complicated? Are there typos and shouty capitalised signs with red letters? Neither of these convey a warm and caring approach to customer care
3. Keep the entrance and waiting area clean, tidy and free from unpleasant odours, Provide separate waiting areas for cats and dogs, to minimise stress for waiting felines and make it easier for cat owners to visit (research consistently proves that many cat owners do not visit the vet unless absolutely necessary as it is so stressful)
4. Train everyone in the team to greet clients using the same protocols, whether on the phone or face-to-face. Body language should be positive and active listening practised so that the client feels valued and welcomed
5. Focus on two-way communication and rapport building in the consult room - listen to what the owner has to say, use the pet's name, don't use jargon and make clear recommendations for next steps
6. Provide written estimates and keep owners informed of any changes to costs as treatment progresses - unexpectedly high bills and confusion as to what they include are a major source of complaints and client dissatisfaction
7. Make it easy for owners to contact you - long opening hours (weekends and evenings), practice apps, live chats and prompt replies to enquiries through social media all help build bonds between client and practice
8. Display photos, names and roles for everyone in the team in the waiting area and online. Putting faces to names and names to jobs helps develop trust and rapport with owners. Team members should wear name badges and uniforms too (ideally colour-coded)
9. Keep in touch. Newsletters, blogs, regular Facebook and twitter posts, appointment reminders and phone calls when preventative care is due are all great ways to keep your practice front of mind through the year
10. Hold regular sessions with the team to share feedback and practical tips for ongoing improvements. Customer care training and development should feature in everybody's CPD plan and be assessed at annual appraisals to ensure standards remain high

When your customer experience is rewarding and engaging, clients will naturally want to return. Of course there are actions you can take to make this even more likely, boosting footfall and increasing Average Transaction Values in the process:

- Use the Net Promoter Score (NPS) tool. This simple and effective model measures the percentage of clients who would recommend you. The target for high performing veterinary practices is >80%, currently the average UK business' NPS is around 70%. NPS is a great way to quantify word of mouth in your local area. The NPS tool is another valuable source of feedback on your consultation effectiveness; its score is derived from

ratings out of ten given by clients in response to the question, "based on your recent consultation, how likely are you to recommend us?" - easy to ask via client surveys on your website, social media and hard copies left in the waiting area. Delighted clients will score 9s and 10s and are ranked as Promoters. Disgruntled owners may award marks of 6 and lower, and are classified as Detractors. Passives are in the middle, with ratings of 7s or 8s. To work out your NPS rating, take the percentage of detractors away from the percentage of promoters, leaving a single percentage score. The target for high performing veterinary practices is >80% and so once you have a baseline NPS score, asking the question again in six months' time will allow improvements to be measured and tracked.

- Give clients a reason to return
 - Book the next visit and / or schedule a reminder whilst they are still in the practice
 - Even if there is no reason to return with the current condition, recommend a health check in six months and get it in the diary now
 - Maintain ongoing contact with the owner, either physical (with an appointment booking), or virtual via email, newsletters etc.
- Boost Word of Mouth. It is a known truth that people choose businesses that others tell them are great, so understand how many clients recommend you currently, and encourage them to do more of it, more often
 - Friend Get Friend schemes. Rewarding loyalty is great for business and is simply an extension of your owners' natural behaviours. Personal recommendation in this way is powerful and effective - offering a £5 voucher to your existing clients when their recommended friend registers with you (generating £5 for them also) is proven to be a cost effective way to drive client numbers and sales
 - Online reviews. Ask your clients to leave comments and reviews on your Facebook page and on review sites such as yell.com
 - Encourage Facebook likes and Twitter follows by featuring your social media details on all practice literature
- Develop positive relationships with Key Opinion Leaders
 - Their importance is underestimated by many practices, yet the key opinion leaders in your area can make or break a practice's reputation. Your clients see these businesses more often than they see you, and they seek advice and recommendations from them:
 - Equine - farrier, yard owners, dental technicians, feed merchants, saddlers
 - Small animal - groomers (probably see each dog and owner up to eight times a year), agility clubs, puppy trainers, rescue centres, catteries, pet shops, dog walkers
 - Hold regular events and information evenings, send newsletters and offer CPD
- Share client testimonials and feedback
 - Create YouTube clips of owners talking about you
 - Share and re-tweet positive comments
- Ask clients for recommendation- most owners are more than happy to provide testimonials when you have helped their beloved pet or horse.
 - Find a person in the practice who is particularly good at this
 - Maintain a degree of sensitivity; know when to ask (as a client is dropping off a box of chocolates, rather than when they are settling a huge bill)

The customer journey - key touch points

Owners have so many choices when it comes to the care of their pets and horses, why should they come to you? It's no longer the case that you can sit back and wait for them to walk through the door - they will search for advice online, self-diagnose and buy medication through other channels, ask their groomer or yard owner for advice, or even visit your competitors. Assuming they do choose you, if their experience of your practice does not match their expectations then not only will they not return, but they may tell others to stay away too.

