How to Manage Conflict Before It Escalates

PLUS

Online Toolbox
DIGITAL MARKETING ON A SHOESTRING BUDGET
Practice Finance
IMPLEMENTING AN EMPLOYEE BONUS PROGRAM
Managing Your Practice
SHUT THE REVOLVING DOOR: JOB DESCRIPTIONS, SKILLS GAPS
Lifelines
HOW TO BUILD THE PERFECT RESUME

Stay Connected. Save Time. Save Money.
A COMPLETE NUTRITIONAL APPROACH TO ALLERGIC DERMATITIS

ULTAMINO®, the ultimate diagnostic tool, is a first choice for elimination diet trials. ULTAMINO® contains a unique protein source with 100% of peptides less than 1 kDa and 88% free amino acids.

A clinical study in dogs with confirmed or suspected food reaction demonstrated that 100% of the dogs had a significant improvement in skin condition based on veterinary assessment.¹

From diagnosis to long-term management, ROYAL CANIN® offers a canine diet for every phase of your clinical approach.

Find out more at royalcanin.com.

CANINE DERMATOLOGICAL FORMULAS:
- ULTAMINO®
- HYDROLYZED PROTEIN ADULT HP
- SKIN SUPPORT

¹Clinical trial on ULTAMINO® canine, 2011. Royal Canin data on file. © ROYAL CANIN® SAS 2017 All Rights Reserved.
Many of our board members are part of VetPartners (vetpartners.org), including members of the VetPartners executive committee and board of directors. VetPartners is a nonprofit association of business specialists dedicated to serving the veterinary profession. Members include consultants in virtually every area of business management, including practice management, law, valuation, architecture, accounting, marketing, human resources, business management, financial services and more. Like VetPartners, Veterinarian’s Money Digest® aims to advance the profession by helping veterinary professionals like you effectively manage your personal and practice finances, stay up-to-date on legal and regulatory issues and keep balance in your lives. VetPartners members are indicated by an asterisk.

Darby Affeldt, DVM
Financial Adviser
North Star Resource Group
Seattle, WA
northstarfinancial.com

Robin Brogdon, MA*
President, BluePrints Veterinary Marketing Group
Huntington Beach, CA
blueprintsving.com

Camala Bailey, CPA, CVA*
Founder/CEO, Camala C. Bailey, CPA, PC
Tempe, AZ
cpa4vets.com

Tad B. Coles, DVM, MRSS-P, CCFP
Well-being Adviser
Founder, Compassion Fatigue Coach
Overland Park, KS
compassionfatiguecoach.com

G. Lynn Davis, BS*
Paladin Business Consulting
Nashville, TN
paladinsuccess.com

Nancy Dewitz*
Technology Consultant
Beyond Indigo Pets
Osseo, WI
beyondindigopets.com

Chad Dodd, DVM
President and CEO
Animatas Consulting, LLC
Lawrence, KS
animatas.com

Tracy Dowdy, CVPM*
Founder, Relationship-Centered Practice Academy
MRG Consulting, LLC
San Diego, CA
tracydowdy.com

Louise S. Dunn*
Owner and Founder, Snowgoose Veterinary Management Consulting
Pfafftown, NC
snowgoosevet.com

Erika Ervin, MBA, CVT
Area Manager, VCA
President, New Jersey Veterinary Technicians and Assistants
Toms River, NJ

Eric D. Garcia*
CEO, IT & Digital Consultant
Simply Done Tech Solutions
Lutz, FL
ericgarciafl.com

Wendy Hauser, DVM*
AVP, Veterinary Relations
Crum & Forster Pet Insurance Group
Akron, OH
cfpetinsurance.com

Shelley Johnson, BS, CVPM*
Training Specialist
Patterson Veterinary Goochland, VA
pattersonvet.com

Stith Keiser, BA (Business Management)*
Chief Executive Officer
Blue Heron Consulting
Pullman, WA
bhc.team.com

Mary Beth Koester, CVA*
Manager of Valuation Services
Rea & Associates
Dublin, OH
ReaCPA.com

Stacy Pursell, BA, CPC, CERS*
Founder/CEO, The VET Recruiter
Tulsa, OK
thevetrecruiter.com

Julie Reck
Owner, Veterinary Medical Center of Fort Mill
Fort Mill, SC
vmcfortmill.com

Karl Salzsieder, DVM, JD, CVA*
Owner, Total Practice Solutions Group Northwest, Salzsieder Legal Services, PLLC
Longview, WA
Owner, Yelm Veterinary Hospital
Yelm, WA
Owner, Deschutes Animal Clinic
Trumwater, WA

Bill Schroeder*
InTouch Practice Communications
Schererville, IN
intouchvet.com

Bruce Truman, BS, MBA*
Founder and Principal Consultant
BLT Technology & Innovation Group
North Plainfield, NJ
www.bltconsulting.com

Debra Vey Voda-Hamilton, Esq
Hamilton Law & Mediation, PLLC
Armonk, NY
hamiltonlawandmediation.com

Peter Weinstein, DVM, MBA*
Executive Director, Southern California Veterinary Medical Association
President, PAW Consulting
Irvine, CA
 simplesolutionsforvets.com

Tips for Outrageously Good Customer Service
To please the pet owners who visit your practice, you need to make sure you’re doing these two things.

Five Habits of Savvy Credit Card Users
Astute customers reap the most benefits from their credit card companies. What are their habits for success?

Is Your Practice “Financially Efficient”?
Insights and advice from a practice management consultant who has been in the business for 45 years.

Embracing Diversity in Veterinary Medicine
Diversity in veterinary medicine extends well beyond gender, ethnicity, race and sexual orientation.
**COVER STORY**

8 *Extinguish the Anger*
How to manage conflict and douse flames of discord in your practice before they rage out of control.

**Also in This Issue:**

3 **From the Chairman**
On the bright side: job outlook

4 **The Scoop**
Links between animal abuse and domestic violence

6 **Advice Unleashed**
Tips and insight from business, financial and practice management experts

12 **Practice Finance**
Implementing a bonus program

20 **Managing Your Practice**
The connected practice; shutting the revolving door

26 **Lifelines**
How to build the perfect resume

30 **Online Toolbox**
Power-packed digital marketing strategies; digital marketing on a shoestring budget

---

**PERSONAL FINANCE**

14 *Best Locations for Veterinarians*
When it comes to deciding where in the world to work, locale matters more than you might think.

---

**LEADERSHIP LESSONS**

18 *Rung by Rung*
Step onto the ladder to discover the secret to becoming more than just a boss.

---

**LIFELINES**

28 *Oh, the Places You Can Go*
The career trajectories of three outstanding professionals are proof that opportunities abound in veterinary medicine.
On the Bright Side: Job Outlook

Are you soon to be graduated and worried about landing your first job? Are you employed and concerned about staying that way? Although the job outlook for veterinarians today is outstanding, the most important influence on your career prospects may be your personal perspective and actions.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, overall employment of veterinarians is projected to grow 18 percent between 2016 and 2026 — a rate that far outpaces the average for all occupations.1 This growth is attributed largely to increases in the amount of money pet owners are spending on their four-legged family members, from toys and treats to health care services that today are on par with those in human medicine.

Of the nearly 80,000 employed veterinarians, 79 percent work in private practice and 13 percent are self-employed. Most work full-time or more; some work nights, weekends and on-call shifts. The median salary for those in private practice approaches $89,000.

In any job climate, education and an entrepreneurial mindset are the best keys for unlocking opportunities. And opportunities in veterinary medicine to further your expertise and enhance your employability are everywhere, from local and national continuing education meetings to webinars you can view from your home or practice. You can also bolster your clinical knowledge with our sister publication, American Veterinarian®,. Being able to provide cancer treatment or preventive dentistry, for example, can enhance not only your ability to help patients but also your bottom line. Several articles in this issue are aimed toward job seekers as well as those who are already employed but want to grow or move in a different direction.

Speaking of directions, where you live can make a real difference when it comes to landing a great job. We’ve got the inside scoop on the U.S. cities and states where veterinarians can earn the highest living (page 14). For those interested in working abroad, we’ve also got the skinny on the nine best countries for veterinarians.

Many veterinary professionals — from veterinarians to kennel assistants — lack a good grasp of how to set themselves up for success via their resume. Yet this document is often crucial to landing a choice interview. With many recruiters affording just six seconds for the initial review of each resume that crosses their desk, it only makes sense to ensure that yours stands out from the crowd. With help from a longtime veterinary recruiter, we outline the keys to creating a knockout resume that will impress any would-be employer (page 26).

This issue also features three veterinary professionals who have carved their own career paths (page 28). A veterinary acupuncturist, a laboratory supervisor and a veterinary technician specialist who mentors others are proof positive that passion, dedication and hard work are integral to career success.

With this final issue of our debut year of publication, we gratefully acknowledge your support. Please let us know how we’re doing. Are we providing the information you need to own, manage and work cohesively in your practice? Is there something you’d like us to cover in greater depth? As always, our ears are open.

We wish you and your families a happy and prosperous 2018. Thank you for reading!

Mike Hennessy Sr.  
Chairman and CEO

---


---

Subscribe Today!

Veterinarian’s Money Digest® is your go-to source for money matters and professional and personal growth.

