

TAKE CHARGE

From Chaos to Cohesion

Weekly meetings and daily huddles bring your practice's long- and short-term objectives into focus.

BY HEATHER PRENDERGAST, RVT, CVPM, SPHR

Veterinary practice leaders dream of the perfect team, one that is aligned, communicates well and delivers spectacular client experiences and top-notch patient care, all while treating each employee with respect. Wait. What? Is that possible? Yes, my friends. You can have your dream team if you create structure, inspire people and enhance communication. Read on.

Alignment Starts with You

Leaders must first share a practice's vision, core values and mission. When all team members understand how they contribute individually to the objectives and how to get there, they hold themselves and each other accountable.

Here is how it becomes your reality.

- **Define your practice's vision.** Where do you want your clinic to be in three years? The vision statement should be succinct so that every team member can easily recall it at any time.
- **Develop and define the core values.** Which behaviors should each team member demonstrate daily to deliver exceptional client experiences and outstanding patient care and support respectful interactions with each other? This step is a worthwhile team activity if you have not previously defined the core values.



- **Write a mission statement.** This is why everyone got into veterinary medicine — “Why we do what we do every day.” When team members can achieve their purpose, their cups are filled. When people love what they do, they deliver the behaviors expected in the core values and complete the tasks needed to achieve the practice's vision.

You, as a leader, must:

- Demonstrate the behaviors you expect every day. A strong team emulates its leader.
- Communicate well. The team should be able to finish your sentences.
- Integrate the practice's goals into everything — team meetings, huddles, the hiring process, employee onboarding, ongoing training, individual coaching sessions, performance reviews and strategic plans. Goals are not one and done. Live them, breathe them and demonstrate them every day.
- Connect employee roles to goals. Teach each department how its responsibilities contribute to goal achievement. Furthermore, ensure each role contributes to the success of other roles. Veterinary medicine is a team sport. We can't function without one another.
- Reward team members who demonstrate desired behaviors and achieve results.

Maintaining Alignment

Communication and transparency are key to an aligned team. Practice leaders must find multiple communication pathways to ensure all messages are heard, retained and perceived as intended. Remember that every team member retains information differently and might perceive messages differently based on individual experiences.

Here are two settings for delivering consistent messaging.

1 Team Meetings

Bringing everyone together helps them feel safe and included. Don't leave team meetings to chance. Be consistent with the scheduling.

- **Why:** Team alignment should be the No. 1 priority during the meeting. So that everyone delivers consistent client messaging and provides

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superb patient care, each person must be allowed to think critically and confidently and make decisions or recommendations autonomously. Identify the meeting's goals and expected outcomes and prepare an agenda to achieve those goals. Don't just have a meeting to have one. A specific purpose keeps the team engaged and participative to achieve the intended outcomes.

- ▶ **Who:** Every team member, including veterinarians. Because veterinary medicine is a team sport, every team member must participate.
- ▶ **How often:** Weekly.
- ▶ **How long:** 45 minutes to an hour is plenty of time to stay on top of hot issues, think critically and generate ideas that align with your practice's vision, values and mission.

2 Huddles

Just as football teams huddle before each play, daily huddles in a veterinary clinic communicate today's game plan. They must be brief — maybe 10 minutes — and include the opportunity to plan collaboratively. Hold them at the start of the shift, and don't use them to problem-solve.

Here's what you can address:

- ▶ **What each team member is covering and where?** For example, who is on the receptionist, veterinary assistant, technician and doctor teams?
- ▶ **Did anyone call out?** If yes, how will the team cover for that person?
- ▶ **Which clients will arrive?** Who might need extra attention to enhance the pet owner and team member experience?
- ▶ **Which patients are coming in?** Brief the team about special needs, such as anxiety-reducing handling.
- ▶ **What else on the schedule should the entire team be aware of or aligned on?** For example, you might mention job candidates arriving for

an interview, a new team member's first day and lunch being delivered at the weekly meeting.

- ▶ **Recognize team members who demonstrated a core value the previous day.** Celebrate achieving a goal or update everyone about progress toward a goal.
- ▶ **Set expectations.** The receptionists should know which clients are scheduled. The technician and DVM team should be ready to discuss the day's patients, brief each other on potential patient issues involving fear, anxiety and stress, and outline action plans for specific cases. For example, if a patient will present with a possible ear infection, review the procedures for diagnosing the condition and allow the technicians to educate the client about the diagnostics and cost estimate. Once the client approves, the technician can obtain the sample, stain and read it, and share the results before the veterinarian enters the room. While such an approach might not be the same in all cases, efficiency increases dramatically if 50% of the appointments have a plan in place.
- ▶ **Be consistent with huddles.** Never skip them.
- ▶ **Rotate who leads the huddle.** That way, everyone stays involved, comfortable and confident in leading others. **TVB**



HEATHER PRENDERGAST

The Take Charge columnist is the CEO of Synergie Consulting and the author of *Practice Management for the Veterinary Team, 4th Edition*.



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