TURN THE NEGATIVITY AROUND: HOW TO CONVERT A TEAM'S THINKING
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Introduction

Working in veterinary medicine can be difficult because it involves working in a team. So many went into the industry thinking that they enjoyed animals more than people only to find out that they work with people the same amount, if not more. In hospital settings it is a matter of life and death on a daily basis for patients. In order to perform even the simplest task, like drawing blood, team members must work side-by-side with each other. This is unlike human medicine were often times the registered nurse performs phlebotomy solo. The stress of day-to-day experiences, coupled with having to work so very closely if not on top of each other, can result in a stressful work environment. Being a great team member not only allows for better experience for everyone else but yourself as well.

The Team Members

People leave managers, not jobs. That saying is mostly true, but it can be argued that people also leave bad teams with bad morale. Usually the teams that have bad morale and high turnover are the direct result of also bad managements. Rarely, but sometimes, a team member may leave a job simply because they want a challenge outside of what the company can offer.

That said I personally worked in a veterinary hospital where the management was terrible, but my team was amazing. I stayed because of the amazing team members that I had working alongside me.

A team is made up of many individuals all with different personalities. There are many personality testing software's and theories out there that attempt to classify one's personality. There is no exact or perfect testing method, but certainly having a good understanding of the different types of personalities out there allows any team member to interact with their coworker in a more productive manner.

One of the more popular method is the Myers-Briggs personality test which categorizes people into 16 different personality types. It is based on the conceptual theory that was proposed by Carl Jung and created by Katharine Cook Briggs in the early 1900s. It is such a popular personality classification system that numerous websites, including www.16personalities.com, offer tests to classify you into one of the 16 different personality types. There are four main groupings of personalities with two choices in each group.

- People tend to be either extroverted or introverted.
  - Extroverts tend to drawl energy from action. They like crowds and they react first and think later. Solitude is stressful to them and take more energy than interacting with people. Being with people recharges them.
  - Introverts tend to drawl energy from inaction. They are thinkers first and react second. Crowds are stressful to them and take more energy than being alone. Being alone recharges them.
- People tend to be either sensing or intuition
  - Sensors tend to focus on real senses they can see, touch and feel. They trust the information that a tangible and that they can see.
  - Intuition individuals tend to focus on possibilities. They learn from larger experiences and can apply it to what could be in the future.
- People are either thinkers or feelers
  - The thinkers tend to be over analytical and they do not use feelings to place judgment on a decision
  - Feelers tend to look at the impact it would have on those around them and take into consideration others' feelings
- People are either judging or perceiving

o Judging individuals like to live in a very organized manner. They feel satisfied when a plan comes to a closure. They like planning and organization
o Perceiving individuals like to keep options open. They are spontaneous and adaptable.

While there are plenty of ways to categorize human behavior, the Myers-Briggs method is certainly one that many people enjoy and can relate to. There are certainly people who are very extroverted and people that are very much thinkers. There are also people who fall in the middle. Having the team take a Myers-Briggs test or other personality test will allow the members to understand how best to interact with each other.

The 10 Key Traits of Being a Great Team Member

- **Start the Day Off On a Good Foot**
- **Be Kind, Respectful, & Polite to Each Other**
- **Own Your Mistakes & Be Honest**
- **Be a Cheerleader**
- **Be Helpful**
- **Be Engaged & Have a Good Work Ethic**
- **Don't Gossip & Assume Good Intention**
- **Remember It's ONE team**
- **Create Moments of Laughter & Fun**
- **End the Day With a Unicorn Flying By**

Starting the Day

In veterinary medicine all team members perform shiftwork. It might be an overnight shift or day shift, but team members are expected to arrive and end the shift at a certain time. In order to start the day off on a good foot (or perhaps it's the night you are starting) you must arrive on time. This doesn't mean just in the nick of time. You must arrive before your shift, put away your belongings, check your cell phone one last time, and be ready to work at the start of the shift.

Say hello to your team members. Say something nice. The first words out of your mouth should not complaining. Starting the day off with the complaint sets the tone for the rest of the day. No one wants to hear about how you're tired and you didn't want to come into work. Probably several other team members feel the same way. Complaining just breeds negativity. Don't let it be the very first thing that exits your mouth when you walk into work. Instead, put in a few positive sentences before maybe adding in about how you are tired and would rather sleep in.

Be Kind, Respectful & Polite To Each Other

This seems to go without saying, but it is difficult to remember this when there is a patient who is not doing well or a client yelling at you. If the exam room appointment start getting backed up and a technician is taking longer than usual to read a blood smear or a fecal things get said that are not kind. One of the largest issues in veterinary medicine is that people forget to be polite, kind and respectful to each other.

