

# Your best business asset – A great team

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## Abstract

This session will outline strategies to use in hiring top performers, outlining expectations and monitoring best performance. When used in combination, these can lead the way to creating a strengths based team that contributes to practice success. A high functioning team creates a service model that promotes high level patient care and exceptional client service.

**Key words:** hiring, performance, team

It's no secret that great people are a valuable asset to any veterinary team; their skill, their passion for animal care, their hard work ethic, their technical abilities, and their problem solving are all highly desirable traits. Are practices leveraging skill sets and attributes in the most effective way? Are we elevating each role of each person in practice? Increasing profitability? Retaining staff? Utilizing the strength areas of each member of our team?

A simple strategy includes the following; be strategic about hiring, monitor and encourage best performance, promote continuing education and empower. Build strength based teams.

## 1. Be strategic about hiring

Have a well thought out plan. Before you go straight to booking interviews, ask yourself some questions first. Talk with current staff; what kind of team member are they looking for? What skills or attributes are currently absent from the team? What are the 3 things that are most important to you about your employees? How will you articulate the practice core values and vision? Critically think about your current team, think about your future goals and have a picture in your mind of who will contribute to your provision of service and practice culture. Then build your job ad to reflect that. Differentiate between skills (things people can demonstrate) and attributes (how people behave) when crafting your catchy employment listing.

Then, select your interview questions for the applicants and select the hiring committee from your current staff.

During the interview, use open ended questions that don't allow for "this is what I would do in this situation". Open ended questions allow for the "story" to be told and gives insight into who the person is and how they behave.

E.g. What could you teach us?, Tell me about a time in your life when you actually failed at something, Describe for me your worst day of work at a veterinary hospital (or at

school), what would it look like to you?, How do you anticipate spending the first 100 days of your time in this practice?.

Interviews are a very subjective activity and rely much on how interviewers "feel" about each candidate. Having your criteria ahead of time, thoughtfully prepared, can provide some objectivity to an otherwise very subjective interaction. Start your selection process by reviewing applications/resumes and select for interviews based on your needed skills and attributes. Conduct formal, sit down interviews first, shortlist for working interviews and then host the applicants for a half or full day working interview. Have a plan for their working interview; who will they work with, what tasks will you ask them to do, what skills can you have them demonstrate and be sure to have a wrap up conversation with them at the end of their time with you. Be sure to follow up with an offer of employment or a thank you for their time.

Know the code! Be familiar with the Labor Laws within your region.

## 2. Monitor and encourage best performance

This must begin with a probation period for new employees that includes a training plan, regular meetings and feedback **to** the new employee and **from** the new employee. For successful integration into any team, there needs to be a plan for each week or month (or some time set) that sets out training goals for the new employee. This allows for progressive integration into the team and into the workflow of the practice. This training plan can be developed from existing job descriptions and or tasks lists for the position or role(s). Assign 1 or 2 people to work closely with the new employee and schedule time each week for that person and their mentor to chat privately with the employee to discuss areas of strength and areas of higher training needs. A more formal assessment should be completed a month before the end of the probation period that gives the new employee and the current team an idea of if they are going to be successful in their probation period. If they are not a good fit, for whatever reason, their employment must be terminated before the end of the probation.

For current employees, performance is an ongoing effort, not a one and done event or awkward yearly conversation. Employees should have the opportunity and resources (budget of money and time) to be able to develop themselves professionally and personally. This isn't just limited to attending large conferences, but can include community education opportunities, online learning and enhancement of skills in a variety of areas. There is no limit to learning in the veterinary profession!

Performance management includes identifying areas of interest or strengths, investigating continuing education opportunities, setting learning goals, applying the learning, measuring performance and then reporting back. This is encouraged and supported by the employer, the team and each person. When each person drives their own path to growth, it will have a higher degree of success and professional fulfillment. Professional development must be prevalent in the culture of each practice. Meaning that there is a willingness and desire to grow and learn and then be in an environment to share, to apply and to celebrate successes and failures as both of those outcomes support learning.

### **3. Empower your People**

Veterinarians and all supporting staff are highly skilled, highly driven, highly committed professionals and paraprofessionals. They are valuable in the practice culture and the delivery of patient care and client service. Leadership is an essential component to all team structure. Through proactive and progressive leadership by the owner, managers or supervisors, staff can be utilized at their highest skill level. Build

strength based teams where each person is doing what they like, what they're good at, most of their working time. Identify key areas of strength on hone in on those skills. This can be in; patient care, behavior or wellness, diagnostic testing or imaging, client communication, surgery, species specific, etc. Technicians should be part of the client cycle and be as involved in cases as a DVM.

Workflow is a key priority for providing great patient care and excellent client service. Clearly defined roles within teams will enhance workflow, ensure DVM's are well supported, clients are served, orders are placed and filled and everyone gets home at the right times! Clearly defined roles means each person knows their role, the duties and tasks associated with that role and how it fits in with the entire team and flow of patients and clients.

It's no secret! Staff that are fulfilled and feel that they are contributing positively are more likely to stay, more likely to grow and more likely to positively affect practice culture. The flip side? Setting this up and keeping it up takes time, money and resources and a deep commitment from practice leaders. Invest in your people, it's that simple.