

## **The Power of Whole Team Utilization**

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Veterinary medicine is frequently described as facing a talent shortage. In many cases, however, the more pressing challenge is not talent scarcity but talent underutilization. Across practices of all sizes, highly trained professionals often spend portions of their day performing tasks that do not require their level of expertise. Veterinarians complete callbacks that could be delegated. Credentialed technicians restock supplies during appointment backlogs. Client service representatives repeatedly answer preventable questions due to unclear systems. Assistants wait for direction rather than anticipating procedural needs.

The consequences are predictable. Doctors feel overextended. Support staff feel underdeveloped. Appointments run behind. Emotional fatigue increases. Burnout rises across the organization.

Whole team utilization is not about asking individuals to work harder or longer. It is about ensuring each team member operates at the top of their education, training, and legal scope of practice. When that alignment occurs, efficiency increases, morale improves, and the practice becomes both financially and operationally stronger. Utilization is not merely a staffing conversation; it is a leadership strategy.

### **Defining Whole Team Utilization**

Whole team utilization aligns skill level with task level. Veterinarians should devote their time to responsibilities only they can perform: diagnosing, prescribing, performing surgery, and making complex medical decisions. Credentialed technicians should fully apply their technical training, provide client education, and manage treatment execution. Assistants should support patient preparation and procedural efficiency. Client service representatives should optimize scheduling, manage communication flow, and clarify financial expectations.

When these roles blur unnecessarily, capacity diminishes. For example, if a veterinarian spends fifteen minutes printing discharge instructions or restocking inventory, those minutes are no longer available for diagnosing cases, performing procedures, or consulting with clients. Over time, this misallocation compounds, affecting revenue, workflow, and professional satisfaction.

Utilization protects both productivity and energy. It preserves high-level cognitive resources for high-level tasks.

### **The Hidden Cost of Underutilization**

Underutilization creates frustration across hierarchical levels. Doctors may feel they are “doing everything.” Technicians may feel their education is underleveraged. Assistants may lack development opportunities. Leadership may observe payroll investment without corresponding productivity growth.

The financial implications are substantial. When the highest-compensated team member performs the lowest-leverage tasks, inefficiency accumulates daily. However, the emotional cost may be even greater. Professionals who are not empowered to use their training fully often disengage. Stagnation leads to dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction leads to turnover.



Whole team utilization is therefore not only a financial strategy but also a retention strategy. When individuals feel trusted and challenged appropriately, engagement deepens and loyalty strengthens.

### **Trust as the Foundation of Delegation**

Effective utilization depends on trust. Veterinarians must trust technicians to execute treatment plans accurately and communicate effectively with clients. Technicians must trust assistants to prepare patients thoroughly. Front-of-house staff must trust back-of-house teams to provide accurate updates on timing and care progression.

Trust develops through structured training, repetition, and accountability. A common barrier to delegation is fear: fear of mistakes, inefficiency, or loss of control. Leaders may believe that completing a task personally is faster. While this may be true in the short term, it guarantees long-term bottlenecks. Each time a leader chooses to perform rather than develop, growth capacity narrows.

Delegation requires patience. Initial attempts may require additional oversight and feedback. Over time, however, delegated tasks become proficiently executed responsibilities. Development multiplies capacity in ways individual effort cannot.

### **The Operational Link to Burnout**

Burnout in veterinary medicine is often framed solely as emotional fatigue. In reality, it has operational roots as well. When responsibilities are distributed unevenly, cognitive and physical strain accumulate disproportionately. Doctors operating in constant overload experience decision fatigue. Technicians restricted from practicing at their full capacity experience frustration. Receptionists absorbing client tension without authority to resolve issues experience stress.

Proper utilization balances workload across roles. It ensures that no single position absorbs excessive responsibility. When tasks align with training and purpose, professionals experience greater clarity and less emotional drain. Burnout decreases when operational structure supports professional identity.