Subscribe at VMdToday.com/Subscribe, or scan this QR code to visit our website.
Previous studies exploring the link between domestic violence (DV) and animal abuse have reported reasons why DV perpetrators abuse animals, including the desire to control the intimate partner and intimidate children in the home. Often, the perpetrator exploits the human-animal bond to inflict emotional harm on the victim. Children who witness animal abuse can experience emotional and behavioral problems and become desensitized to violence.

These studies typically use interviews or questionnaires to collect data directly from DV victims, but these approaches often cannot capture the full breadth of the link. For example, DV victims may feel ashamed or embarrassed while being interviewed and may withhold information requiring disclosure to authorities.

To overcome these limitations, Michelle Newberry, BSc (Hons), MSc, PhD, senior lecturer in forensic psychology at Sheffield Hallam University in the United Kingdom, used a novel approach — analyzing online public forums where DV victims anonymously shared stories of animal abuse.1 This approach has several potential benefits, including more detailed accounts of animal abuse and data that can be analyzed for more general purposes.

Over 12 months, several investigators collected and analyzed 74 stories of animal abuse from online public forums of DV victims. Four themes were identified.

**VICTIM-ANIMAL BOND**
DV victims’ pets provided affection and emotional support and, for children, relief from the violence. In addition, companion animals provided physical protection from the abuser. Many DV victims risked their own safety (i.e., staying in the abusive relationship) to protect their pets; others did not take that risk out of fear of being abused themselves.

**ANIMALS USED TO CONTROL VICTIMS**
DV perpetrators threatened or carried out animal abuse to exert control over their victims. Some perpetrators reportedly derived pleasure from abusing animals, whereas others tried to conceal the abuse. Dr. Newberry noted that “the stronger the victim-animal bond, the more likely it may be that the perpetrator will abuse a companion animal to control the victim.”

**PERCEPTIONS OF ABUSERS’ BEHAVIOR**
DV victims cited jealousy of the victim-animal bond as one reason for the animal abuse. Some victims also mentioned rough upbringings or alcoholism as reasons. Others justified the abuse, evidence of the need for animal welfare campaigns to emphasize that animal abuse is never justifiable.

**SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS AND ANIMALS**
DV victims mentioned a lack of support from the police and DV services. Some lamented DV services that either don’t accommodate pets or take in only certain pets (i.e., dogs). Without being able to take their pets with them, DV victims may end up returning to their abusers.

This lack of support has major policy and training implications. For example, policy changes can ensure that police take animal abuse in DV households more seriously. Joint training initiatives can help the animal welfare, child protection and DV sectors understand how they are each linked in addressing DV.

To ensure the safety of all abuse victims, the author concluded, “DV services, animal shelters and community organizations must work together to provide joint refuge.”

Reference available at VMDtoday.com.

Dr. Pendergrass received her DVM from the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Emory University. She is the founder and owner of JPen Communications, a medical communications company.
Don’t Take Risks. Practice Safe Sticks.

Help protect your staff against accidental needlesticks with innovative sharps safety devices from Terumo

Surshield® Safety Winged Infusion and Blood Collection Sets

SurGuard®3 Safety Hypodermic Needles and Needles with Syringe
End-of Life Disconnect

“CLIENT EXPECTATIONS ARE often overlooked in end-of-life care,” says Sandra Grossman, PhD, owner of PetLoss Partners and Compassionate Practice Veterinary Consulting, “yet they are a big component of what drives client satisfaction and ultimately the practice’s client retention level.” One of the most surprising findings from her recent survey study on end-of-life care and pet loss was how important compassion is to pet owners at that time in their pet’s life. “Seventy-six percent of the clients surveyed said compassion from the veterinary team is just as important as the curing component in end-of-life care,” she says.

The survey results also showed that the area most in need of improvement is follow-up from the veterinary practice after a pet passes. “Eighty-seven percent of respondents said they received no pet loss support following euthanasia, such as grief counselor names or pet loss brochures, yet 83 percent said it was very important that they do get some type of pet loss support from the practice,” Dr. Grossman notes.

Teamwork Framework

REBECCA TUDOR, DVM, DACVS, owner of Tarheel Veterinary Surgical Specialists in Louisburg, North Carolina, uses the DiSC behavior profile assessment when hiring and onboarding new employees — “and really on a daily basis.” According to DiSC, there are four basic behavior styles that offer a framework for how to interact with one another:

D — dominant, direct, demanding, decisive, determined, doer
i — influential, inspiring, inducing, interactive, impressive
S — steady, supportive, stable, sensitive
C — compliant, cautious, calculating, careful, competent

All people will have some level of each of those characteristics making up their DiSC profile, says Dr. Tudor. “We all know and interact with people with whom we instantly connect, and we also have people in our lives who are more challenging to interact with, but we have to learn to work with a variety of people. DiSC helps you understand better who you are, what makes you tick and what makes you work well,” she says. “Understanding this about yourself and your coworkers allows you as a team to work more smoothly, to have less conflict and to be on the same page — all of which will make you perform better and more efficiently.”
Sleep Hygiene for Shift Work

SHIFT WORK IS DIFFICULT for many veterinary care providers. Marie Holowaychuk, DVM, DACVECC, critical care specialist and veterinary wellness advocate for Critical Care Vet Consulting, offers some advice for those working odd hours.

“Simply staying awake during a night shift can be difficult, and caffeine can be a big help — two to four cups of coffee per shift for most people. Of course, we want to be able to sleep after our shift, so we don’t want to consume caffeine within six hours of going to bed,” she says. “Exposure to light is also helpful, such as with an artificial UV lamp or even the light from a computer monitor. Also, having the opportunity for a brief nap, usually between 1 a.m. and 4 a.m., to recharge, restore and rejuvenate yourself for the remainder of your shift can be tremendously effective.”

Dr. Holowaychuk “can’t stress enough” how important sleep hygiene is for everyone, but especially for those on shift work. “We really want to maintain healthy habits,” she says, “so set yourself up for a good night’s sleep. That means exercising before your shift, hydrating during your shift, avoiding alcohol after your shift and not using electronics within an hour of going to sleep,” she advises. “Finally, your bedroom should be your sleep sanctuary — a cozy bed, a comfortable temperature and quiet darkness will set you up for a good night’s sleep.”

Network, Network, Network

ONE OF THE KEY HABITS OF successful job seekers is to always be prepared for opportunities that may present themselves, says Gary Vroegindewey, DVM, MSS, DACVP, director of One Health at Lincoln Memorial University. “This means that you carry business cards, your resume is up-to-date and your elevator speech is prepared.”

He also notes that unless you speak up and say what you want in your career, then it is going to be very difficult to achieve what you are seeking. When you go to a conference or other places where an opportunity might present itself, somebody there may be able to help you advance your career, but you’ll never know it unless you network.

A large percentage of jobs are acquired through networking, he says, particularly in the corporate arena. “When you let people know what you want, the odds are good that someone will reach out to you,” he says. “You’re much better off sending your resume to a company through a connection you have rather than sending it in blind.”

After the Interview

SHEILA GROSIDIER, SCP, consultant and partner at Veterinary Management Consultation Inc. in Evergreen, Colorado, says there are three things interviewers should ask themselves after they interview a potential employee:

1. “Were the questions I asked accurate compared with the candidate’s resume?
2. Did I portray the job appropriately by providing an up-to-date job description and discussing my expectations for the role?
3. Does this person fit with our practice culture? Remember, it’s not always about talent; sometimes the fit is just as important.”

Building a Culture of Trust

“A CULTURE OF TRUST MEANS that employees feel like information is readily shared with them,” says Robin Brogdon, MA, owner and president of BluePrints Veterinary Marketing Group in Huntington Beach, California. “There are not a lot of secrets.”

She is not talking about sharing things that should remain confidential, like salaries. “But a culture of trust breeds openness, where people aren’t afraid to try new things, to talk to leadership about ideas and problems,” she notes. “It’s about free-flowing communication with some transparency that’s written into the culture of the practice. That’s the best way to inspire teamwork, collaboration and loyalty because team members feel that they’re being listened to, that they’re being heard and that their opinions and ideas matter.”

DVMs and MDs: The Education Difference

VETERINARY AND HUMAN MEDICINE are very similar, says Steven Marks, BVSc, MS, MRCVS, DACVIM, associate dean and director of medical services at North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine. “We take some lessons from them; I think they take some lessons from us,” he says. “Both of us, sometimes, on some days, can learn how not to teach students and how not to treat patients, so errors are also valuable.”

The biggest difference between human medicine and veterinary medicine, he says, is the end result after four years of postgraduate schooling. “At the end of four years of veterinary school, we produce a product that is functional. They are clinicians, and they’re ready to go,” he says. “A relatively small percentage pursue internships and residencies. On the other hand, medical schools don’t really produce a functional product at the end of four years. That is not meant to be disrespectful, but [medical doctors] are required to do further training. [In veterinary schools,] we’re under the gun to produce a product in a pretty short period of time.”
Extinguish the Anger

How to manage conflict and douse flames of discord in your practice before they rage out of control.

By Debra Vey Voda-Hamilton, Esq
nder the law, pets are considered personal property, yet 94 percent of pet owners describe their pets as family members and companions. Given the strong bond between people and their pets, it’s no wonder conflicts arise in veterinary practice.

Many practice management consultants recommend good processes for avoiding conflict, but the reality is that disagreements are almost inevitable in the emotional environment of pet health care. Differences in opinion, the inability to understand information and digest directives, and personal beliefs involving the care that should be provided can thwart your best-laid plans and wreak havoc on your business.

