

STAFF MEETINGS SUCK AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

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The Beatings Will Continue Until the Morale Improves-Captain Bligh, Mutiny on the Bounty

You may have heard or read the above quote. What would you think if you saw it in the treatment area of a veterinary practice?

The same treatment area where staff meetings are conducted; the same treatment area where staff meetings are conducted with this quote as the mantra. Motivating? NOT!!

Why have staff meetings (and meetings in general) become so hated? It has a lot to do with the fact that most meetings are conducted with no reason, no vision, and no plan in mind.

Running effective, efficient, and productive Staff Meetings is truly needed for successful practices and successful teams.

WHAT is a staff meeting?

It is an opportunity to bring a group of people together to learn, teach, share, and work to improve a business. It is a perfect time to celebrate successes.

WHAT a staff meeting is NOT?

It is NOT an opportunity to publicly embarrass, lambast, or beat on individuals or teams for doing or not doing. This is just one of the many reasons that staff meetings are feared, hated, avoided, and ignored.

WHO should be there?

If possible, everybody. If not possible, everybody. The meeting provides a chance to address teaching by doing it once with everybody there to learn. It allows for questions to be asked and answered and everybody gets the same answer.

WHEN should a meeting be held?

The \$1 million question! The answer is when the most people can there; the day-to-day operations are least disrupted; and, the greatest attention span is attainable. End of day meetings frequently have exhausted attendees. First thing in the morning meetings can disrupt getting started. Mid-day meetings also come with their own issues. Weekend? If you can get consensus, sure!

We scheduled our staff meetings the first and third Wednesday of the month from 1230-230. Mid-day was the best to get as many people as possible. And we were consistent!!! Be consistent!

WHERE is a good place to conduct a meeting?

Convenience is the best answer. A restaurant, bank, hotel, etc. are all good options. However, since most staff meetings are conducted during the business day, the practice is frequently the best location. If your staff lounge isn't big enough or there isn't a conference room, the treatment area or the reception area will work. Except for the distractions.

HOW to deal with or avoid distractions?

The telephone, the front door, and the animals are just a few of the distractions to having an effective, focused meeting. To send the message of the importance of a meeting, I would suggest that:

1. Telephones are forwarded to an answering machine with a message that only emergency calls will be handled during the meeting and a cellphone number to call.
2. The front door is locked. A sign on the front door should be ubiquitous stating that you are closed for a staff education meeting and to make arrangements for pick ups and drops off before or after the meeting. If there is an emergency, please call.
3. Set up your appointment book for Staff Meeting days so that: outpatient appointments are completed well before the scheduled start of the meeting; the number of surgery and dental procedures are limited to ensure completion with plenty of time for the meeting.

HOW long should the meeting be?

Too long and you lose people. Too short and you can't get our message across. Of the two hours we set aside, the goal was to accomplish the meeting portion in less than an hour. Of course, we frequently ran long.

HOW to conduct?

Truly effective staff meetings have an agenda. This agenda is a template that is used every meeting and is followed and adhered to. There will be repeat line items on the agenda every month. And there will be new items.

We liked to spend at least half of the meeting teaching a clinical or business related topic that can help patient care or client care. How did we pick the topic(s)? We asked the staff what they wanted to learn!!

WHO conducts?

One of the best staff meetings I participated in was conducted by a receptionist and a technician from an emergency clinic. They talked about CBCs from a client service and education standpoint AND from a clinical and process standpoint. They also handled the rest of the agenda.

WHAT is an agenda?

All meetings have an agenda. Each agenda item should have a time limit to complete. And each agenda item should have a person (or people) who will conduct the topic. The agenda is built by the team in conjunction with management. There will be topics that are consistent from meeting to meeting, for example:

1. Clinical discussion of the month
2. Case/patient of the month
3. How did we do compared to our goals
4. What are our goals for next month
5. Employee accolades
6. General areas of concern

Consider putting the agenda items in the form of a question and definitely put them in order of importance. Most important items **MUST** be completed first.

Post a white board in the staff lounge or somewhere where people can post ideas for meetings or issues that need to be discussed.

WHAT about minutes?

Absolutely!! Assign one staff member to take notes on the meeting. This role could/should rotate from month to month. Each staff member is provided with the minutes within 10 days of the meeting.

WHY, if staff meetings are so onerous, do we need them?

No sports team will go on the field without knowing what they are doing. Teams train everyday and practice every day to give the best performance on the field. Veterinary medicine is a team sport. We are performing everyday and what we do everyday has a life and death component. Doesn't it make sense to meet routinely to improve communications, knowledge and outcomes? Staff meetings are not a forum for telling people how bad they are performing they are a forum to bring people together to enhance performance. Think of staff meetings as opportunities to **PREVENT** problems NOT opportunities to treat problems.

WHAT about problem solving?

Praise in public. Punish or admonish in private.

Like training a puppy, if you don't address the issue when it occurs, the mistake is long forgotten when the punishment is administered. Most mistakes are training failures.

WHAT else?

Consider recording the staff meetings and thus create a learning library for new hires.

Those who can't attend **MUST** watch the recording and complete a quiz.

Consider having quizzes at the end of the meeting that are used to reinforce the teaching points and that 100% scores are rewarded with gift cards.

Be consistent in the day, time, agenda, minutes, etc.

Owners are best as cheerleaders and resources.

Associates are great teachers.

Did I say food?

And, yes, they are paid!

And, yes, owners are there –what message does it send when the owner doesn't think it important enough to show up for a meeting that will benefit their practice.

And, yes, associates are there- what message does it send to a team when some people don't have to be there.

HOW to have fun?

Once you get past the need to use staff meetings for a focus on negativity, you now have an opportunity to focus on positivity and teaching. So, how can you make meetings fun?

BE POSITIVE---that alone should be sufficient. But if it isn't enough, then:

Let different staff members choose the theme for the meetings based upon what they want teach

Let client service people learn some technical skills- microscopes, radiographs, dental grades

Food is fun---vary your menu

Role playing or Karaoke---something that helps learning by doing

Dress up as your favorite (or least favorite) client

Conduct meetings off site at a fun location with team building as the focus

Pick a pet of the month and or client of the month

Use as many visuals as possible---videos, demonstrations

Talk less, show more

Make sure everybody has something nice to say about somebody else

Recognize those that went above and beyond

KEEP the meeting short, focused

Celebrate Success!!

When asked why they don't have staff meetings more often, veterinarians reply with one or more of the following:

1. It costs me to close down and have a meeting
2. It costs me to feed and pay them to be there
3. It costs me because nobody pays attention and it becomes nothing more than a gripe session
4. Why should I bother training anybody, they are just going to leave anyway.

My answer to the above is:

It costs you NOT to train your staff in poor client service, mistakes, poor communication, and lost patients and clients. Well-run Staff Meetings are proven to improve communications, happiness, and prevent problems. Now, just add some fun!!