### **Impact on Client Experience**

Clients may not consciously analyze utilization patterns, but they experience their effects. In a well-utilized practice, appointments flow smoothly. History is gathered thoroughly. The doctor enters the room informed. Discharge instructions are clear. Financial discussions are structured and confident. Follow-up questions are addressed efficiently.

In underutilized environments, clients encounter delays, repeated explanations, inconsistent messaging, and rushed interactions. Fragmentation weakens trust. Cohesion strengthens it.

Whole team utilization is therefore both an internal productivity model and a client experience strategy. When every team member functions optimally, the visit feels coordinated rather than chaotic.

### **Expanding Capacity Through Skill Development**

Utilization is contingent upon competence. Team members cannot operate at higher levels without adequate training. Development must be intentional and ongoing. Cross-training support staff, standardizing protocols, practicing technical skills, and coaching communication strategies expand collective capacity.



Underutilization frequently stems from unclear expectations. If technicians are uncertain about their authority to lead client education discussions, they may defer to veterinarians unnecessarily. If assistants lack structured training, technicians may hesitate to delegate tasks. Clarity builds confidence, and confidence fuels delegation. Investment in training directly influences utilization potential.

### **Leadership's Strategic Shift**

Whole team utilization requires leaders to transition from task completion to capacity development. This shift can be uncomfortable, particularly if short-term productivity appears to dip during training phases. However, the alternative—a persistent bottleneck at the highest level of responsibility—is unsustainable.

Leaders must routinely evaluate the highest and best use of their time. Tasks that can be performed safely and effectively by another team member should be taught and delegated. Delegation is not abdication; it involves oversight, feedback, and accountability. However, it communicates trust and reinforces growth pathways. When team members are entrusted with meaningful responsibility, engagement rises.

### **Accountability Without Micromanagement**

Delegation without accountability undermines utilization efforts. Conversely, micromanagement erodes trust. Effective systems include clearly defined expectations, observable performance standards, timely feedback, and coaching when refinement is needed.

Balanced accountability allows leaders to step back without disengaging. Team members feel supported rather than scrutinized. Confidence develops through both autonomy and structured oversight.

### **The Financial Multiplier**

From a business perspective, whole team utilization is one of the most significant drivers of sustainable profitability. When veterinarians operate at full diagnostic and surgical capacity, revenue per hour increases. When technicians effectively support diagnostics and client education, compliance improves. When reception manages scheduling strategically, appointment density optimizes.

Utilization increases production without increasing hours. It enhances sustainability rather than relying on extended workdays.

However, the financial multiplier materializes only when cultural alignment supports delegation. If utilization is perceived as task dumping rather than empowerment, morale declines. Leaders must clearly communicate why utilization matters—not only for financial performance but also for workload balance, professional development, and patient care quality.

### **Cultivating a Culture of Contribution**

Whole team utilization thrives in cultures that prioritize contribution over hierarchy. In such environments, skill development is expected, delegation is normalized, feedback is routine, and no role is minimized. Each position is maximized within its scope.

The objective is not to stretch individuals beyond their capacity but to expand capacity intentionally. When team members understand how their responsibilities directly influence patient outcomes, client loyalty, and practice sustainability, engagement deepens.



## **Moving From Busy to Effective**

Many veterinary practices are busy; fewer are strategically effective. Busyness often feels exhausting and reactive. Effectiveness feels purposeful and coordinated.

Whole team utilization transforms busyness into intentional productivity. It aligns talent with responsibility, protects energy, and strengthens systems. In a profession characterized by emotional and cognitive intensity, operational clarity is invaluable.

When every team member operates at the top of their training, the practice does more than function—it advances. Veterinarians focus on medicine. Technicians apply their technical expertise and client education skills. Assistants optimize workflow. Client service representatives guide communication and scheduling.

Together, the collective capacity exceeds what any individual could achieve alone. Whole team utilization is not about doing more. It is about doing what matters most.