This article explores three steps you can take to defuse conflicts that arise with a client or team member and resolve disagreements before they disrupt your practice.

HOW CONFLICT ARISES

Often, signs of a brewing conflict are missed – understandable in the backdrop of a busy veterinary practice. Nevertheless, when discord goes unnoticed, misunderstanding, misinformation, disappointment and disrespect have a chance to percolate.

The truth is, some veterinary teams have a less-than-ideal bedside manner, and often the front desk staff take their cues from the doctor. This may lead to a culture of conflict avoidance. Not everyone is adept at smoothing the ruffled feathers of a client or staff member. Sometimes small conflicts escalate into full-blown litigation, simply because the parties involved fail to stop talking and start listening.

Misunderstandings can lead to communication breakdowns, which might be perceived as disrespect on the part of an angry client or staff member. The inability to talk about a problem from the outset inhibits the ability to listen and stokes the fires of litigation.

This past fall, the British Veterinary Association released data from its Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey. A full 85 percent of respondents, which included veterinarians and their staff in the United Kingdom, felt harassed by pet owners. Most situations involved money: Clients did not want to pay a fee, expected the fee to be reduced or decided to pay by installment. Sound familiar? U.S. veterinary professionals would likely describe similar experiences.

How can veterinarians address such problems while protecting themselves from abuse? They need to employ stopgap measures to help them learn more information without inflaming the issues: Stop, drop and roll.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Unfortunately, in the United States, malpractice insurance companies systematically tell veterinarians to avoid antagonistic conversations altogether or to speak with a client in a friendly manner while exploring possible solutions. Both approaches can lead to serious issues: First, ignoring a disgruntled client or staff member is done at your peril – it may or may not avoid a lawsuit. Plus, disgruntled clients might take to social media to broadcast how they feel, describing what you did wrong and how you wouldn’t take responsibility. That can have an even greater impact on your practice’s well-being than being sued. In the second case, you could create more harm than good if you attempt to engage with an angry client or staff member but lack the proper communication skills or the presence of a neutral person in a confidential setting. What you say could leave you vulnerable to greater liability.

About five years ago, stakeholders in the medical community were interviewed about the reality of implementing the Disclosure, Apology and Offer approach to address medical malpractice situations. In this model, health care providers, their institutions and their insurance companies notify patients of unanticipated adverse outcomes, explain the circumstances and measures taken to prevent future occurrences, and offer financial compensation if appropriate. The article confirmed what those working in medical venues already knew – that parties are ready to shift how they handle medical issues arising from services rendered. Both sides want to be heard and are ready to engage. They want to acknowledge each other, minimize the trauma of the event and avoid reliving it in litigation. Veterinary medical malpractice insurance providers may want to lend an ear to this valuable discussion.

U.S. veterinary malpractice insurance companies do not support allowing their clients to participate in confidential discussions before a lawsuit is filed. Malpractice agents believe that emotional clients may lodge spurious complaints, wasting everyone’s time and money, but this belief thwarts the best possible outcome for all the parties and may end in a lost client. The veterinarian might also be displeased with the insurance company for limiting his or her ability to resolve a problem.

Veterinarians can always decide on their own to speak with angry clients or staff members, but if no agreement is reached, the lack of confidentiality protections in personal discussions are tricky.

Confidentiality issues can be avoided if the parties facilitate discussions using alternative dispute resolution. Two types – mediation and collaborative practice – provide a confidential setting, supporting a personal choice by each party to discuss the problem before resorting to litigation.

That pre-lawsuit process has not been implemented systematically into U.S. veterinary malpractice coverage, but similar models are being implemented in Europe. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) is funding a recently approved mediation service. The Veterinary Client Mediation Service (VCMS) is free for all pet owners and veterinarians. According to Jennie Jones, a partner at the law firm that administers the service, “Complaints are referred … by clients and practices where the relationship has become strained or communication may be
difficult. Importantly, the service does not look at who is right or wrong but focuses on finding an outcome that both parties can live with and bringing an end to the complaint."4 Findings from a trial period, in which all parties voluntarily agreed to participate, have shown that the VCMS has "allowed greater time and resources to investigate concerns that could constitute serious professional misconduct," said RCVS Registrar Eleanor Ferguson.4

STOP, DROP AND ROLL
How can veterinarians maintain a successful business, manage a variety of personalities and keep their malpractice coverage intact? By taking three easy steps: Stop, drop and roll. These tactics give the entire practice the tools to address conflict without jeopardizing malpractice insurance.

Stop
The first step: Stop talking. Listen to what your client or staff member has to say. Have your staff do the same when facing an angry client. Responding with what you believe are correct facts will not serve you, but allowing someone to feel heard will empower you. You will uncover what is really going on in his or her mind.

The idea of being quiet and listening is foreign to many. In her book "We Need to Talk: How to Have Conversations That Matter," public radio journalist Celeste Headlee explained why listening is imperative for good communication. She details the 1982 crash of Air Florida Flight 90 that killed 74 of the 79 people aboard, as well as four people on the ground. Of the black box recording of the conversation between the first officer and the captain before the crash, Headlee wrote, "Most communication experts who listened … concluded that airline co-pilots should be trained to be more direct with their captains." In reality, Headlee wrote, "we needed to train pilots to listen better."5

There are three good reasons for listening. First, you may hear about things you need to address in your practice. Second, it allows you to learn about anything going on in a client's or staff member's life – such as divorce, sickness or family issues – that is skewing his or her response to your information. Third, when a person is angry, he or she cannot hear you. Valid arguments fall on deaf ears.

Drop
Next: Drop the need to be right. That might be one of the most difficult things for a professional to do. After all, you are the one with the degree, and you know what you are talking about. But, along with stopping to listen, dropping the need to be right is a key step toward resolving conflict.

This does not mean that you are wrong. It may actually empower you to be twice as right. If you stop to listen, you may hear things that help you locate the path of least resistance toward resolution. Rest assured you are not fueling the fire. You are just allowing the other side to tell his or her story fully without interruption. In fact, in many cases, dropping the need to be right and appreciating how someone else feels, without commentary, can simplify finding a solution.

Roll
Finally, let the aggrieved party's angry words roll off your back. This does not make you a doormat or mean you agree with the complaint. By listening fully and not offering an immediate counterpoint, you refrain from providing more fuel for argument. You might also receive an apology once cooler heads prevail and the enraged party sees just how out of control he or she was and how in control you were – all because you resisted adding fuel to a fire someone else started.

CONCLUSION
Addressing conflict with team members or clients is difficult and stressful, yet managing impassioned situations before they escalate is key to avoiding potentially significant public relations or financial problems. The simple three-word phrase most of us learned as children can be vital to de-escalating conflict: Stop, drop and roll.

It is important to advocate for yourself in times of conflict. Request permission from your insurance carrier to mediate before you are sued. Doing so places your malpractice provider on notice that you are proactively and confidently addressing a perceived conflict. This notice will maintain your malpractice insurance coverage in the event that mediation does not work and the client or staff member sues. VMD

References available at VMDtoday.com.

Ms. Vey Voda-Hamilton is an attorney/mediator and principal at Hamilton Law and Mediation, the first mediation practice to focus specifically on conflicts between people over animals. She is a best-selling author of “Nipped in the Bud, Not in the Butt – How to Use Mediation to Resolve Conflicts Over Animals," which outlines the methods she uses to address conflict, keep clients and appreciate another’s point of view in a disagreement.
The CareCredit credit card gives clients a way to pay for all the care you recommend. CareCredit can be used for everything from exams and lab tests to surgery, pet food, medicine and parasite control.* In fact, 76% of cardholders said financing is a tool that helps them with unplanned healthcare expenses.1

Already enrolled? Call 800-859-9975, option 1, then 6, to learn how CareCredit can help more pets get the care they need. To get started with CareCredit, call 844-812-8111 and ask for the one-time enrollment fee of $59 by September 30, 2017.

*Subject to credit approval.
1. Path To Purchase Research, Veterinary Category, conducted on behalf of CareCredit by Rothstein Tauber, Inc., 2016.
©2017 CareCredit
A few years ago, I was asked to help a practice evaluate and improve on a generous bonus program focused solely on increasing revenue. If the gross revenue generated in the month was 10 percent more than the revenue generated in the same month of the prior year, the whole team would share a bonus. The practice team hit the mark several months during the year, was paid thousands of dollars in bonuses and grew the top line tremendously.

The problem, however, was that the clinic’s net profit was spiraling downward. During our evaluation of the program, we discovered that to service this tremendous growth, efficiency was suffering throughout the practice. Besides bonuses, substantial overtime wages were being paid because the clinic was so busy that no one could hire or schedule. Clinic supply costs also increased, including excess waste because of timing issues with appointments and surgery schedules. In addition, inventory that the practice didn’t need was languishing on the shelves, including a large number of expired medications, because no one had time to manage the hospital’s inventory properly. Ultimately, although the practice got what it paid for – an incredible growth in gross revenue – it wasn’t worth the cost!

It’s been proved that well-planned bonus programs will give your team incentive, show how much you value them and ultimately increase your clinic’s performance. So where do you start?

