

NATIONWIDE SURVEY REVEALS CRITICAL FACTORS FOR TEAM DEVELOPMENT

Over the course of three national meetings (NAVC, AAHA, AVMA), three veterinary consultants gathered critical information to help veterinary hospitals better manage and develop their teams. Using technology generously sponsored by CareCredit, the consultants were able to gather feedback in “real time” during their interactive presentations. Audience members were supplied with Touchpads, which they used to respond to specific questions about employee management.

Topics ranged from job descriptions to accountability to legal aspects of employment. Session titles and subjects included:

- I Contracts, Job Descriptions, and Standards
- II Teachable Moments, Feedback and Performance Evaluations
- III Accountability: Create and Implement Consequences

“Our survey clearly shows that team members want to know when they’re doing well and when they need improvement. We found that managers need help in learning specific skills for providing feedback, coaching, and establishing both positive and negative consequences.”

— *Carin Smith*

“Timing and position does make a difference in perception. Once you know the goal, cooperation and collaboration is so much more powerful!” — *Louise Dunn*

“With all the employment-related lawsuits veterinarians read about, they tend to think they are liable when they are not! The survey shows that veterinarians understand their legal obligations, but our conference discussions suggested they did not always know how to avoid lawsuit threats by disgruntled employees.” — *Charlotte Lacroix*

The consultant-speakers included:

Practice management consultant **Louise Dunn**, who focused on “in the trenches” tips for hospitals;

Veterinarian-attorney **Charlotte Lacroix** DVM JD, who focused on legal aspects of employment;

Veterinarian-consultant **Carin Smith** DVM, who focused on creating processes for employee development.

Detailed Survey and Speaker information follows.

Speaker Information

Carin Smith DVM

Dr. Carin Smith is a trainer, mediator, and consultant who helps veterinarians and their teams create successful lives and careers. She conducts multi-day experiential workshops and interactive learning experiences to help the team practice and develop their skills in leadership, communication, conflict resolution, and coaching others to peak performance. Dr. Smith's years in both large and small animal practice add real-life experiences and insights to her presentations.

Smith Veterinary Consulting www.smithvet.com (509) 548-2010 carin@smithvet.com

Louise S. Dunn

Ms. Dunn launched Snowgoose Veterinary Management Consulting after 21 years of managing in the veterinary field. She provides technical assistance to practice teams to meet their strategic plans. SVMC works with a wide variety of practices, ranging from 100 team-member companion animal hospitals to referral centers, mixed animal, and single veterinarian practices. Ms. Dunn has held practice management workshops at many veterinary schools. She is widely published and speaks nationally. Ms. Dunn brings a unique combination of business, in the trenches experience and knowledge to the veterinary industry. Her passions include her family, veterinary practice management, kayaking and the New England Patriots. **Snowgoose Veterinary Management Consulting (336) 286-0878 snogoose@infionline.net**

Charlotte Lacroix DVM JD

Dr. Charlotte Lacroix is a veterinary attorney who consults with veterinarians and attorneys nationwide on veterinary legal issues. Her focus is on business transactions and mediation of partnership disputes. Dr. Lacroix advises on selecting and forming business entities; structuring buy-ins, acquisitions and practice mergers; negotiating and facilitating the sale and purchase of veterinary practices, including specialty practices; preparing buy-sell documents, employment agreements, commercial leases; mediating disputes, and advising on malpractice cases, as well as, employment and animal law issues. **Veterinary Business Advisors (908) 534-2065 clacroix123@earthlink.net**

Survey Methods

Veterinarians and their team members were asked questions during interactive practice management sessions at three national veterinary meetings during 2006: the **North American Veterinary Conference**, the **American Animal Hospital Association**, and the **American Veterinary Medical Association** annual meetings.

Attendees were given electronic touchpads on which they could enter their answer to questions displayed on the screen. This technology, generously sponsored by CareCredit, allowed attendees to anonymously answer any question posed by the speaker, with the total results instantly displayed for the group. Such technology greatly enhances learning and understanding while removing some of the concern about “saying the wrong answer” or about revealing uncomfortable information.

