

**From the Floor To Supervisor**  
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**Introduction**

There is no school that teaches you how to go from working on the floor with your peers to being a supervisor/manager over them. The veterinary industry is interesting because technicians and assistants work literally on top of each other all day every day. In human nursing the nurse, has the ability to draw blood by themselves or administer drugs by themselves. Human patients are asked to lay on radiology tables while registered nurses walk out of the room. This is not the case in veterinary medicine. Almost every single task that is performed by a technician or assistant requires your coworker to be there. As such you develop relationships with these individuals. You hear about their day and their life and you probably know them more than you know your friends outside of the hospital. Many times individuals become true friends with each other. So how does one go from being in a casual working environment as a colleague to managing or supervising that same individual?

**Why Go Into Management**

Oops. I became a manager. That is the reality of how most people suddenly realize that they are in a supervisory role. Sometimes it is sought after. Perhaps it is a job that had an opening or there was a need and you approached management to be considered for that position. Most often those seeking supervisor or management roles are older and have been in the profession for at least over five years. Working long hours on the floor is tiring so a supervisory role allows older technicians and assistants to still work in a hospital environment without every day working on the floor. In most hospitals some floor time is expected even of those in a leadership role. You may have also sought out a supervisor or management role because you wanted more money.

Often times, these roles are associated with more money. However, if you found yourself suddenly in a supervisor role, in the “oops I became a manager” scenario you may have just taken on more responsibility without a formal role being created. It is important that if you found yourself in a scenario such as this new advocate for an increase in salary. Failure to do so often times breeds discontent and burnout because of the added responsibility without the added compensation.

It is important that the main reason why you went into a supervisor role was because you wanted to advocate for your team members and help provide a voice for them. Once you move into management the success of your job is dependent on the happiness and success of those you are leading.

**What Does Your Job Entail?**

If you were not provided with the job description then you must ask for one. Do you have the ability to hire and/or fire? Are you responsible for yearly annual reviews? Are you responsible for your teams career development? What about conflict resolution or performance-based issues? Do you have the ability to write somebody up? If you did not receive a job description of your new role you must ask for one because it’s important for you to understand what it entails in order for you to be successful.

**The Team Needs to Understand the Role**

If you were given more and more responsibility without the actual job title and finally came to the realization that you were working as a supervisor or manager then it is unlikely that the team understands your role. Once you have obtained a clear job description and title it is important that this is communicated out to the team in the hospital. Your role can never be successful if they don't treat you as a supervisor or manager.

If you are not made aware of issues within the team and the team is constantly circumventing you to go to the practice manager then you will never be successful in your role. The team must understand that they need to come to you to help them with their issues and concerns. If you take on more responsibility in your role this also has to be communicated out to the team. It should not come as a surprise during their performance reviews that you're the one delivering them. If this is a new change it is to be communicated out that now you are the one who is administering their performance reviews.

### **Learn the Art of PC**

Once you step into a manager or supervisor role you are no longer permitted to be politically incorrect. You are no longer permitted to gossip. You are no longer permitted to be negative. You are being watched by your team at all times. How you act is how you want your team to act. You no longer are permitted to be lazy or have excessive call-outs or not pick up shifts. Your team will hold you to the highest standards. How you want your team to act should be reflected in your own performance. You must set the example.

Every hospital has some lack of PC. Clients are made fun of when they are not present. Harsh things are said about coworkers when they're not around. Inappropriate jokes are made about castrating animals. Inappropriate jokes are probably even made about people. You, as a manager or supervisor, are not permitted to partake in this anymore. Gone are the days of passive-aggressive comments online about the hospital, or the benefits, or the salary. You not only represent your team, but you represent the entire hospital. Disagreeing with the practice manager might have been something you use to vocalize to your coworkers. Now that you are in a manager or supervisor role you are no longer permitted to do so. You must back the practice manager's decisions up. If you disagree you must remain silent about your grievances and deal with them professionally with that individual. If you dislike a certain doctors style of doing medicine you no longer get to voice your opinion.

If you are permitted to gossip, come in late, not pick up on call shifts, not work any holidays, never work in evening or weekend, then how will your team ever look up to you or treat you with any respect? The art of being politically correct and holding yourself to the highest standards is difficult. It's definitely not for everyone and before accepting any new role in management you must ask yourself if it's something you can do on a behavior level.

### **Get to Know Your Team**

You may be good friends with some of your team. You may not like others. It is important to cultivate a healthy management relationship with everyone in your team. If you are new to the role of leadership then take the time to have a team meeting and explain to them that you are growing and learning and that you're going to make mistakes.