**CAN YOU AFFORD IT?**

First, determine whether an incentive program makes sense for your practice. Can you afford it? To answer this question, analyze various clinic metrics, including a detailed review of your financial statements and key performance indicators. Compare your historical data with your current period data, and look for any trends that have developed. Ideally, you should evaluate your financial information and metrics for the past 24 months.

As you perform the analysis, the most important question to ask is whether your practice is profitable. According to Denise Tumblin, CPA, owner and president of WTA Veterinary Consultants in Columbus, Ohio, “A well-managed practice averages a profit to gross revenue ratio of 33 percent to 42 percent.” This ratio is determined without including owner and associate compensation.
The American Animal Hospital Association’s “Financial and Productivity Pulsepoints” indicates that the average profit to gross revenue ratio (prior to owner compensation) is 34 percent. If your clinic’s ratio is 28 percent or higher, you may have the profit to support a monetary bonus program, and if you are at or near that percentage, you also have room for improvement. If your ratio is below 28 percent, consider starting with nonmonetary rewards.

**DO YOU HAVE CASH AVAILABLE?**

The next question is whether there is cash available to pay the bonus. Your practice may show a healthy profit, yet because of debt payments, owner distributions or other nonexpense cash items, it could be cash poor. To ensure you have the cash on hand to pay the bonus, prepare a cash-flow forecast. Begin with your current cash on hand, predict and add your revenue, and then predict and deduct your expenses for the period to arrive at your ending cash on hand. Ask your practice manager or accountant for help if needed.

During your financial statement and metric review, look for areas ripe for improvement. Building an effective incentive plan includes forming the right measures and metrics, making them measurable and concentrating on those that will affect your bottom line dramatically. When formulating the goals, remember to concentrate on areas that will improve performance, create focus, encourage a culture of ownership and positively influence behaviors.

**SEEK TEAM INPUT**

Solicit input from your practice manager, team leaders and employees. Because they are in the trenches, they know where there’s room for improvement, and they likely will have thoughts and ideas about what goals will increase efficiency and add profitability. Ask your colleagues what has worked for them. Read journals and research incentive plans.

After reviewing your metrics, doing your research and talking with colleagues and friends, develop your own unique bonus plan based on what you want to achieve (see Possible Bonus Plan Goals).

**KEEPI T SIMPLE**

There is no end to what can be measured, but it’s best to keep your plan simple and relevant. Choose what’s important to you and what will accomplish your practice goals. For the plan to succeed, educate your team so they understand the goals, the process for tracking and the reward. Communicate with them regularly to keep these initiatives top of mind and to gain a true sense of how the team is progressing.

It’s a reality that we all can’t be Google, where employees have free food available at 16 gourmet cafes, on-site gyms and medical care, or Netflix, where employees receive unlimited vacation. However, once you’ve established your metrics and goals, there are many creative ways to reward your employees.

A monetary incentive is any compensation that increases an employee’s earnings based on accomplishing the established goals. Although there are various ways to calculate rewards, a bonus pool shared by team members typically works well in veterinary practices and encourages teamwork. You can split the bonus pool evenly among team members, allocate it based on hours worked or use any other reasonable method. This incentive strategy is often called profit-sharing.

**CONSIDER NONMONETARY INCENTIVES**

Multiple studies have shown that employees value compensation, but they value recognition, job fulfillment, communication and transparency just as much, if not more. This is good news for practices that don’t have the cash necessary or aren’t ready to jump into a monetary bonus program. Nonmonetary incentives can take many forms, and they don’t necessarily have to cost a lot of money. Consider such nonmonetary incentives as:

- Catered lunch at the clinic; invite spouses and significant others for an even bigger celebration
- Time off for each employee (within reason and appropriately scheduled)
- Team social events, such as a picnics, movie nights or sports events
- Team photo for a “Wall of Fame” area in the waiting room; take individual photos and give to employees
- Gift cards to gas stations, grocery stores, restaurants, movies or specialty stores
- Mobile car wash at the practice
- Chair massages at the clinic

If you’re struggling for ideas, ask your team. They will likely choose something reasonable, resulting in a win-win for everyone; you will achieve your practice goals, and your team will get what they asked for.

Reference available at VMDtoday.com.

Ms. Bailey is founder and president of Camala C. Bailey, CPA, PC — CPA 4 Vets. Her financial services firm focuses exclusively on serving veterinarians, helping them to start, buy, grow and sell their practices. She also enjoys speaking at conferences, where she educates her audience on finances including profitability, practice value, taxes and operations. You can reach her at Cammi@CPA4Vets.com or 800-359-8175.
According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the median annual salary of veterinarians living in the United States was $88,770 in 2016. That got us thinking. What do veterinarians earn in different areas of the country? How about in different countries around the world?

Where you live can make all the difference when it comes to finding a great job. It turns out that the United States tops the list of best countries for veterinarians, and excellent wages can be earned throughout our country. What's more, veterinary employment in the United States is predicted to grow 18 percent between 2016 and 2026.

If where you decide to live and work is dictated by the salary you can earn in that locale, you're in luck. Here we present data about the best countries, states and cities for veterinarians just starting their careers and those looking for a change of scenery. Where does your area rank? And are the wallets greener elsewhere?

By Kerry Lengyel
Although this wage is higher than that of any other country, the state of Hawaii takes the cake. The average veterinarian in Hawaii earns $95 per hour, or $198,600 per year.
BEST CITIES

Data from a BLS 2016 national compensation survey.

1. Jacksonville, FL
   - Median annual salary: $177,160
   - Entry-level salary: $62,540
   - Number of employed veterinarians: 230

2. Springfield, MA
   - Median annual salary: $177,140
   - Entry-level salary: $87,900
   - Number of employed veterinarians: 250

3. Oxnard/Thousand Oaks/Ventura, CA
   - Median annual salary: $176,260
   - Entry-level salary: $77,480
   - Number of employed veterinarians: 160

4. Eastern Ohio (nonmetropolitan area), OH
   - Median annual salary: $168,420
   - Entry-level salary: $67,730
   - Number of employed veterinarians: 120

5. Palm Coast, FL
   - Median annual salary: $166,730
   - Entry-level salary: $61,670
   - Number of employed veterinarians: 30

6. Reading, PA
   - Median annual salary: $145,860
   - Entry-level salary: $77,240
   - Number of employed veterinarians: 90

7. Southern Indiana (nonmetropolitan area), IN
   - Median annual salary: $145,110
   - Entry-level salary: $72,790
   - Number of employed veterinarians: 60

8. Atlantic City/Hammonton, NJ
   - Median annual salary: $133,300
   - Entry-level salary: $83,280
   - Number of employed veterinarians: 40

9. Nassau/Suffolk, NY
   - Median annual salary: $132,050
   - Entry-level salary: $70,280
   - Number of employed veterinarians: 720

10. Santa Ana/Anaheim/Irvine, CA
    - Median annual salary: $129,080
    - Entry-level salary: $80,090
    - Number of employed veterinarians: 580

References available at VMDToday.com.
The world’s leading distributors and thousands of practices across the country agree:

**Vetsource is the only industry-endorsed Home Delivery partner.**

Home Delivery is an essential service for your hospital.

- **Help your practice run better** by freeing up staff time to focus on what matters - delivering better care.
- **Drive practice revenue and increased profitability** by offering more products and competitive prices.
- **Make filling prescriptions and giving medications more convenient for pet owners**, which increases compliance.

Learn more about starting your risk-free, 12-month trial at [vetsource.com/trial](http://vetsource.com/trial) or call us at (877) 738-8883.
Leadership Lessons

Rung by Rung

Step onto the ladder to discover the secret to becoming more than just a boss.

By Phil Zeltzman, DVM, DACVS, CVJ, Fear Free Certified

In his book “The 5 Levels of Leadership,”¹ author, coach and speaker John Maxwell outlines how true leadership works. The secret to becoming more than just a boss, he says, lies in being able to inspire others and build a team that not only is productive but also produces other leaders. By understanding the five levels of leadership, you can evolve from an entry-level boss into a master manager at your practice.

THE LEADERSHIP LADDER

Level 1: Position

Position is the first rung of the leadership ladder. It does not really require much ability or effort. Anyone can be appointed to a leadership position and implement orders. You are given a title, a business card, a desk, a nametag and, voilà, you are a leader.

In the veterinary world, you may be called owner, head receptionist, head technician, medical director, kennel supervisor, hospital manager or hospital administrator. Your team will do what you say merely because of the title you have.

Employees come to work to get a paycheck, so they will rarely go the extra mile. They will do only what is required to comply with what you ask of them. If you ask for something a little unusual, you may hear statements like “That’s not in my job description” or “You’re not the one who signs my paycheck.”

To maintain your position (and your job), you will need to create and implement rules, policies and standard operating procedures that guide employees in many areas. You will need to organize meetings to make sure people understand the rules. You will have to make them sign documents proving that they have heard or read the information and will comply with it.

There is nothing wrong with this entry-level position. It is a necessary step. Your newfound title makes you a boss more than a true leader. At this stage of the game, you merely have subordinates, not quite a team.

If you find this position unpleasant, this may be the motivation you need to move on to the next level.

Level 2: Permission

In this leadership position, employees follow you because they want to, not simply because they have to. Once you start knowing and liking them, you become familiar with their stories and circumstances. You listen to their opinions, feedback and ideas. You treat them like valuable team members, and so you start to develop real relationships.

