

Enhancing Staff Productivity

By Lauren O'Leary RVT CVPM

Overview:

The dictionary has many definitions of productivity:

- Rate at which goods or services are produced per unit of labour
- To bring effective results, benefits or profits
- The quality or power of producing in abundance

For farmers, productivity is often referred to as "yield". Farmers discuss units of measure to gauge productivity, like bushels per acre.

Remember the old adage if you can't measure it you can't manage it.

It's easy to enhance staff productivity in veterinary practice, isn't it? Simply jam in more visits or surgeries that day and calculate the Average Dollars per transaction. You'll look great.

In reality, it's about making client visits more convenient, less stressful, with less waiting time and more follow up. Enhancing staff productivity is a fine balance of improving efficiency without compromising quality.

It's much more than stats and key performance indicators. Numbers can always be influenced. It's about teamwork. Teamwork builds loyalty and loyalty builds profits. The single most important factor to any profitable business is the productivity of the staff. Leveraging well trained staff
Allows clinics the freedom to increase productivity and profitability without additional doctors.

Getting there is a combination of the following:

- Hiring for attitude and flexibility.
- Rewarding staff that welcome change and embrace it.
- Setting up programs to "Train and Retain"
- Empowering staff to create solutions.
- Following through on changes.

If you use "open book" accounting, Bravo! Showing staff how the business runs encourages employees to become higher producers. They can see procedures falling through the cracks and will be instrumental in preventing it from happening in the future.

Basics

Share your passion. Give them a clear sense of direction by outlining your business plan and leadership style. Define your vision, focus, and long-range financial goals.

Leadership - Managers leading by example reap many benefits. Instilling in staff the value of going one step further than clients expect. Clients remember, staff are proud, and both tell friends. Set the stage for staff to discover talents, to mentor and to delegate. Encourage staff to "act like an owner" - making decisions like the money they spend is their own.

Mentoring - "Farming" for good staff members is comparable to mentoring. A good practice manager has a "farm team" that steps in and fills gaps seamlessly when necessary. They know how you react and that you will back them on their decisions. This results in the formation of self directed work teams. Life is simpler, trust is greater, and teams are built.

Management Style - Clarify the style staff prefer to be at their most productive. Some thrive with "hands on" leadership style with lots of direction, while others prefer a "hands off" approach where you are available only if

they need you. There are those that produce best when left on their own. If you over manage – they will under produce.

Continuous Improvement - Staff that are challenged to upgrade and use their skills stay longer and have a greater sense of worth. Set them up for success with small projects to build confidence. Celebrate those successes.

Career Path - Make it clear that this is not a dead end job; there is room for advancement. Employees should be given a copy of their job description, mission, vision and goals. These are to be signed, and placed in their employee record. There are levels of skills to attain and tasks to be delegated. Staff must embrace continuous improvement not complacency. They can make a difference.

Culture of Change – Embracing change creates an atmosphere where increasing productivity becomes a focus within the team. Staff thrive on finding new ways to streamline processes, reduce costs and increase compliance. The team provides solutions, plans, and budgets for areas being updated, encouraging staff to take initiative and manage risks.

Employee satisfaction is closely linked to this culture and productivity. If staff are stressed, production declines – just like animals on the farm.

- Give staff clear, job descriptions with stretch objectives.
- Review goals semi-annually to avoid ambiguity.
- Ensure staff have a current policy and procedure manual
- Recognize that responsibility allows staff to feel valued.
- Train staff to make decisions that increase client satisfaction.

Vacation - Remember to recharge those batteries. Studies show staff are more productive after holidays. Clinics need to recognize that overworking staff drains productivity leading to burn out.

Core Values - You can't control their home life but you can foster a positive work environment with solid core values as listed below:

- Honesty and integrity
- Respect and trust
- Team atmosphere
- Continuous learning
- Pets always come first

Staff Worth - Happy, well trained, staff are more productive, creating an atmosphere of calm, where clients feel more comfortable asking for advice about their pets. Clients tell their friends, and this makes the door swing. Conversely, clients can sense when there is tension or infighting and will be hesitant to leave their pets at the hospital. Conflict costs! The following is an actual example provided by a nurse in New England. The conflict occurred between a doctor and two nurses in a patient care facility. How much is conflict costing your practice?

FACTOR/DESCRIPTION	Loss	Loss units	Nurse A	Loss	Loss units	Nurse B	Loss	Loss units	Doc
Salary			\$22,000.00			\$33,500			\$100,000
Salary + benefits			\$33,000.00			\$50,250			\$150,000
Workweek hours			37.5			28.0			37.5
Length of unresolved conflict			52.0			12.0			52.0
1) Wasted time/energy	3.0	hrs/wk	\$609.23	5.0	hrs/wk	\$2,070.74	2	hrs/wk	\$1,846.15
total \$ wasted time			\$4,526.13						
2) Reduced Decision Quality			\$1,500.00						
3) Loss of Skilled Employees	4.0	empl	\$42,000.00						
employee #1	salary	\$22,000	dec. factor	1.0		\$33,000			
employee #2	salary	\$20,000	dec. factor	0.3		\$9,000			

