

LEADERSHIP AND TEAM BUILDING FOR PRACTICE SUCCESS

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LEADERSHIP

Your DVM, CVPM or other title does NOT automatically come with respect from the veterinary hospital team and most definitely doesn't mean you are a leader. If you want to be a leader in your practice, you have to EARN IT.

When asked what people expect from their leader, there were some definitive attributes that the majority of people look for:

- Honest, truthful, character, trusting
- Creativity, Forward looking, visionary, fore-sighted, sense of direction
- Motivating, Inspiring, uplifting, enthusiastic, cheerful, humorous, optimistic
- Team Builder, Competent, capable, proficient, professional

To earn your leadership stripes, you must exhibit the attributes noted. It takes time to achieve the trust needed to be a leader. It takes seconds to lose it. When you demonstrate honesty, vision, inspiration, and competency, you will be a leader in your practice.

People, who work with leaders they admire and respect, feel good about themselves. Strong leaders set their team free to accomplish levels of success not seen previously. Credible leaders raise self-esteem of those around them by the trust they show in them. Leaders make a difference in the lives around them and those around them make a difference in other lives.

Leadership is a relationship based upon trust and credibility. They are the foundation of being a great leader. The people around you have to believe in you before they will willingly follow you. You must earn the trust and confidence of the team to be a leader. Being the leader of veterinary hospital team is no greater feeling. The saving of a life or the counseling of a terminally ill patient/client or the bonding of a new client to your practice are the culmination of the efforts of everybody working together like championship team under your leadership. When the energy of the group comes together, what can be accomplished is amazing.

All in all, leadership has many definitions. But, when all is said and done, the most important requirement for a leader is to have followers.

LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

Strong leadership is supported by four integral concepts, the practice must have:

- A vision
- A mission
- Core Values
- Standards of Care

VISION- a compelling vision statement answers the question: "WHERE ARE WE GOING?"

MISSION STATEMENT—is the sense of purpose that a leader and the team work under. It answers the question: "WHY ARE WE HERE?"

CORE VALUES—the principles under which everything is done by the team, including the leadership, answers the question: “HOW WILL WE BEHAVE AS WE WORK TOGETHER?”

And finally, the STANDARDS OF CARE are the set of consistent approaches to the delivery of healthcare within the practice. These standards are based upon a community standard but are unique to each practice and answer the question, “HOW WILL WE DO IT HERE?”

The role of leadership in successful veterinary practices is to help employees know their role; help employees succeed; and, in doing so, to help the practice to succeed. In conjunction with managers, they help the team answer the question: “WHO WILL DO WHAT BY WHEN?” Managing the dream or vision is the responsibility of the Leader. The ultimate objective of the leadership and management team is the successful accomplishment of the goals and objectives through their people.

COMMUNICATION

What should be the top priority of all successful leaders? COMMUNICATION--clear, honest, frequent, frank communication using a variety of tools (memos, meetings, coaching, etc.) to ensure that key messages are reaching and engaging EVERYONE. The secret is to communicate effectively. That means information is given AND received in each exchange.

Rule of thumb: “About the time you are sick of talking about something is about the time your employees are starting to get it.”

Recognize that even in the most successful business, less than 50% of the employees are clear about what the business is trying to achieve and what is expected of them to help achieve.

Successful leaders make their followers successful and by doing so make their practice thrive.

The trust you build and the actions you agree to take are essential steps toward becoming an exceptional practice and communication is foundational.

Veterinary medicine requires a team approach to be successful. No one individual makes a practice run effectively, efficiently and profitably. It takes a group of people, each with specific roles and responsibilities, to provide client service, patient care, at the highest level possible. To that end, it is the leadership of the team that determines:

- Who is on the team
- How well they work together
- What their goals and roles are
- Why they come to work in the morning
- And, whether the team plays together or falls apart.