No one should be permitted to yell at each other. It simply should not be tolerated. Throwing of items or slamming things on tasks should be immediate reasons that an employee is written up. While at times it seems

like a casual place of employment, it is a working hospital performing medicine. It is a professional environment that many times employees forget to be professional in.

If there is a heated exchange of words or actions it should be immediately corrected once the individuals have had time to reflect on the inappropriate behavior. They need to apologize in order to mend the relationship they have as team members. And while they may not agree with each other, they need to agree that they are working towards the same common goal and will treat each other in a more respectful manner moving forward.

Team members should not be permitted should not be permitted to curse frequently. There may be a rare instance where cursing happens. The team member who said the bad word, should apologize and make it known that it was inappropriate behavior but that they were reacting to the situation. Cursing directly at a team member is grounds for immediate action from a manager.

Above all else it is important to remember that every team member works in a professional environment. Maintaining professionalism and being polite and respectful is important to good team health.

Don't Gossip & Assume Good Intention

Just don't do it. When team members gossip it breeds distrust. The trust in a team comes from a respectful and healthy relationship. It's okay to make mistakes. Everyone does. However, if people gossip about the person who made the mistake behind their back and that individual finds out it becomes a very bad team. Even if the person doesn't find out, anyone who makes a future mistake will assume that they too will be the brunt of gossip.

A good team is built on trust. Gossip is defined as talking about someone when they are not present. Gossiping makes people feel uncomfortable and they will shut down and become resentful. The person who is gossiping requires attention or acknowledgment of what they are saying. It is hard for those who are listening to the gossip to disagree with the gossiper. Disagreeing with someone who is gossiping creates conflict. No one likes conflict when they have to work in a team environment. So, even if individuals disagree with the gossip up they are often times left with just agreeing to get through the situation. Gossiping makes everyone except for the person who is doing it uncomfortable.

Since most gossip is about something someone did wrong or how someone is bad or how something is annoying, the best rule of thumb is to "Assume Good Intention". If all team members can assume good intention from clients and each other and it will make for a better team environment. Assuming good intentions and not gossiping go hand-in-hand.

Getting off the phone and complaining about a client who called in for a silly question about their cat's medical health and about how much time they took out of your day is gossiping. It's also not assuming good intention. The client had good intention. They were worried about their cat. You work in veterinary medicine. You share a same love of animals as that client. Their only intention is to do right by their cat. Maybe they don't have all the answers or maybe they're not going about it the right way but the end result is they are trying to have good intention for their cat. When you get off the phone and talk about how the client is "stupid" and "annoying" and "wasted 15 minutes of your day" that is the opposite of assuming good intention. It also is gossiping. It is unlikely that your coworkers want to hear you go on and on about the client on the phone. They have other things to worry about. The reason why you are upset and gossiping in a negative way about that client is because you did not assume good intention. Take a moment to have compassion for them and assume good intention.

This same scenario can be used with your coworkers. The doctor wasn't trying to make your life harder because they forgot to write a prescription that you asked them to do three times. They were busy and they had good intention doing other things. Maybe they simply forgot. It was not however their personal vendetta against you to not write the prescription. Don't gossip about it. Assume good intention.

Assume Good Intention & Rethink

Reframing is really about rethinking a thought and assuming good intention. Again, it's exhausting being miserable all the time. The first step of reframing something from negative to positive is to recognize your thoughts. Being self-conscious and self-aware of the thoughts that you are having it Is truly the first stop in reshaping your mindset.

Some ideas to become cognizant of your thoughts is to keep a journal where you write all the negative thoughts down for that day. You can also try the rubber band technique where you have a rubber band on your wrist and every time you consciously recognize you are producing a negative thought you snap it as a reminder it was negative.

The second step is to really recognize overthinking a thought. A lot of negativity comes from over analyzing thoughts. One dwells or accesses over a thought resulting in very negative behaviors. You can keep a journal of what that thought it was, right a solution to that negative thought and then write how many times you are aware of obsessing over that thought. The last step of this is then to write the positivity about that thought.

Practice Reframing
        You can practice reframing with a team or even yourself. Right now to 5 to 10 negative sentences and have the team reframe them into positivity. One example is "this dog won't stop having diarrhea all over the hospital." A positive reframe to that is "at least the dog is not having it on you (or in your mouth)." Reframing can provide humor in the situation or shape it so it's not so negative where everyone dwells on the negativity. On a simplistic level if everyone talks about how they dislike this dog because it has diarrhea, this dog will be disliked. More people will be more apt to grumble about this patient and even get irate over this patient. In the end, it's not really that big of a deal that the dog having diarrhea. We work in veterinary medicine. It is how we perceive this situation and handle it whether or not it is stressful or not.

