

Leadership, Vision and Culture: How to Get, and Keep, Your Team Feeling Good

Welcome to the 2nd article in the Training Your Team series! We hope you enjoyed the July e-newsletter article on “Capturing the Heart of your Team.”

This month’s article focuses on getting, and keeping, your team energized. So the key question becomes: what motivates your team so they will stay with your business, and become effective and productive members? How can you show them you value them as a team member? Who is the your team’s leader? In this article I will provide the tools to help you to succeed in creating a team member that fit these traits, and I guarantee that the end result will be what all businesses strive for – consistency – in your work environment, as well as your patient and client care. And in turn, the result in a more profitable business so it’s a Win-Win all around!

As a business owner or manager, you might be surprised to learn that money is not the primary motivator for your team. Surveys show that money is not even in the top 3 when selecting or staying with a place of employment. What teammates want is to be part of a business that shows them respect, recognition, accomplishment, interesting work, and a chance to develop their skills. We in turn must strive to assure our team members feel not only the emotions above, but want to have a true career path with your business. Remember, you don’t want your team feeling like their job is “just a job.” I feel strongly in that if you’re passionate about incorporating all these things into your business’s strategic plan, you will succeed in keeping in the best of the best on your team.

So how do you show your team Value? There are ways to show your team members they have value by demonstrating that you take pride not only in them, but in yourself and your business. For example, if you say to a team member “Oh, you don’t need to charge that client for that cytology slide; it only took me a moment to read it.” What you are doing is devaluing the importance of that cytology. From the doctors to the technicians to the front desk staff, everyone is a professional and there is value in each person’s expertise. After all, doctors, you did go to veterinary school. You are in the service business and your business is veterinary medicine. These are the facts. So we must charge fairly to the client *and the practice* for that knowledge, expertise and the skills. That knowledge and expertise is what pays your bills. As an owner, it is your responsibility to be profitable. This is the only way you in turn can fairly compensate your valued team members’ appropriately and keep current.

To start the value process, you must see yourself as a professional. When you do this, your team will take their cue from you. Team members look for a chance to learn, grow and contribute so look for examples throughout the day and point them out. This type of public praise with act a positive reinforcements will produce a sense of trust. Surveys also show that empathy and compassion are the most sought after attributes clients look for in our profession, but did you know that they’re also top reasons a team member will choose to work for a practice? So it’s your job to teach these skills to your team members so they will consistently perform these golden rules when working with your customers. Once this is achieved, your practice can reach its true potential.

Besides value, creating a happy, motivated and successful team comes from being open and honest. Showing your team you trust and value them are key factors. We all have heard the saying "walk the talk" and “show you care.” I have found that one of the most tangible and effective ways to do this is to share some of the KPIs (key practice indicators). This must be done with skill, forthrightness and consistency. When the numbers are looking good, it provides you with the opportunity to celebrate. However, when the numbers are not where you need them to be it gives you and your team the opportunity to create an

action plan for your business. Share numbers such as patient compliance, percent of goods, payroll and client bonding rate. Certainly some financial information should be kept confidential, but you can start with the KPIs that your team members can understand and have an impact on. Remember, you want everyone to see themselves as a stakeholder so they have a vested interest in the growth, success and profit of the practice. Without those stakeholders in your business, it will never grow to its true potential. If you don't share these numbers, you're carrying the burden of the practice's success on your shoulders, and you're showing your team that you don't trust them to contribute and/or make the right choices for the practice.

So you decided to share the numbers with your team – excellent choice! Now, hold an entire team meeting and ask questions such as:

- How can we improve our compliance?
- How can we increase our patient care, and how will we measure it?
- How can we improve the client experience?
- What is our client retention or bonding rate?
- What do we need to do to get our 2 biggest expenses in line (i.e. cost of goods and payroll)?
- Do we have a healthy lab income to expense ratio?

Compliance is a key factor in your practice's success so it should be addressed monthly during team meetings. (*Preview - Next month's article will have examples on achieving a successful team meeting.*) We all know that just recommending a service to a client doesn't help the animal; it needs to be DONE. The compliance will only increase when your entire team is on board and buys into the shared goals of the practice. You need to make sure that they not only understand the importance of each service/product, but they feel comfortable in their ability to communicate the benefits of their recommendations to each client. After all, your practice is all about good patient care, and good patient care is measured by compliance.

As previously mentioned, success from your team starts from the team leader; but *who is the leader at your practice?* You may think the answer is the owner, hospital administrator or manager. The correct answer, though, is EVERY PERSON must see themselves as a leader. This includes the senior owner across the board to the newest team member. We are all in roles that include educating clients, caring for the patients and building business. But how can each team member be a leader? Here are some examples of how leadership can be applied to aspects of your practice:

- **Your Part-time ward attendant** = this team member is observing your patients, and monitoring their pain and comfort levels. Providing TLC at a home away from home. Some pets and their owners may become nervous or even grumpy. This position must be able to relate to these emotions and make the efforts so that all concerned parties feel happy and at ease. You want the pets to be happy, and the owner to feel a sense of relief and trust.
- **Receptionist or Client service representative** = a client enters the practice and is very concerned about their sick kitten, so your receptionist needs to take leadership role and be empathic and compassionate to that client. This is an art as well as learned skills. *These team members are crucial as they are the first and last impressions of each client.*
- **Manager** = a manager must motivate and teach to be sure each team member, and monitor to assure all standard operating procedures (SOP) being met. And that the team is being held accountable for *every patient, every client, every record, every time* at that practice.

- **Technician** = the outpatient technicians are there to help with taking the history, TPR, and provide quality client education. They are also the member responsible for keeping the flow in the exam rooms, and assuring all the pets and clients needs have been met when they leave the doctor's care.
- **Doctors and Owners** = one of the greatest ways for the owner of the practice to show leadership is to walk the walk, and talk the talk. Build trust! If you expect your team to be motivated and enthusiastic, it is critical that you behave in this manner. As an owner or business leader, your team looks to you for direction and guidance, and if you want your team to treat each other with and dignity and respect then you need to set the tone.

Your team is equally responsible for a creating positive workplace, cooperation and teamwork, and the training process never ends. Each person is responsible for sharing the workload. It is everyone's job to live the mantra *every patient, every client, every record, every time.*

Change usually occurs when there is a sense of urgency. However, I have never met a practice that regretted making improvements. The key is continuing to raise the bar proactively. Find out where your team members feel the practice can improve. As you incorporate team member's suggestions, you will see ownership starting to occur. This will create buy-in and the team will become more willing to continue to come up with solutions. The changes will stick and be long term, and thus successful. Remember it's everyone's responsibility to create an environment that encourages teamwork and superior performance.

See you in September when we finish this series and focus on "Making the Right Choices For Your Practice."

After twenty one years of managing in the veterinary field, Louise S. Dunn started Snowgoose Veterinary Management Consulting, which provides technical assistance to practice teams to meet their strategic plans. SVMC works with a wide variety of practices. They range from large specialty hospitals ranging from 1-100 team-member companion animal referral centers, mixed animal hospitals to single veterinarian practices. Ms. Dunn has held practice management workshops at many veterinary schools. She is widely published and speaks internationally and nationally. (Including ACVIM, TNAVC, CVC, WVC, AAHA, VSIPP and AVMA.) She serves as an officer of VetPartners, is a member of the AAHA Leadership Practice Management Advisory Committee, the VHMA, VESPA and AVMLA. Louise brings a unique combination of business, in the trenches experience, knowledge and tools to the veterinary industry. Her passions include her family, veterinary practice management, kayaking and the New England Patriots. Louise was named WVC 2007 Practice Management Educator of the year.

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