Working in teams does not come easily for physicians who still most often see themselves as heroic lone healers. Nonetheless, developing teams is a key leadership function for healthcare providers of all types and a critical competency for veterinary leaders. The ability to build high performance teams confers a competitive advantage.

TEAM BUILDING

These days one of the greatest challenges in professional sports is the ability to keep a winning team together from year to year. Whether it is players aging, injuries or offers of more money, the bygone era is history.

Is your practice a model of the old sports teams OR do you emulate the revolving door model of the 21st Century? Based upon studies in virtually any industry, staff retention has an amazing impact on client retention. And client retention portends well for your business in any economic environment.

So, what can you do to keep your team together? What is it the staff members want? Can you ever satisfy them?

REQUIREMENTS FOR A TEAM

High performing teams have:

- Vision, Mission, Values, and Standards of Care
- Autonomy-- and are empowered to act and make decisions and choices with clear boundaries
- Relationships-- and open communication with no fear of taking risks or sharing their opinions
- Flexibility in that they are interdependent and each are responsible for the ultimate outcome of the team as a whole and are willing to change as needed to achieve their outcomes.
- Productivity by not just the quantity but the quality of the work done based upon high standards. Team members hold each other accountable and seek Continuous Quality Improvement.
- 3Rs—Respect, Responsibility, and Recognition.
 - Respect
 - Responsibility
 - Recognition- positive feedback, by the leadership and team mates.
- Great morale—enthusiasm--- pride

Bill Capodagli, author of “The Disney Way” notes:

“Putting together a culture where a people’s ideas are valued, and they’re respected, and they’re trusted is one of the most important things, and when people know that they are being trusted to do their work, they rise to levels that surprise even themselves many times.”

TIPS FOR PUTTING A TEAM TOGETHER THAT STAYS TOGETHER

Hire Slow, Fire Fast

Look for people who meet the culture of the team. Hire for personality and train to a level of competency and trust. When someone, with training and coaching doesn't meet the standards, it is better to let them go early on than carry them.

Hire Strong

If you need to scare off applicants, do so. A thorough job description and list of expectations should be shared early on in the process. The interview process should be reserved for those

that have been thoroughly screened. Use behavioral interview questions rather than just asking about past experiences. Challenge a candidate's ability to think on their feet

Use a Hiring Team

A team composed of various team members can be used for the initial stages of the hiring process. This team knows the culture and will look for people like themselves and will work very hard to identify people that they can work with.

Train to Make People Successful

Give people the tools they need to be successful right from the very first day and for every day that they are in your employment. Education adds value to the team members and to the clients and patients.

See Your Team as a Whole

Teamwork it makes the dream work. Envision the team working together right from the beginning. See it as a living, integrated system rather than a collection of individuals. The real challenging goal is to take a group of individuals and create a high performing team.

Ed Catmull, Pixar, "You can give a great idea to a mediocre team, they may screw it up. But, if you can give a mediocre idea to a great team, they'll turn it into a great product."

SUMMARY

Not all practices work. Not all leaders work. One of the most significant reasons for failure is the 'perception gap' between the hospital's leadership and their followers or team. The simple solution found by most Fortune 500 companies is to ensure that the leaders and their team ALL understand and support the business's mission, vision, and values.

Focus on "What you do" and "How you are going to do it", however you must have the "WHY" you are doing it to be successful.

Effective leadership is accomplishing the mission with minimum expenditure of personal time and effort and an appropriate balance between practice, staff, and individual needs and goals.

Emotional engagement is fundamentally more important to your company than intellectual engagement. You can instruct your team about the direction of your company. You can train them in the skills they need to move the company in that direction. But inspiring your people to use those skills and pursue those goals is another matter.

Traditional healthcare leaders try to buy time, fend off change, and maximize revenue under the existing system while they can. The new leaders focus on outcomes and use performance measurement as a motivating tool to organize their colleagues and drive improvements.

As the boss treats the staff, so will the staff treat the clients. The leader's vision and dream will be supported best when the team is led by example.