All questions were created by the speakers as part of their segment of the presentation. Louise Dunn focused on “in the trenches” tips for hospitals; veterinarian-attorney Charlotte Lacroix DVM JD, focused on legal aspects of employment; and veterinarian-consultant Carin Smith DVM, focused on creating processes for employee development.

GENERAL QUESTIONS ASKED AT ALL MEETINGS: Overall results

The total number of attendees varied with each meeting.

Subsequent sections show both the percentage and the number of replies to each question.

My position in the team is:

My position in the team is:

1 Practice owner	23%
2 Practice manager	54%
3 Associate veterinarian	6%
4 Technician	6%
5 Receptionist	2%
6 Other	10%

“Other” included bookkeeper, other niche office work, academia

My overall experience after today’s sessions was....

1 I feel that I have at least one specific action item I can take back with me	70%
2 I have some good ideas but am not sure if the boss will be ready to hear them	19%
3 I am ready to quit my job	11%

I. CONTRACTS, JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND STANDARDS: Employee Development

Dr. Carin Smith, Smith Veterinary Consulting
 carin@smithvet.com (509) 548-2010

QUESTION	PERCENT	Total Respondents
Do you have a written job description?		
1 Yes	59%	
2 No	39%	
3 Not sure	1%	150
If you have a written job description, does it accurately reflect what you do?		
1 Yes	27%	
2 Somewhat, but it needs changes	62%	
3 Not really, or not at all	6%	
4 Not sure, I haven't looked at it lately	4%	93
Have you ever been asked to help write a job description?		
1 Yes	79%	
2 No	21%	149
If no, do you feel that your boss / manager would be open to your input in doing so?		
1 Yes	90%	
2 No	6%	
3 Not Sure	4%	51
Does your hospital have written standards for courtesy?		
1 Yes	20%	
2 No	70%	
3 Not sure	9%	132
Does your hospital have a conflict resolution policy? *		
1 Yes	30%	
2 No	66%	
3 Not sure	5%	132

** Note: Most "Yes" worked in government or academia.
 As part of this workshop, attendees began to create their own conflict resolution policy that began with "we will talk directly to one another about our problems."*

I. CONTRACTS, JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND STANDARDS: Legal

Charlotte Lacroix, DVM JD, Veterinary Business Advisors
 clacroix123@earthlink.net (908)534-2065

Many of Dr. Lacroix's questions have ONE correct answer

QUESTION	PERCENT	Total Respondents
Does your hospital have written and signed employment contracts for its veterinarians?		
Yes	71%	
No	29%	69
Does your hospital have written and signed employment contracts for its Non-veterinary employees?		
Yes	24%	
No	76%	70
Without an employment contract, either the employer or the employee can terminate the employment relationship at any time with NO advance notice		
1.True <i>Correct</i>	89%	
2.False	11%	64
An Employee Manual is binding on an employer...meaning if it says that each employee gets 3 weeks of vacation, the employer must give 3 weeks.		
1.True <i>Correct</i>	81%	
2.False	19%	69
From a human resources risk management perspective, job descriptions and standards...		
1 Differentiate responsibilities among employees	7%	
2 Enhance delivery of medicine	0	
3 Provide for the basis for reprimand and termination of employees * <i>Correct</i>	45%	
4 Define employer expectations	48%	71
<i>* It Is ok to reprimand your employees so long as you are consistent in applying reprimands to all of your employees.</i>		
Your practice should develop job descriptions for...		
1 Job applicants to review at time of application	2%	
2 Effective training and management	0	
3 Evaluating progress after hiring	0	
4 All of the above. <i>Correct</i>	98%	

I. CONTRACTS, JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND STANDARDS: “In The Trenches”

Ms. **Louise Dunn**, Snowgoose Veterinary Management Consulting
 336-286-0878 snogoose@infionline.net

