

## Differing Needs of Practice Team Mates

By Lauren O'Leary

### Basics

Successful teams understand the needs of each member, from three different perspectives.

1. What does the practice need to succeed?
2. What does each member need to succeed?
3. What does the profession need to succeed?

### Overview

First, determine the difference between "working" and "working well".

According to Harvard Business Review 1987 – Herzberg found that it was **culture** and a **self-directed team** atmosphere that enabled staff to "work well"

How does a **self-directed team** differ?

1. Increased accountability of individuals.
2. Remove controls, retain increased accountability.
3. Grant additional authority - job freedom.
4. Business information available to staff.
5. Introduce more difficult tasks, staff to become experts.

**Clarity** - tools used to ensure job expectations are clear include:

- Letters of engagement
- Job descriptions,
- Performance plans
- Organizational chart.

One may wonder, why is an org chart part of this list? The "org chart" is less about hierarchy and more about the big picture. It clarifies career progression, identifies mentors, and provides us with an "at a glance" view for key areas.

i.e. Dr. Smith (exotics) Emily Jones (Laser safety officer)

It provides an avenue to recognize skills developed by staff, as well as a contact list. It highlights vacancies, opportunities to restructure or change schedules. A multi-purpose document, the chart delineates the infrastructure supporting the team.

### Issues and Options

#### Changing Dynamics

- More veterinarians = Increased Competition = decreasing prices
- Cost of goods and services have increased twice as fast as total revenue

Marry these circumstances and we have a business model with little chance for sustained growth.

**Averting This = Change**

Developing different areas of veterinary medicine such as exotics, aquaculture, reptiles, public health, animal welfare, environment, food safety, industry, corporate practice or academia are starting points

- Reducing stock, scripting out - helps tackle cost of goods.
- Better use of facilities, equipment and staff helps increase margins.
- Higher fees generate revenue to pay associates and support staff fairly

There are options, and bond centered practices in a niche market, charging appropriately for their services will prosper.

- A once entirely a male dominated profession, now 70% of students are women and 36% of practicing veterinarians are women
- Flexibility, split shifts, time off, team approach, job sharing, excellent support staff, benefits, good medicine, a nice facility and harmony in the workplace are often more important than the wage itself.
- Women find other aspects of compensation more important than wages. Stats show women veterinarians are setting their fees lower and accepting lower salary offers. \*KPMG study May 1999.
- This needs to be halted or a nasty downward cycle will ensue. Ladies, equal pay for equal work.
- The “**old boys club**” scenario. Well-respected, older practices run by men are experiencing communications issues between Generation Xer’s and the Boomers. It doesn’t stop there – there are issues between Mars and Venus too.
- Understanding these differing styles will be paramount for practice success.

### Owners/Partner

#### To benefit the team

Owners/partners require strong leadership skills, vision, and an ability to foster teams

The challenge is not to solve problems, but to plant ideas. Allowing the team to develop the plan, take ownership, bring it to fruition - celebrating their successes. This is the art of coaching.

Leaders need to do the following:

- Provide focus
- Motivate
- Model professionalism and decorum.
- Instill enthusiasm for quality.

Owners need to adapt and stay current regarding best business practices.

Those who are proactive will weather the storm. Owners need to do one of two things:

Hire a Certified Veterinary Practice Manager

Or

Develop Management Skills

Basic Management Skills include:

- Communications

- Financial management
- Time and stress management
- Problem solving and decision making
- Listening skills
- Organizational development
- Strategic planning
- Team Building

To benefit owners/partners they require:

- ROI
- Succession planning
- Partnership agreement
- Practice valuation
- A buyer
- Insurance

When preparing the practice for sale, ensure that it is the “practice” that has value and not the doctor i.e. LLP, Inc. etc

**New grad**

To benefit the team:

**Written Protocols**

Protocols are like scripts, removing ambiguity regarding each procedure performed. Protocols take time to compile, but save hours creating quality medical records. AAHA’s standards of accreditation CD is a great start.

**Communications.**

Team members must recognize the different “era’s” we encounter. One common clash can be “Boomers” vs. “X’ers” Understanding differences and finding out what motivates team members is imperative if practices are to prosper.

**Teamwork**

Drs. are lauded for being mavericks at school. They quickly mesh with their environment by doing the following:

- Trust, learn from, utilize, and respect staff.
- Learn to stay on time and on task.
- Follow up – Follow through.
- Understand how to measure your performance

Learning to listen, share, and manage a case load becomes overwhelming. Creating good medical records, up to date by end of day is tough.

To benefit new grads:

**Supervisory/Leadership skills**

Graduation changes everything for doctors. Many have never negotiated a contract before, but need to walk in that door day 1 as leaders and supervisors.

**Debt versus Income**

Rising tuition, fees, and debt loads, coupled with salaries that have not kept pace with costs - is a recipe for a decreased quality of life for young doctors. Dr. Gerald Pijanowski, Associate Dean for academic and student affairs, University of Illinois, says the mean student debt at graduation is \$50,000. Grads need to dedicate 10% of their income to paying down debt.