In turn, your team members will want to learn more about you. All of this leads to trust and influence, which foster a happier work environment. As Maxwell writes, “You can like people without leading them, but you cannot lead people well without liking them.”

Aspiring leaders won’t stop there, though. Creating a happier work environment is all very nice, but you need to get some work done. This is what Level 3 is about.

Level 3: Production

Level 3 is based on achieving goals and results. The energy you have spent developing relationships and designing a fun work environment in Level 2 gives you more credibility and influence. This in turn enables you to work more efficiently as a team. Yet you cannot just talk the talk; you also have to walk the walk. You need to lead by example.

Maxwell summarizes the consequences of level 3 management in these words: “Work gets done, morale improves, profits go up, turnover goes down and goals are achieved.” Now you are starting to have fun as a leader. This is why you’ve worked so hard. But you can’t rest on your laurels. You can achieve even more in Level 4.

Level 4: People Development

Gaining more power, getting things done and generating profits are great. But true leaders have a longer-term goal: empowering others. Level 4 leaders “use their position, relationships and productivity to invest in their followers and develop them until those followers become leaders in their own right. The result is reproduction. Level 4 leaders reproduce themselves,” explains Maxwell.

Having more leaders on your team leads to a virtuous cycle. Relationships deepen and can become lifelong friendships. Teamwork reaches new heights. Productivity increases. Everybody’s happy.

Can things get any better? Of course they can. On Level 5, you can grow even more as a leader by helping others grow in the practice substantially.

Level 5: Pinnacle

Only the happy few leaders will ever reach this level, also called the respect level. It takes a lot of work to get to Level 4, but reaching Level 5 requires talent. Level 5 leaders help others become Level 4 leaders. In turn, those leaders will help others become leaders, and the cycle continues. It becomes part of the culture, part of the legacy.
**THEORY INTO PRACTICE**

Here is how a young colleague, passionate entrepreneur and practice owner in Pennsylvania describes his journey through the five levels of leadership.

“In the nine years I have been a practice owner, I can see the transition of leadership levels. On day one, I started at Level 1 (position). I was the leader of the hospital, but only because I took out a huge loan and said, “I’m the boss.” I knew none of the protocols, let alone how to be a true leader.

As the first year progressed and I became more familiar with my team members and developed relationships with them, I morphed into a Level 2 leader (permission). At this level, I concentrated on morale-boosting activities, such as having a potluck lunch at staff meetings for special occasions. Every staff member brought in a favorite dish to share. This created a positive buzz in the hospital, and it brought in a lot of great smells and tastes! I would say that I remained a Level 2 leader until almost the end of my second year of practice ownership.

Then two things occurred. First, I demonstrated that our veterinary hospital was doing well compared with other hospitals, by growing 9 percent in our first year and 3 percent in our second year, despite the recession. The second event was firing the hospital manager. It took me almost two years to realize that she was not productive. Of course, the rest of the staff knew that well before me! They had felt the same way for years. Once she was fired, morale improved and my team leaders took on more leadership roles and thrived.

I was now in Level 3 (production) and on my way to Level 4 (people development). The hospital went from one practice manager to three team leaders (reception, technicians and assistants) who accepted and wanted a larger role in the decisions of the hospital. We all worked together to develop a leadership style. I developed stronger relationships with the team leaders and continued to boost morale. I provided outside training to give them tools to become great leaders.

I have not quite made it to Level 5 (pinnacle) yet. I strive to make it to this level, but as with the other stages, it will take time and patience.”

And without any doubt, he will get there. You can do the same in your own practice. Interestingly, these leadership principles are not limited to your professional life. They also apply to sports, volunteer work and family life.

Reference available at VMDtoday.com.

**MORE GUIDANCE FROM THE GURU**

A quick Google search for John Maxwell quotes brings up more than 13 million hits. Maxwell has been quoted about communication, change, teamwork, success and more. Here are some wise words from Maxwell on leadership:

“A leader who produces other leaders multiplies their influences.”

“When the leader lacks confidence, the followers lack commitment.”

“A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way.”

“The greatest mistake we make is living in constant fear that we will make one.”

“People never care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

“Leaders must be close enough to relate to others, but far enough ahead to motivate them.”

“People buy into the leader before they buy into the vision.”

“The best leaders are humble enough to realize their victories depend upon their people.”

“A good leader is a person who takes a little more than his share of the blame and a little less than his share of the credit.”

“A man must be big enough to admit his mistakes, smart enough to profit from them and strong enough to correct them.”

“Learn to say ‘no’ to the good so you can say ‘yes’ to the best.”

“Remember, man does not live on bread alone; sometimes he needs a little buttering up.”

Dr. Zeltzman is a board-certified veterinary surgeon and serial entrepreneur. His traveling surgery practice takes him all over eastern Pennsylvania and western New Jersey. You can visit his website at DrPhilZeltzman.com and follow him at facebook.com/DrZeltzman.
The Connected Practice

Savvy use of technology is a must for independent veterinary hospitals to not just survive but thrive. Take these steps to make sure your practice doesn’t become “unplugged.”

By Bruce L. Truman

The past quarter-century has witnessed a great shift in veterinary practice ownership, with corporate hospitals now quite common throughout the country. Based on trends in other vertical health care markets such as dentistry, many expect that corporate practice ownership will “level out” at 25 to 30 percent.

Once acquired by a corporation, a veterinary practice benefits from a variety of shared services and aggregated purchasing power. I liken this not only to what has occurred in the dental profession but also to what I saw growing up in rural Illinois in the 1970s. Inefficient farms were forced to close or were sold to larger corporate entities because they could not keep up with the latest equipment and innovations and were unable to farm 24/7.

My message to independent veterinary practices is that this does not have to happen to you. Yes, there is more competition out there now and practices require greater business proficiency to succeed, but private practices have a powerful weapon at their disposal: technology. The astute use of technology can be your “great equalizer” when it comes to competing with corporate practices. I call this “getting connected,” and the good news is that all you need to succeed is a decent practice information management system (PIMS; a.k.a. practice software) and the internet.

BEING “CONNECTED” TODAY

What does it mean to have a practice that is “connected”? The short answer: It all depends on you and the needs of your unique practice. Ten years ago, being connected was much simpler. It was about using email and the internet, ordering online, maintaining electronic medical records and exploring the use of social media. Today, it involves so much more.

By networking and coordinating the delivery of medical care — “connecting” with clients — a practice expands patient care, improves customer service and delivers better business performance. In a nutshell, being connected is about improving the continuity of care that pets receive. Look at your family and friends. They all use their smartphones to stay connected.

(continued on page 22)
Stay Connected!

Consider *Veterinarian’s Money Digest*® your personal and professional coach—offering expert advice on effectively managing your personal and practice finances, staying up-to-date on legal and regulatory issues, and maintaining balance in your life.

**Experienced veterinarians, practice owners and practice managers:**
- Save money by managing smarter.
- Discover the nuances of being a boss.
- Lead better.

**New graduates and students:**
- Start planning your financial future.
- Understand the economics of veterinary practice.
- Become a leader in your practice.

**Follow Us**
- facebook.com/VMDtoday
- twitter.com/VMDtoday
- VMDtoday.com/link/8

**Hear From Us**
News, insight and expert video tips delivered to your inbox. Visit VMDtoday.com/email-profile to sign up today.

**Write for Us**
Contact Maureen McKinney to learn more: mmckinney@americanveterinarian.com.

VMDtoday.com
Having an online pharmacy is critical for future growth, and I consider it mandatory. Your local manufacturer or sales representative is a good resource to help you choose the right online pharmacy for your practice.

**Practice Management Tools**
Many companies provide practice analytics and benchmarking in easy-to-read reports. Choose a company and work with it. Make sure your practice is following the American Animal Hospital Association/Veterinary Study Groups (AAHA/VSG) chart of accounts, field definitions and AAHA diagnostic codes, which can be found at aaha.org/professional/resources/chart_of_accounts.aspx.

Partner with a pet health insurance company that allows for easy electronic processing of pet health claims at your practice or by your client. Your clients expect an experience similar to what occurs when they see their own physician. Work with a company that can automate the payment process and offer a direct payment to your practice's bank account within a few days.

When Michael Dicks, PhD, director of the Veterinary Economics Division at the American Veterinary Medical Association, spoke at the recent Veterinary Hospital Managers Association annual conference, he stressed the importance of making care affordable by providing pet parents with the ability to purchase wellness plans — an annual bundle of preventive care services that are paid for in monthly installments. There are several wellness plan providers. Choose one and set goals with your staff to make the plan a success.

**TECHNOLOGY AND JOB PERFORMANCE**
Being connected comes with a caveat: You need to rethink the way you perform your job. With connectivity comes the opportunity to change the way you deliver patient care and client service.

Are you among those who think mobile phones should be banned from the pockets of your support team? If so, consider that many doctors and support staff could benefit from accessing medical content online from their smartphones or iPads. Something as simple as having access to your in-house subject-matter experts via text messaging is beneficial from the standpoint of consistency of care and growing the knowledge of individual team members. Your clients are looking up information online, so why not let your team members enter an exam room armed with better resources to engage in constructive dialogue with your clients? We all know that “Dr. Google” is sometimes wrong.

Becoming connected could change the physical landscape of office personnel, enabling a practice to blend on-site and remote team members. It is already becoming easier to outsource certain job duties using cloud-based services. Consider ways that connectivity can change other business operations (e.g., connecting with clients by using off-site staff with remote capabilities).

**LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**
Bob Dylan's lyrics from 1964 still hold true today: The times, they are a-changin'. Connectivity is not only affecting veterinary medicine; it can be seen in human health care too. As people become increasingly connected to their physicians, veterinarians can expect more demands for connectivity from clients. Ten years ago, it was common to hear a veterinary client praise a practice with the words, “My own doctor doesn’t do that for me — my pet gets better care than I do.” The situation may flip on us, and we may be told, “My doctor offers telemedicine, and I can manage my health needs online. Why can’t I do that for my pet?”

If it all sounds like too much for you, but you agree that connectivity is the best way to enable your practice to thrive, then consider hiring a practice management consultant. [VMDtoday.com](http://www.VMDtoday.com)

Reference available at VMDtoday.com.
Turning practices that run into businesses that perform.

VetPartners™
For the good of the profession.

A NONPROFIT ASSOCIATION OF VETERINARY BUSINESS SPECIALISTS
Marketing | HR | Valuation | Finance | Legal Practice Management | and more

Let VetPartners connect your veterinary practice with the experts it needs to reach its full potential.

It is Friday afternoon following a typical week of call-outs, double-booked appointments and emergencies of all kinds. To top it off, one of your technicians just handed you her resignation. How do you respond?

A. “Don’t let the door hit you on the way out.”
B. “Please don’t do this to me. Can’t you stay until I hire a replacement?”
C. You give her the silent treatment while you try to figure out how to stop the insanity.

Although no one would blame you for choosing any of those options, the fact is that they all are reactive responses. If your practice experiences high turnover, it’s time to stop reacting and start being proactive. Although taking the time to be proactive is much easier when you are not embroiled in a scenario like the one just described, view it as an opportunity. By updating your documents and procedures to handle the immediate crisis, you’ll also strengthen your talent management strategy for the future.

This is the first in a series of articles that discuss four key issues to help you close that revolving door for good: job descriptions and skills gaps, compensation and benefits, interviewing and recruiting. This installment explains why accurate job descriptions are a must for hiring and retaining employees and how to identify skills gaps in your team.

**JOB DESCRIPTIONS**

When was the last time you reviewed your employees’ job descriptions? If it has been while, consider any hires that went wrong. Was there a disconnect between the job’s description and its actual requirements?

Did you advertise for one skill set when you really needed another? Were factors important for compensation accurate? Job descriptions are key management documents for a host of reasons: They allow you to review performance; manage day-to-day operations; recruit, train and compensate your team; and establish appropriate expectations for the entire staff.

Have you ever heard someone say, “That’s not in my job description”? You should review your team’s current job descriptions if, since they were last drafted, you:

- Made changes in operational procedures, such as assigning or shifting responsibilities
- Initiated a new strategic plan for business operations
- Created new positions
- Integrated new technology
- Built a job description around an individual who is leaving or taking on new responsibilities

So where do you start? Begin by comparing the requirements listed in the job descriptions with what people actually do every day. Conduct a job analysis and involve your team in the process. Ask each person to review and edit his or her job description for current relevancy. Supervisors should also review and edit the descriptions.

When conducting a job analysis, consider using a questionnaire about the tasks being performed; face-to-face interviews
with the person performing a particular job as well as the supervisor evaluating his or her performance; direct observation of the employee; and log sheets detailing each task and the time spent performing it. Doing so will shed light on expectations of both parties and identify any areas of disconnect between the job description and the reality. See The Job Description Checklist for details of what every job description should include.

SKILLS GAPS
Reviewing and revising the job description includes updating the required knowledge and skills. Consider performing a skills-gap analysis when you update your job descriptions. Once you have accurate job descriptions, you can identify where skills may be lacking in your team. Gaps fall into three categories:
- Doesn’t know (knowledge gap)
- Doesn’t know how (skills gap)
- Unable to do in practice (practice gap)

Think about the old training adage: Learn one, do one, teach one. Identifying gaps in essential knowledge and skills follows the same idea. Does the person possess the knowledge needed to complete the task, can he or she apply that knowledge to do the task, and can he or she perform the task in real-life situations and show others how to do it as well?

Consider a situation involving new equipment. The technicians do not how to use the new equipment — that is the gap. Does it exist because they lack knowledge about the equipment, have not handled it yet or have not used it in practice on an actual patient?

Identifying gaps in the skills of your team is not relevant only for job descriptions. It also relates to the strategic goals of your business — in other words, what will be needed in the future. While reviewing a job description, you may realize that a new strategic initiative will require new skills and knowledge. That means it’s time to update the job description, inform and train the team, and use this information as you interview potential hires. Skills gaps occur as the faces of the team and the demands of business change.

Suppose the strategic plan is to initiate Fear Free techniques in the exam room. Your team has completed the training modules and is using the techniques in practice. A technician has given notice and you will have to interview for a replacement. Do you include a question about Fear Free techniques during the interviewing process? Is a statement about practicing Fear Free techniques in the job description?

WHAT’S IN IT FOR YOU?
Although updating job descriptions and assessing for skills gaps is not a one-and-done process, the rewards are worth the effort. A vacated position presents a good time to review the job description and needed skill set. This new job description should be used for recruiting. After all, you should know what the business needs are before you write a help-wanted ad.

Use the job description to coordinate training of the new hire and subsequent performance appraisals. Use the job description to market your open position. Use the skills analysis to develop interview questions and target candidates who can cover any gaps in your current team or provide skills the business will need when it moves forward with the strategic plan.

Once you make that hire, use the job description to coordinate training and subsequent performance appraisals. Updating the job description and skills list as you go along will keep the document relevant and current with the needs of the business.

So, the next time you receive a resignation letter from an employee, welcome the opportunity to update your documents and skills assessment so that the next hire will be exactly what the doctor ordered.

Ms. Dunn is an award-winning speaker, writer and consultant who brings over 40 years of in-the-trenches experience and business education to veterinary management. She is founder and CEO of Snowgoose Veterinary Management Consulting, which helps veterinarians develop strategic plans that consistently produce results.

THE JOB DESCRIPTION CHECKLIST

- Practice’s strategic plan (goals, objectives)
- Job title (accurate reflection of duties and strategic plan of business)
- Requirements, responsibilities and duties
- Objectives of responsibilities and duties
- Clear chain of command
- Knowledge, skills and abilities required
- Description of physical demands

VMDToday.com
How to Build the Perfect Resume

Follow these tips to create a career summary that is sure to impress any would-be employer.

By Kerry Lengyel

Whether you’re a recent veterinary school graduate seeking your first job or an experienced veterinary professional looking for a new practice or career advancement, building a top-notch resume should be priority No. 1.

A study by The Ladders, an online job-matching service, found that recruiters spend only six seconds reviewing an individual resume. It’s your job to make those six seconds count so the recruiter wants to read it more carefully.

Resume trends change quickly, and expert opinions vary on some aspects of what makes a great resume. One thing they all agree on is that it’s important to keep your resume updated and current.

So, what should your resume look like? We sought some expert advice to find the answer.

“Your resume can be considered the launching pad for your job search,” said Stacy Pursell, CPC, CERS, founder of The Vet Recruiter. “And it has one purpose: to land you as many interviews as possible.”

BRAND YOURSELF

Your resume should show what you can do for an employer, not what the employer can do for you. Build your resume to be a summary of you and your qualifications and how they are just what the employer is seeking. You are an expert on yourself and what you bring to the table. Choose your words wisely to convey your personal “brand” through your resume.

Tip 1: Include some of the keywords from the job description in your resume. Many recruiters actually search electronically for those words when reviewing incoming resumes, and if they aren’t there, your resume may not even be considered.

Tip 2: Include volunteer work if you can. According to a Deloitte Impact survey, 82 percent of those who influence hiring decisions said they are more likely to choose a candidate with volunteer experience, but only one in three resumes in the United States cites volunteer work.

COVER LETTERS COUNT

Best practices dictate that you send a cover letter along with your resume — even if the potential employer did not specifically request one. Think of your cover letter as an introduction that provides the recruiter with additional information about your skills, experiences and qualifications that they may not find in your resume.

Here are the basics of a successful cover letter:
- Opening: Be personable in your opening paragraph while also highlighting how your skills and qualities are the perfect fit for the job you want.
- Hook: Talk about past achievements, awards and recognitions that relate specifically to the job at hand.
- Skills: Highlight relevant skills that relate specifically to the job you’re seeking.
- Close: Recap and reiterate your strengths, and end the letter by providing your contact information.

DESIGN TO IMPRESS

Make your resume stand out by putting a bit of thought into its design. Attract potential employers with a simple pop of color or an interesting — but readable — font. They may be looking at several dozen resumes in a day, and something that catches their eye on first glance may receive more attention.

One important thing to remember is never to add a photo to your resume. “Unless you’re applying for a job as an international model, it’s not recommended,” Pursell said. “Including a photo can throw off the applicant tracking system, and it won’t import your resume.
properly.” Also keep in mind that your resume is meant to be a concise summary of your qualifications. Most can be kept to a single page; never exceed two pages.

**Tip 1:** The font you select is important. Times New Roman is dated and boring and should not be used. Instead, select a sleek, cleaner font, such as Garamond, Gill Sans, Calibri, Lato or Avenir.