You may want to pull any good friends aside and be honest with them. Explain to them that you're going to hold them to the same standards as everyone else on the team. Let them know that you may at some point have an awkward situation where you may need to write them up or discipline them in some manner. Let them know that you value their friendship and that you hope

that you will be able to maintain as wonderful the friendship outside of the hospital even though you are their “boss”. The reality is that plenty of people have lost friendships with individuals because they went from working with them on the floor to supervising them.

It is equally important that if you had less than desirable feelings towards another employee you must take them aside once you take a supervisor role. You must treat them with the same respect and hold them to the same standards as you do everyone else. Any issues or complaints that you have with that individual should be valid and relating to the job they are performing.

The best supervisors take the time to check in with each employee individually for at least 15 to 20 minutes every other week. This is not always practical in a veterinary hospital. There may be multiple shifts where you don't even get the opportunity to work with some of those that you are managing. If that's the case checking in via email and letting them know that you're there for them if they have any concerns or questions is also important. If you're working with someone on the floor just talk to them about how things are going. Plenty of career development conversations have taken place over patient workups. While it's not ideal the employee feels valued because the leadership is listening to them.

Having one-on-one sessions and making sure you're in touch with every member of the team is important for the success of your position.

### **Educate Yourself**

Many times, the best skilled veterinary technician or longest lasting veterinary assistant is promoted into a leadership position. Just because an individual can perform CPR or place a catheter in a very compromised patient does not mean they are the best managers. It is important if you are offered such a position that you look at your own skills and drive to want to lead people. Your role will no longer be judged on how well you do a dental. Instead, it will be judged on how well your team does the dental's and how happy they are at their job.

It is important that any new supervisor or manager educate themselves on how to lead people. There are plenty of in classroom weekend seminars, online seminars, and even at most veterinary conferences you can find continuing education on skills needed to lead people.

Things that you used to take for granted are now looked at by all employees differently because you are manager. For example, if a patient is barking incessantly throughout the day and you say multiple times to the team “that dog is so annoying he's really upsetting me” it is looked at differently if you are a manager versus not. If you are a technician on the floor, not in a leadership role, then you are simply a disgruntled employee who is burning out because of a vocal dog. If you are a manager complaining about the same scenario then you are setting an example for your employees that it is okay to vocalize negative thoughts which only adds to the stress level of an already stressed team. You are condoning a negative work environment by simply adding to it. It then allows the door to open for other employees who wish to complain about patients or clients or each other because, after all, you did it.

Leadership skills is something that can be learned and worked on throughout one's career. There is no such thing as a perfect leader. Educating yourself on the basics is very important to the success of your position.

### **Set Your Team Up for Success**

A good team has the following key qualities. Understands what is expected of them, feels like the hospital's success lies in their hands, feels like they are valued, the work environment is healthy and pay/benefits are good.

*Pay/Benefits:* It is unlikely that you have the ability to control pay or benefits. If you do, the most important thing is that all employees are paid fairly. The person who has more skill level and higher credentials should be paid more than someone who has potentially been there longer. This is hard for employees to understand. If you have an employee who has never increased their skill level but does a good job, why should they be rewarded with a higher salary than someone who brings a higher skill set and knowledge to the hospital? Higher skill set and knowledge is usually equivalent to better patient care, faster turnover on appointments, and more production for the hospital. Because someone has done a good job but never improved themselves doesn't mean they get to earn more than someone who comes in with a higher education. Using a pay scale and standing by it is the best way to justify salaries to employees. Pay scales are never based off of just years experience. Medicine is constantly evolving and changing and employees should be expected to evolve and change with it.

*Understanding Their Job:* Hospital teams should have a manual for that department. It is important that items such as dress code, calling out policy, vacation time requests are all outlined for the employee. It is hard to document less than ideal workplace behavior if they don't know what's expected of them. Ensuring your team knows exactly what's expected is important. Ensure that important policies, perhaps even how the team is expected to place an IV catheter, are signed off on so it can't be said that the policy was never presented to the employee.