Financial management courses to prepare students for the real world after graduation are imperative.

## **Support Staff**

No “Us versus Them” attitude

Rotate on call between Dr.s and post an RVT on call with a pager as well.

**Continuing Education plan** – Encourage learning. Share new techniques.

**Bedside manner** - Dr.s survived school because of drive. School doesn't include a module on decorum. Dr's need to see this skill modeled to acquire it.

## **Dr Associate**

### **To benefit the team**

**Adaptability** – cooperative, responsible Dr.s that work well on their own will have the best chance of meshing with the team

**Supervisory/developmental planning** – getting people to do their work doesn't just happen. Good supervisors need training.

**Train the trainer** –there will be skills to impart but staff won't necessarily know “how” to impart them. Learning how people learn is a whole topic in and of itself

### **To benefit Dr. Associate**

**Clarity and long range planning**– Dr.s looking to become partners or start their own practice should say so. If the answer to buying in or practice ownership is a resounding YES, then clarify by estimating a date. Formulate a plan, agree to it and execute.

**Work life Balance** – juggling home, kids, career and finances is tough. Harmony at work is icing on the cake.

## **Client Services**

### **To benefit the team**

**Interpersonal skills** - maturity, organized, possessing exceptional customer service skills

**Staying power** – hospitals need their key front people to stay put for continuity of care.

**Compassion** -seeing pets in pain and dealing with Euthanasia's is tough. We laud client services staff for their caring, then tell them not to be so “sensitive”. They may suffer from compassion fatigue. This is an occupational hazard that can affect any member of the team.

**Multi-tasking - Triage** Need to be able to juggle many different tasks, switch gears easily and prioritize what needs to be done first.

**Patience and perseverance** - Must be able to run reminders, handle phones ringing, barking dogs, impatient owners, a printer jam and a delivery without breaking a sweat.

### **To benefit Client Services**

- Career path
- Job description
- Wage expectations
- Objectives
- Need to feel valued and heard
- Compensated for performance – i.e. callbacks, reminders, full apt book etc.

- Continuing Education

## **RVT,LVT,CVT**

### **To benefit the team**

- Standards of care
- Leverage technicians abilities to increase profitability
- Acknowledge skill level of RVT's versus lay staff
- Agree to level of utilization in accordance with state/provincial laws

### **To benefit RVT'S**

- Utilize all areas of skill
- Continual challenge
- Pay linked to increasing levels of responsibility and income generated, not tenure
- Career path
- Continuing Education
- Clearly defined, legally acceptable duties (state governing body),
- Association memberships
- Benefits
- Uniforms

## **Animal Care**

### **To benefit the team**

- Responsible for well-being of pets in wards
- Understand link between cleanliness/disease prevention
- Able to give meds, check bandages,
- Understand nutrition for sick/well pets
- Understand canine/feline behaviour
- Safe handling and restraint

### **To benefit Animal Care**

- Enjoys working with animals
- Does not require a higher education
- Satisfied doing less demanding job
- Work independently
- Enjoy repetitive tasks
- Doesn't mind shift work
- Understands limited chances for advancement
- Enjoys team
- May need secondary or supplemental income.

## **Practice Manager, Hospital Administrator**

### **To benefit the team**

- An environment of cooperation and group learning, encouraging team members to fully develop their skills and ideas.

### **To benefit practice managers**

- Clearly defined authority,

- A business plan, budget, financial goals
- A long-term vision for facility and team.
- Team(s) to lead
- Staff to delegate to
- Support network and resources of the VHMA
- Support of local VMA
- Continuing education

Essential skills required:

- Managing change and conflict
- Hiring, training, mentoring staff
- Rewarding and Disciplining
- Terminating effectively
- Refining objectives with staff
- Delegating, motivating and negotiating
- Giving feedback effectively
- Project management
- Organizational development

## **Terms Defined**

**Self-Directed Team** - group working toward a common goal that team defines. Team does own schedules, training and recognition. Functions as a profit center, handling compensation, discipline, defining future goals and direction.

**Compassion Fatigue** - Vicarious trauma suffered when healthcare providers find themselves having difficulty with the grief process.

## **Abbreviations**

NCVEI – National Commission on Veterinary Economic Issues

LLP – Limited Liability Partnership

ROI – Return on Investment

## **Recommended reading**

Harvard Business Review 1987 - How Do You Motivate Employees? Hertzberg

KPMG Study

Brakke Study

*Websites:*

<http://www.avma.org/>

<http://www.vhma.org/>

<http://www.vpc.com/>

## **Books**

Who Moved my Cheese? Spencer Johnson M.D.

Boom Bust and Echo – David Foote

New Veterinarians Survival Primer – VPC Consultants, Catanzaro and Assoc.