**Tip 2:** Use bold text strategically to highlight things you want the hirer to notice (e.g., job titles, accomplishments); don’t overuse it.

**Tip 3:** Bullet points are your friend – use them to save valuable resume real estate.

**START AT THE TOP**
The first place a potential employer will look on your resume is the top, so give it your utmost attention. Simply stating your name, phone number and email address is not enough. Pursell advised including a link to your personal website, your LinkedIn profile or another website that offers the prospective employer more in-depth information that a resume can’t provide.

When it comes to a mission statement or objective statement, Pursell said don’t include one. “Your stated mission or objective may not line up perfectly with the organization’s mission or its current opening,” she added. Instead, she recommends using an executive or professional summary that more closely aligns with the company’s expectations. It should be a summary that gives a quick idea of who you are and why you’re qualified for that specific job.

**Tip 1:** If you have a Hotmail or AOL account, it’s time to upgrade. If your email address is with one of these outdated accounts, job recruiters will think you’re living in the past. Make yourself a Gmail account or an email address tied to your personal website.

**Tip 2:** Be sure to hyperlink your email address, LinkedIn profile, and social media handles so the recruiter can find you online easily.

**Tip 3:** Don’t include personal information, such as your age, marital status or religion.

Employers are not allowed to ask about this personal information.

**Tip 4:** Don’t include “References available upon request.” This is an outdated statement – the recruiter will ask you personally for references if they are required.

**INCLUDE KEY SKILLS AND REAL METRICS**
Be sure to list your skill set near the top of your resume in its own separate section. If you’re familiar with a new surgical procedure, for example, mention it. Tailor this section to the specific job you’re applying for. Remove skills that may not be as relevant, and list qualifications that tell a potential employer you can handle the position with ease.

“You need to list your employers, your job titles, dates of employment and highlights of what you did in each position,” Pursell said. “It’s especially important to include your accomplishments and what you did to benefit your employers.”

Is your salary based on production at your current veterinary practice? If the practice makes these metrics available to you, include them in your resume. Did you save the practice money by implementing a new protocol? Mention how much you were able to save. Were you part of a research team in veterinary school? Describe what you accomplished. Your potential employer wants to see what you have actually done with your career or during veterinary school.

**Tip 1:** Avoid overused phrases like “quick learner” and “hard worker,” and instead list hard skills that show the recruiter exactly what you can do.

**Tip 2:** Having trouble finding real numbers? Look to past performance reviews or recommendation letters for ideas.

**CONTROL YOUR TIMELINE**
If you’re an experienced veterinarian, consider deleting your early jobs and internships from your resume. Include only work experience that is relevant to the position you’re applying for and shows the progression of your career. You may not even want to include the date you graduated veterinary school – some employers may find you too young or too old.

Pursell also said it’s important to make sure you’re listing your work history in reverse chronological order. “The recruiter is expecting that the job listed at the top of your resume is your current position,” she noted.

**Tip 1:** Unless it’s essential to your narrative, leave any work experience that dates back more than 20 years off your resume for good.

**Tip 2:** If you’ve been out of school for longer than three years, don’t include your grade point average on your resume.

References available at VMDtoday.com.

Ms. Lengyel is assistant editor for Veterinarian’s Money Digest® (VMDToday.com) and American Veterinarian® (AmericanVeterinarian.com).
Oh, the Places You Can Go in Animal Care

The career trajectories of three outstanding professionals are proof that opportunities abound in veterinary medicine.

By Elaina Boudreau

The career path in veterinary medicine isn’t always a straight line. Opportunities extend far beyond general veterinary practice and include teaching, research, public health and global medicine, government work, shelter medicine, specialty practice and more. Veterinary professionals can choose to work with dogs and cats, or they can venture into the world of exotic animals, marine animals, horses, wild animals or food animals.

The possibilities truly are endless. You just need an open and inquiring mind and dedication to doing what you love. Here, we highlight three animal care experts in the Compassion-First Pet Hospitals network who found their way to unique and rewarding careers by being open to the possibilities around them.

WHEN EMERGENCY CARE TOOK ITS TOLL, HE SHIFTED HIS FOCUS

David Chen, DVM, CVA, Acupuncturist

Talk about a leap of faith. The injury Dr. Chen suffered during a jump off the Great Wall of China showed him firsthand the healing power of acupuncture, and he ultimately shifted his professional focus from emergency medicine to integrative pet care.

Today, Dr. Chen specializes in pain management as a certified acupuncturist in the physical rehabilitation department at East End Veterinary Center in Riverhead, New York.

After veterinary school graduation in 2010, Dr. Chen took a backpacking trip overseas, where he joined other tourists in leaping off the Great Wall – a stunt he immediately regretted due to a back injury. He took anti-inflammatory medicine to no avail before deciding to visit a local acupuncturist. Twelve hours later and free of pain, Dr. Chen recognized Eastern medicine as an excellent complement to conventional care.

Dr. Chen returned to the United States and served as medical director of a high-volume specialty center, but his interest in acupuncture persisted. During the four years that followed, he found the emotional stress of emergency animal care increasingly difficult to bear. He also longed for the opportunity to build a stronger connection with his patients.

“I was certified in veterinary acupuncture and traveled to Florida to do my intern hours, all while working at a hospital on Long Island,” Dr. Chen said. It took a year to complete the coursework and internship before he received certification. By then, he had moved to East End Veterinary Center. The hospital administrator welcomed his initiative, and in early 2017, Dr. Chen joined East End’s acupuncture provider, as well as the rehabilitation and surgery departments, in helping dogs with hip dysplasia, cancer and other conditions requiring pain management.

“I love it. I’m working with clients I see on a recurrent basis. I know their families, and I’m able to build a relationship with the pet, which is something I find very rewarding,” Dr. Chen said. He spends some of his days at the hospital and others making house calls.

Integrated care is a growing trend as people realize they can help resolve pain and support the immune system not only through medicine and surgery but also with treatments like acupuncture. Dr. Chen especially enjoys collaborating with the rehab team. “When you integrate rehab with acupuncture, the benefits are huge. The patient gets stronger, inflammation and pain decrease, and mobility increases, while the overall quality of life for each pet is improved,” he explained.

“My life is stress-free now,” he said. If his acupuncture patients could talk, they might say the same thing.

HE’S MOST AT HOME IN THE LAB, FROM ZOO TO PRIVATE PRACTICE

Peter Psillas, LVT, Laboratory Supervisor

For Peter Psillas, there is no career challenge too big. Whether it involves a polar bear or a Pomeranian, his career as a veterinary technician has entailed doing just about everything. Psillas spent 20 years at the Bronx Zoo before joining Red Bank Veterinary Hospital (RBVH) in Millstone, New Jersey.

It’s easy to see why Psillas enjoys scientific analysis, given that he earned his bachelor’s in geology. But instead of pursuing a job in earth science, Psillas decided to put his scientific skills to work on behalf of animals and took a job at a small animal practice in New Jersey.

Happily surrounded by pets and having found his true calling, Psillas returned to school part time to become a veterinary technician while working at the hospital. After becoming licensed, he worked at a large referral hospital for a brief period, and then went on to a research facility in Westchester, New York. Through networking, he found a job at the Bronx Zoo, working first in the mammal department and then in the hospital.

“In the hospital, we rotated from the lab to surgery to the pharmacy, and we assisted with the treatment of hospitalized animals. It was never boring,” Psillas said. In fact, on his first day there, he was tasked with making sure a polar bear didn’t wake up during surgery. He also once radiographed a 25-foot anaconda.
there, and he encourages students to take full advantage of the opportunity to explore their interests and decide what they find most challenging and rewarding. That's how he carved his own winding path to a career he loves.

MAKING HER MARK THROUGH NETWORKING, TEACHING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION
Valerie Garuccio, CVT, VTS (ECC), Mentor and Instructor
Valerie Garuccio has more credentials after her name than most veterinary technicians do, and there's a reason for it. She realized that the more expertise she acquires, the more connected she becomes to the world of animal care. Through those connections, she finds opportunities to make an impact while doing work she loves as a veterinary technician specialist (VTS) clinical mentor and instructor at RBVH in Tinton Falls, New Jersey.

Garuccio became a certified veterinary technician in 2001. Ten years later, she furthered her expertise by earning her VTS certification in emergency and critical care (ECC), completing the coursework and practical training while at RBVH.

Garuccio calls earning her ECC certification her proudest moment, and becoming a member of the Academy of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Technicians (AVECCT) took her career in a new direction as a mentor. She is an active member of the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) and serves as secretary for her state association, New Jersey Veterinary Technicians and Assistants.

“The industry is creating new areas that veterinary technicians can move into, and certifications are definitely something that people exploring this career should consider obtaining,” she said. Those who achieve VTS status are education-oriented and eager to help teach others, which is what led her to the role she fills today at RBVH. Garuccio also enjoys networking with fellow academy members.

“The academy gives you access to other specialists around the world, opening doors to collaboration and idea sharing that improve veterinary medicine and the work environment for technicians,” Garuccio said. She has found that when you open one door, it always leads to another. For her, those doors have opened a world of learning, collaboration and advancement. For example, a colleague at an academy gathering asked her to review an article written for an animal care website. Next thing Garuccio knew, the publication asked her to contribute her own article, further establishing her as an expert in her field. She's come a long way in 16 years.