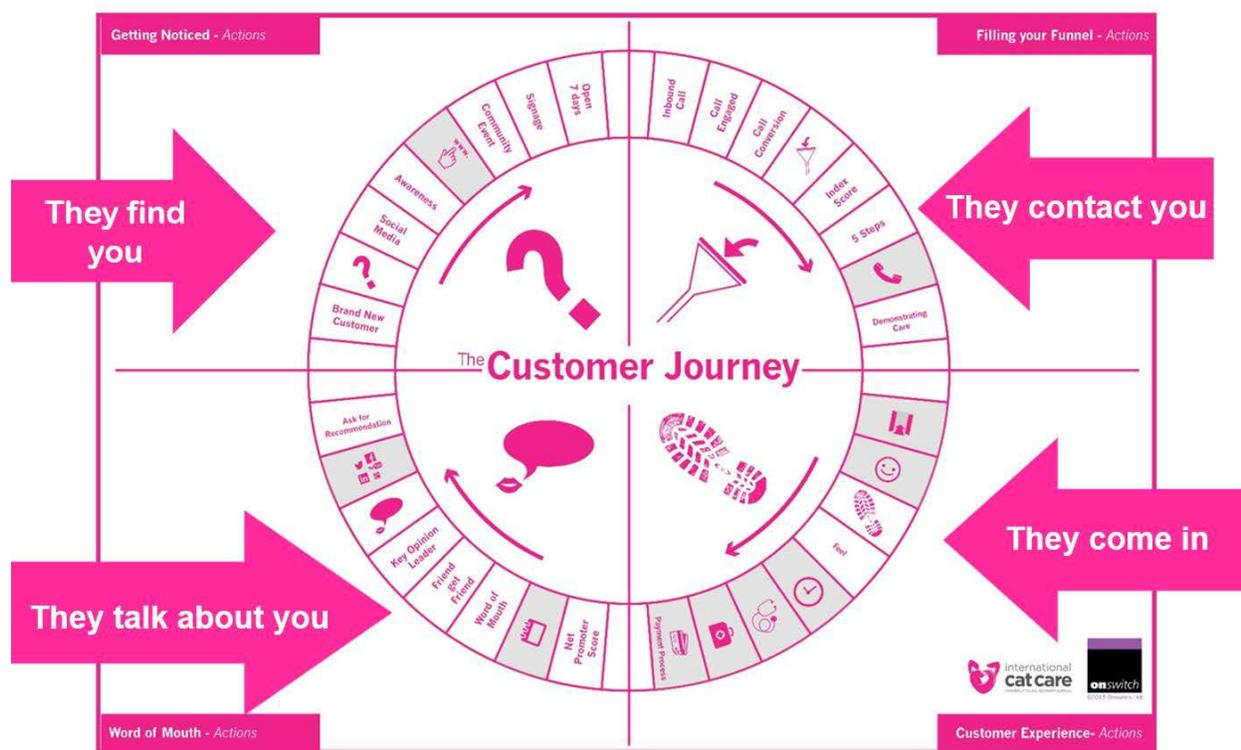
Research consistently proves that after convenience, the next most important factor for owners choosing which practice and vet to use is the customer experience - how the practice *feels* rather than what it does and how much it charges. Thus a practice that focuses on making the customer experience personal, welcoming, professional and convenient from start to finish will ultimately win and keep more clients. And let's not forget that the customer experience begins long before the owner sets foot in the door. Your website should be professional, friendly and kept up to date. Your premises should be well maintained and tidy. Your client communication materials should be professionally produced and grammatically correct! The little things speak volumes when it comes to the customer experience, and it's crucial to maintain focus and not become complacent.

Understanding the customer journey

The concept of the customer journey is not new, describing the many touch points experienced between client and practice. This journey begins long before the pet owner has set foot inside the clinic, with searches carried out online for reviews and information, recommendations sought from friends, family and pet care professionals (groomers, kennels, pet shops etc.) and impressions formed through local advertising and open days, not to mention clinic branding and appearance. Through this initial stage of intelligence gathering, known to marketers as the Zero Moment of Truth, potential clients will form an impression of the practice and the likely levels of care it will provide for them and their pets. Based on these impressions they will make a conscious choice to contact one of more practices (usually by phone in the first instance), and at this stage they will confirm or challenge their existing perceptions based on the conversation that takes place.

Potential clients are looking for genuine interest and care to be shown towards their beloved pet, and for a rapport to develop when both owner and practice share the same values and aspirations as to what great customer care feels like. It should be noted that clinical competence is taken for granted by the owner - they do not care how many letters are after the vet's name, or what equipment the clinic has, they are simply looking for their family member to be treated with respect by every member of the practice team.

Only when telephone contact has proved positive will the owner make the decision to bring her pet in, and once they are face-to-face with the reception team, vets and nurses they will once more assess the levels of customer care afforded to both their pet and themselves. Disappointing customer service at any stage of the customer journey will result in the owner choosing not to visit again, and in the worst cases telling friends and family not to do so either.



Practical steps you can take to ensure every stage of the customer journey is effective, efficient and engaging include:

- First impressions count - smiles are so important, transcending any language and cultural barriers. Even if receptionists are on the phone when the client arrives, they should always make eye contact with waiting clients and smile
- Make it personal - introduce yourself, use both the pet's and the client's names
- Streamline processes to minimise waiting time
- Keep clients informed if there are delays and give regular updates - if there's been a genuine emergency that has disrupted the planned schedule, most owners will understand and be prepared to be flexible
- Make waiting less stressful
 - Provide separate areas for cats and dogs
 - Offer drinks and reading material
 - Change information displays regularly
- Remove obstacles from the payment process:
 - Take deposits prior to surgery, make payment less challenging
 - Sort insurance documents up front
 - Review where the delays occur and change processes / staffing to avoid these

Ultimately owners need to feel valued and respected at every point of interaction with your team - getting the details right is crucial, at every touch point as clients journey through the practice:

- Give clear and detailed estimates about costs
- Explain next steps appropriately and involve clients in making them
- Understand the specific needs of every patient and client
- Exceed their expectations