*Hospital Success Is On Them:* Every employee, regardless of the job, wants to be able to contribute to it in a way that makes them feel empowered. The best hospital teams work in a way where the manager is simply a leader but every member on the floor also feels like a leader. They take ownership and pride in their hospital. They recognize that the drawers will not stock themselves and that in order for them to be most successful it may mean staying 10 or 15 minutes late to stock them. The employee should have the ability, within reason, to help alter a clients charge if there was an issue. They should not have to ask the manager for every little thing. They should be allowed to freedom within a framework to contribute to the hospital. Allowing the team to have freedom makes them ultimately feel more valued. If a team member needs to call out, they should have the freedom to find their own replacement. They should be able to notify their manager after doing so. If the hospital runs out of paper for a printer, an employee should feel like they can drive to a store and pick up a ream of paper for the hospital and know they will be reimbursed and thanked for their help. These small things help to make the hospital run. They also make the team understand that the success of the hospital ways on every single member of that team. The best managers teach employees what freedoms they have and then allow them to make decisions within that framework.

*Valued:* Regardless of all the freedoms allowed, if an employee does not feel valued, they likely will stop performing well. The best managers ensure that their team members feel valued. Every team member should be praised at least once a week for something. "Good job getting that catheter in." "Thanks for coming in early." "Way to go with that difficult patient." All of those things are simple but important for managers to acknowledge. It is important that little and big things are praised. It should become a culture in the hospital that everyone is a cheerleader. The best managers foster that environment.

*Healthy Team Environment:* The minute you have a toxic team is the minute you start losing team members. It is important to focus on the health of the team. You must play fair as a manager regardless of who it is. If your best friend is the one who is gossiping or being the negative "Nancy" you must treat them the same as you would someone else. Behavior problems should be treated the same way as medical mistakes. If a team member is caught gossiping or talking negative

about a situation or person, it should be addressed immediately. It shouldn't be addressed at the yearly review because it has been left to fester and the entire team is likely suffering from it. A healthy team is one that will come in for each other if someone called out, is there to support the wins in someone's life, there to support each other through bad times as well and who has the ability to laugh and joke with each other throughout the day. If your team isn't laughing and joking and you're having a hard time having people come in for work if someone calls out then you likely have an unhealthy team. Working on teambuilding is really important.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Conflict resolution, or dealing with team members that are underperforming or those that have made mistakes, is perhaps the hardest thing from going from the floor to a supervisor position. This is part of the education of yourself when becoming a new manager or supervisor. There are wonderful online courses, articles, and even in person conference seminars on conflict resolution. Dealing with conflict is difficult especially if it's one of your good friends. The golden rule of dealing with any issue is to ensure that you do it within a few days of the offense happening. Immediate and appropriate feedback is essential to the success of that team member. The second rule of thumb, is to document everything. Be sure to document every conversation and what steps you recommended for that individual. It doesn't always have to be signed off on but if the infraction is substantial it should be. Letting the employee know that it's being documented is important. The employee has the right to review their employee record at any time.

If you are dealing with conflict between two employees start by investigating the cause. Listen to both individuals separately. The next step would probably be to act as a mediator. Regardless of whether they want to or not, bringing both individuals into the same room and listening to them while you mediate the conversation is important. Explain to them through your eyes both sides of the story and what needs to be worked on for the future. Likely there is not one person who is completely right and one person is completely wrong. If you have two hospital teams, say the front office and the technician staff, that are at odds, the same thought process can take place. Listen to both sides and then consider a joint meeting between both groups.

Remember to focus on the issue and not the emotion. If someone is saying hurtful things or talking about feelings, bring them back around to how it is affecting the hospital, coworker, or themselves. Always ask their opinion on how they feel it should be resolved. Don't play the role of the parent. You can't fix all problems. Be sure that you listen and then take value in the suggestions they are offering. Let them try some of their suggestions.

If you do need to discipline an employee, be sure to keep it professional. Never yell or bring emotion into it. Discipline privately. Be sure you have gathered all the information you need. Do not respond with a gut reaction. Outline a plan and the steps needed to prevent recurrence. Let them understand the discipline that you are taking on them. Be sure to document everything!

### **Growing & Training for Your Team**

If you do not offer some type of training program for your team then you are failing as a manager. Your hospital and the patients that you see in it, rely heavily on the team being trained with new procedures and medicine. The job description that an employee is provided should be able to provide the framework for what the skills are that they need to be trained in. Using a level system will allow employees to continuously train up to higher and higher levels with clear direction on what is expected of them. Along with that, a salary range should also be incorporated. Therefore, when an employee moves up a level they should get a higher compensation.

Your main job is to coach and mentor your team. This may be actual physical training of skills or it may be that your mentoring them to be coming a team that works better together. Remember that the success of your position is how successful your team is. Teambuilding is it so important for every hospital team. Be sure that you focus some of your time on building the team relationships. Having each person understand what the other member brings to the team is important so that they can value each other.