Garuccio began her veterinary technician career at Animal Kind Veterinary Hospital in Brooklyn, New York, in 2001. She spent five years there, periodically moonlighting as an avian and exotics veterinary technician at The Animal Medical Center in Manhattan.

In 2006, Garuccio moved to RBVH as an ECC specialist. In 2012, she advanced to critical care technician supervisor; five years later, she stepped up to become the hospital's on-site mentor and instructor.

Garuccio also serves as a member of the AVECCT mentoring committee, helping others through the two-year process of earning specialist credentials. Ever eager to expand her own professional skills, Garuccio is working toward her bachelor's degree in organizational leadership. She credits RBVH with supporting her ongoing development, and she intends to continue paying it forward through her efforts to inspire others as a mentor.

Elaina Boudreau is an award-winning communications professional and storyteller. She is the founder and owner of BELA Communications, a marketing communications company with unrelenting focus on creating value for clients.
Power-Packed Digital Marketing Strategies

Establishing an online presence may seem simple, but simply having a presence isn’t enough. Position your practice for success with these proven tactics.

By Naren Arulrajah

At first glance, digital marketing for your veterinary practice might seem easy. Establishing an online presence can be as simple as having a website and joining a few social networks, right? Unfortunately, just having an online presence won’t earn you new customers or engage the ones you already have. Without some strategic planning, you’ll find yourself standing in a dark corner of the virtual world, present but not seen. If this is happening to you, try these strategies to propel your marketing — and your practice — to the next level.

**BUILD A HIGH-PERFORMANCE WEBSITE**

A decade ago, clients were impressed if you had a website at all. It showed that your practice was progressive and that you were making an effort to reach out. Pet owners appreciated the convenience of finding basic information online, such as your practice location and contact information. Times have changed, though, and very quickly. Today, every business is expected to have a website. And if you want to stand out, your website needs to stand out.

You won’t get a second chance to make a first impression and neither will your website. The average visitor will form an opinion within a half-second of the page loading. Of course, that is not enough time to read an article, watch a video or even examine a photo closely. To make a great first impression, you need a cohesive and aesthetically pleasing design. Pay attention to details such as color choices, shapes, graphics and visual layout of text. Is the page welcoming? Does it draw in the viewer? Once you have a viewer’s attention, the next challenge is keeping and directing it. Here are some smart ways to do that:

- **Use real photographs — and lots of them.** Pictures of your office and team help personalize your website. They allow the user to get to know your practice and they establish credibility. Multiple case studies have found that replacing stock photos with genuine, original pictures can increase conversion by more than 30 percent to 40 percent.2,3

- **Include videos.** These can range from educational content to cute animals. No matter what the topic, videos garner engagement. They are also highly sharable, so be sure that your website includes convenient share buttons.

- **Lead the viewer.** Americans read from left to right, top to bottom. The eyes are trained to this pattern, even when scanning. Include your practice name and logo, phone number and contact buttons in the header. Use bright colors, standout shapes or directional graphics to draw the viewer to the most important page elements.

- **Provide educational content.** Your website can serve as nothing more than an online advertisement for your practice, or it can be a go-to information source for current and prospective clients. Just think of the issues you are asked about most frequently, such as the appropriate age for spaying and neutering, signs of certain diseases, feeding schedules and vaccinations. People are looking online for information about these topics. When you become their trusted resource, you position yourself as an expert and begin building an audience.

**GARNER SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS**

When you think of social media success, you might think of followers (or friends or page likes, depending on the platform). This number is often used to gauge the popularity of a person or business, and it is the subject of many
social media marketing articles. However, the number of followers you have is not a measure of success, and it should not be your No. 1 concern.

Acquiring an audience may seem daunting when you first join a new network, but you can easily use existing channels to reach out. Include social media links on your website and in your emails, and list your handle for each platform on printed ads and communications. You can gain exposure more quickly with paid advertising, although you risk a lower-quality audience unless the ads are well targeted.

Once you are established, gaining followers doesn’t have to be a high priority. One of the remarkable things about social media is that your audience and reach continue to multiply with minimal effort on your part. Every time someone shares a post, it will reach that person’s friends and followers. Liking, favoriting and commenting will increase exposure. However, this happens only if people engage with your content.

The true secret to social media success is engagement. You can post basic information and promotional material all day long, and most viewers will scroll right past it. If it doesn’t catch their attention, they will not click the link or act on the offer. They won’t interact with the post, meaning their friends won’t see it. Furthermore, many networks use advanced algorithms to determine the quality of a profile.

Facebook, in particular, has made several changes designed to increase relevancy of content in an individual’s news feed. The algorithm uses clues such as who has commented on a post, how many times it has been hidden and how much a user has previously interacted with the page. In other words, the more engaging your content is, the better your page will perform. The reverse is also true.

Fortunately for you, veterinarians have a unique advantage when creating engaging content. Pet owners are among the most active social media users, and animal-related content is among the most popular on the internet. That means some of the most engaging and sharable content is highly relevant to your industry and target audience.

You won’t get a second chance to make a first impression and neither will your website.

If your social media are underperforming, try posts like these:

• Pet care infographics: The possibilities are endless. You can create infographics showing training tips, nutritional guides, kitten or puppy growth charts and lists of human foods that are safe (or toxic) for animals.

• Seasonal warnings and tips: Post about the signs of heatstroke in animals, excess heat or cold warnings, how to protect a dog’s feet on hot sidewalks, coping with cats and holiday decorations, or anything else relevant to your locale and the time of year.

• Cute animal videos: They are all over the internet, and people can’t get enough of them. You can share existing content or, even better, create your own (see Originality Counts). If your office has a resident animal, or you have especially photogenic pets, you could have the next feline or canine internet star.

• Humor: How often do your friends share funny memes featuring animals? Whether it is a sad bloodhound mourning the end of the weekend or a playful kitten ready to conquer an enemy, an expressive animal photo illustrates a statement or joke like nothing else.

References available at VMDtoday.com.

Mr. Arulrajah is president and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a full-service internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education and the online reputations of veterinarians/practice owners. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with him.
Digital Marketing on a Shoestring Budget

Online marketing is a must for practice success today. Here’s how to get started when you don’t have a lot to spend.

By Chris Panebianco

The success of your practice depends on attracting and retaining clients. If you’re relying on word-of-mouth to win new customers, then you’re probably missing out on big revenue opportunities. In today’s digitally driven world, there are more ways than ever to reach new pet owners and entice them to keep coming back.

If you’re not ready to commit to a full marketing plan, try a few inexpensive digital tactics first to see how they work for you.

MARKETING CHANNELS
For veterinary practices, video can give prospective clients a glimpse into your personality, techniques and facility; provide a platform to educate pet owners; and promote services, events and special offers. You can embed videos on your website, share them on your social media accounts and link to them in emails.

You don’t need high-end equipment; a mobile phone with a decent camera and sound will work just fine (just be sure to use a tripod to avoid shaky production). Make your videos engaging, professional, informative and fun.

YouTube offers built-in analytics, so you can see how many times a video was viewed, how long people watched and viewer geography.

If you have a Facebook page, that’s a good start, but did you know that only a small percentage of your followers see the content you post? That’s because Facebook wants you to pay to boost your posts in the form of advertising.

While ads can help you reach a wider audience, you want to be sure you’re getting in front of the right people. Facebook allows you to target who sees your content based on specifications such as location, interests and likelihood of pet ownership. Using the Facebook Ads Manager function, you’re able to identify who sees your content based on specifications of the right people. Facebook allows you to target their point of need with a clickable website.

Pay per click is a digital advertising tactic intended to drive search engine users to your website. You choose the keywords with which you want to be found so your ad appears at the top of the results based on what people are searching. This can help attract pet owners who are actively searching for veterinary practices or services. Google’s Keyword Planner enables you to determine which terms are commonly used in searches by pet owners.

Pay-per-click can capture new customers at their point of need with a clickable website, phone number, address and online appointment setting (if your website has this functionality). You can set your maximum daily budgets to ensure you’re spending efficiently.

MEASURING YOUR SUCCESS
The key to successful digital marketing is measuring its effectiveness. For whatever strategies you execute, evaluate how they performed against your goals and then modify your approach to improve your business results.

I hope you caught the word “goals.” Before launching any type of marketing program, be sure to identify what you hope to accomplish so you can measure and determine whether your program was successful.

Don’t get discouraged if you don’t hit all your goals – it doesn’t mean you should pull the plug on marketing. Rather, see what you can do differently next time. For example, are you narrowing in on the right keywords to show up in a search? Are you giving readers a clear call to action to visit your site? Is your content engaging enough to make readers stop, read and click through? Are you effectively communicating the value of email communications to your clients in order to get them to disclose their addresses?

The alternative is doing nothing at all to market your practice – and in today’s competitive and digitally focused marketplace, can you afford not to invest in marketing?

Mr. Panebianco is chief marketing officer at Bankers Healthcare Group (BHG), the leading provider of financial solutions for health care professionals. For more information, contact Chris at chris@bhg-inc.com.
Veterinary practice ownership, no experience necessary.

When Dr. Josh Storm bought Woodley Gardens Veterinary Care, he didn't have any prior experience owning a business. He just knew that ownership was the next logical step in his career.

Within the first year, he turned a single-doctor practice into a multi-doctor veterinary powerhouse.

Learn how he did it at calicofinancial.com/storm.