Remember ONE Team
        You are part of one hospital team. Within the hospital team there may be smaller teams. There may be the front office team or the management team, but regardless you all work in the same hospital. You are all striving for the same goal. No team is better than the other so please, don't start the team wars.
        If a team member is struggling in a different department or area of the hospital you don't normally work, but you're able to help them even if it's not the best help, do so. They are your coworker. If you see the front office staff struggling to answer the phones, answer a phone. You may not know the answer to the client's question, but that's okay. You can put them on hold or explain to them that the front office is busy and you're going to try to get the answer for them. It's okay to say that you don't normally work in a certain area of the hospital but you're doing your best to help.
        Be respectful of the fact that that individual has to do their main job to do. If the team member is constantly being pulled away from their main job then it will cause more stress within their team. It's important to remember that each team member has a very specific job within the hospital in order for the hospital to function best. Most of that team members job must be dedicated to their original job description. It's okay to ask for their help, but don't be upset if they truly can't because there is a more pressing issue in their team that they need to deal with. The person who has declined to help another area of the hospital should provide a reason OR provide a timeline that they could be able to help them. "I'm just finishing up with this patient and then I can come over in about five minutes to help restrain that dog."
        Ultimately it is important to remember that every job is important in that hospital. There is not one that is more important than the other. Doctors would not have appointments if the front office did not make them. Technicians would not have patient orders if doctors did not provide them. Front office would not have phones to answer if doctors did not see patients. Remembering that you are all part of the same hospital is important so that you can help each other when time allows. It is every single team members job to help each other out.

Create Moments of Laughter & Fun
        The best team member is a fun team member. For those that are introverted this doesn't mean you have to be the life of the party. However, even an introvert knows what is fun. Maybe it simply bringing in some chocolate or its playing a good song. Maybe it's printing out a picture of a unicorn and putting someone's name underneath it. Maybe it's wearing a silly hat or breaking out into crazy dance moves. And it could be as simple as laughing over something that is not going quite as planned. "Today really stinks like the biggest pile of stinky poop, right" "Yes, it smells like HGE met IBD"

If you do not have fun then you likely will not last in that particular job for very long. It can be argued that you spend more time with those that your job then you do with your family and friends. It's important to have fun with them. If you notice a team member struggling, hitting the keys of the keyboard in an angry fashion or maybe just not talking like they usually do, put a candy bar in front of them. That usually gets them to smile.

There has to be silly moments of laughter and fun throughout the day. The best teammate ensures those moments happen.

Ending The Day With a Unicorn Flying By

There has to be a good end to the day. A good teammate will take in the day and be good to their coworkers on the way out. Say goodbye. Don't just walk out the door. Even though veterinary medicine a shift work, it is very rare that the team members leave exactly at the time they are scheduled to. Don't be the team member that runs out the door exactly at 5:00 PM.

If your hospital works on multiple shifts, potentially 24 hours or even evening shifts, set the next shift up for success. You should leave the end of your shift as if a unicorn ran by and made everything perfect the way you would want it when you came in for your shift. Set the next team up for success and that will make you a good team member. Remember that even though you may not work with the next shift they are still part of your team.

End on a high note. It might have been a terrible day but you all stuck it out and no one ran out of the hospital crying. It's okay if that was the only good thing that happened. Laugh and say "Today was not a good day, but we all stuck it out and no one ran out of the building with their hands above their heads screaming." That's a positive end to the day. Ideally the wins for the day will be bigger. It may be a simple "good job everyone" or "see you all tomorrow" or "I can't wait to see Mrs. Smith's new puppy tomorrow". Regardless, there should be some conclusive statement that is overall positive to end the day from every team member.

Remember that if you are the team member who didn't stock the drawer or left the trash overfilling, it will either be there for you the next day or your teammate who comes in for the next shift is not going to be happy. End the day with a unicorn not a pile of trash.

A Good Team Member

A good team member is one that is engaged, comes in on time, helps out their fellow team members, doesn't gossip, smiles, and create moments of laughter. Just think about someone who does all those things and you likely want them as part of your team. Recognizing that there are so many types of personalities out there and realizing that none of them are better than the other is important. By understanding a little bit about personalities and assuming good intention while being kind you can be an amazing team member. Happiness and laughter means that when you go home at the end of the day you don't spend an hour venting to your family and friends. It means you have an easier life that can be more enjoyable. Being a good team member means that you want your job to be enjoyable so that you can go home stress-free and enjoy the other parts of your life. If everybody could have that mindset we would have great teams in every hospital.