employee #3	salary	\$20,000	dec. factor	1.0				
employee #4	salary	\$20,000	dec. factor	0.3				
4) Restructuring	2.0	empl	\$1,858.33					
employee #1	salary	\$33,750						
employee #2	salary	\$22,000						
5) Sabotage/Theft/Damage								
6) Lowered Job Motivation			\$2,938					
employee #1	salary	\$33,500	prod loss(wks)	8.0	%decl	40%		
employee #2	salary	\$22,000	prod loss(wks)	52.0	%decl	20%		
employee #3	salary	\$20,000	prod loss(wks)	1.0	%decl	20%		
employee #4	salary	\$20,000	prod loss(wks)	20.0	%decl	20%		
7) Lost Work Time			\$9,300.00					
employee #1	salary	\$37,500	\$3,750.00					
employee #2	salary	\$22,000	\$2,200.00					
employee #3	salary	\$33,500	\$3,350.00					
8) Health Costs			\$293.85					
TOTAL COST OF CONFLICT			\$60,916.77					

The cost of turnover has also long been debated and the impact is substantial. Below is a chart from Cynthia Wutchiett, CPA. Estimating the cost of losing an \$8.00/hour staff member at \$13,500. Clearly, we need to place more emphasis on retention programs.

Hiring cost	\$600.00
Departing inefficiency	\$350.00
Other staff inefficiency	\$350.00
Vacancy inefficiency	\$3600.00
Staff training inefficiency	\$4,300.0
New employee inefficiency	<u>\$4,300.00</u>
Total cost of Turnover:	\$13,500

*Note this is for an \$8.00/hour employee not an \$80,000 associate. This does not include the value assigned to the loss of a valued client or her future referrals.

If your practice has a revolving door where staff are walking in and walking out – teams cannot be built and productivity will suffer markedly. Learn to hire for attitude and flexibility, work to retain staff, and save yourself grief and money. If you have difficulty hiring – outsource.

Trust – You can't leverage staff without trusting them first.

Leveraging staff - Once you trust them, utilize them. Staff leave when their skills are under utilized. There are only so many doctor hours per day – the less you use them, the more productive the practice will be.

Dr's only diagnose, prescribe and do surgery

Standards of Care – Every staff member needs written, easily accessible, protocols and standards of care. This clarifies what is expected in terms of treatment and follow through. AAHA's new standards of care CD will help to communicate those standards to staff.

Ex. "Here at ABC vet clinic we include a patent venous access and IV fluids throughout surgery. All pets have presurgical blood screening and post surgical pain relief. This is our standard of care."

Training – Retain staff through effective, targeted training programs that foster your standards of care.

Increasing compliance – Transform recommendations to booked appointments.

“We think Muffy could use this dental”

Changes to

“This is what Muffy needs today”

Clients won't “comply” unless they know that the services offered are filling a need or solving a problem.

Talk in terms of benefits - it's all about solving problems

Ex. “What this means to you Mrs. Jones is that after Muffy's dentistry her breath will be fresh and she'll be able to eat without any pain.”

Is this the level of care you would like for Muffy today?

Walk the Talk - The team must have one message for clients. Ultimately, having staff use the services themselves shows clients their level of conviction.

Follow Up – don't let treatments fall through the cracks – monitor medical records to prevent this from happening in your clinic.

Passive income – the success of ancillary sales depends on staff. Ensure they know a point of differentiation about your services so they are keen about recommending them.

Issues

Do these red flags wave at your clinic?

- Records not complete in time for invoicing
- Missed revenue
- No time for follow up
- Outdated or unused policies and procedures
- Gaps in standards of care
- Excessive costs
- Overwhelmed and disorganized staff
- Increased overhead
- Unclear roles and responsibilities
- Too much time spent on paper work

Options

Improve processes by:

- Remove everything to do with money from Doctors/owners.
- Use travel sheets to prevent missed charges.
- Analyze schedules in your facility
- Identify Zones in the hospital
- Eliminate overstaffing during slow times,
- Ensure appropriate staffing during peak times
- Increase funds available for reinvestment into salaries
- Implement retention and benefits programs.
- Identifying areas of waste:
 - Time
 - Money
 - Energy
 - Products
 - Supplies
- Maximize use of resources

- Staff members,
- Schedules,
- Equipment,
- Time spent on the phone,
- Steps on the computer,
- Cost of supplies

Recommended reading

- The Path to High Quality Care, Practical Tips for Improving compliance - Hill's/AAHA
1001 ways to motivate, empower staff – Bob Levoy
- 101 secrets of a High performance Vet practice – Bob Levoy
- Journal of Health Care Management - American College of HealthCare Executives
- Veterinary Practice Management Secrets – Thomas Catanzaro, DVM, MHA, FACHE,
Philip Seibert, Jr. CVT

Tools

- <http://www.mediationworks.com/> Cost of conflict calculator
- AAHA Standard of Care CD

Websites

<http://www.ncvei.org/>
<http://www.ebc.com/>
<http://www.4act.com>