QUESTION	PERCENT	Total Respondents
Does your hospital have a written outline or procedure (standards or SOPs) for talking to clients about payment policies and options?		
1 Yes	45%	
2 No	52%	
3 Not sure	3%	144
Do you use task lists that are posted and signed daily?		
1 Yes	36%	
2 We have them and sometimes use them	32%	
3 No	32%	149
If asked would you write your own job description?		
1.Yes	95%	
2.No	5%	
3.Not sure	0%	59
If you are an owner, do feel your hospital standards are met consistently?		
1.Yes	70%	
2.No	26%	
3.Not sure	4%	
<i>compare to next question...</i>		23
If you are <i>not</i> an owner, do feel your hospital standards are met consistently?		
1.Yes	25%	
2.No	76%	
3.Not sure	0%	53

II. IMPROVING PERFORMANCE; FEEDBACK: Employee Development

Dr. Carin Smith, Smith Veterinary Consulting
 carin@smithvet.com (509) 548-2010

QUESTION	PERCENT	Total Respondents
In my practice, the one thing that would help most in improving performance is:		
1 Delegate and empower us to do more	14%	
2 Provide better or more clear rewards when we do well*	14%	
3 Create clear and fair consequences for when someone falls short	22%	
4 Communicate more clearly and more often about what's going on	50%	
		114
<i>* Rewards are important, but also boundaries, accountability, and clear communication, for employees to feel they're treated fairly.</i>		
At your hospital, "teachable moments" are...		
1 Overdone, with micromanaging	15%	
2 Great, it's done in a positive way	17%	
3 Not done	1%	
4 Inconsistent	66%	
		142
As a team leader, practice manager, or practice owner, the style** I use most is:		
1 Providing the solution	40%	
2 Collaborating	33%	
3 Coaching	27%	
		136
<i>** Note: During skills practice, attendees practiced and discussed appropriate use of each style and became aware of the gap between what they thought was "collaboration" or "coaching" and what they were actually doing. True collaboration requires that both people's needs are addressed and both contribute ideas. True coaching requires open questioning to allow the employee to develop their own plan, not for the leader to use leading questions or suggestions.</i>		
With regard to decision-making in my practice:		
1 It is clear who has the authority to make what decisions	56%	
2 Delegating or empowering team members to make decisions is inconsistent or unsupported	44%	
3 I have no idea who has the authority to make what decisions	0%	
		25
In my practice, the owner usually:		
1 Asks for feedback, but doesn't take action	17%	
2 Asks for feedback, and usually takes action	38%	
3 Rarely asks for feedback, but receives it ok	38%	
4 Rarely asks for feedback, and doesn't welcome it when it's offered.	7%	
		58

II. IMPROVING PERFORMANCE; FEEDBACK: Employee Development

Dr. Carin Smith, Smith Veterinary Consulting
 carin@smithvet.com (509) 548-2010

QUESTION	PERCENT	Total Respondents
In my practice, the <i>practice manager</i> usually:		
1 Asks for feedback, but doesn't take action	15%	
2 Asks for feedback, and usually takes action	52%	
3 Rarely asks for feedback, but receives it ok	22%	
4 Rarely asks for feedback, and doesn't welcome it when it's offered.	11%	
		27
IF the practice manager is the "designated receiver of feedback" for your practice, then does the owner "let" the manager follow through with action?		
1. Yes	46%	
2. The owner isn't the problem, it's the manager who isn't following through	5%	
3. Often the owner circumvents or undermines the manager	19%	
4. It's totally inconsistent	30%	
5. No	0%	
		57
In my practice, feedback during teachable moments is usually:		
1. Vague or nonspecific, leaving us unsure of how or what is wanted	7%	
2. Sugarcoated (unclear, hints, or indirect)	20%	
3. Inconsistent	24%	
4. Negative or critical	15%	
5. Specific and tactful	34%	
		59
Owners & Managers: The amount of feedback that I give to team members is:		
1. Too little	58%	
2. Appropriate	37%	
3. Too much; micromanaging	5%	
		59
<i>compare to next question...</i>		
Non-Owners: The amount of feedback I receive is:		
1. Too little	55%	
2. Appropriate	18%	
3. Too much; micromanaging	27%	
		49

Note: The results on this page indicate that managers could use some help in giving appropriate feedback!

II. IMPROVING PERFORMANCE; FEEDBACK: “In The Trenches”

Ms. Louise Dunn, Snowgoose Veterinary Management Consulting
 336-286-0878 snogoose@infionline.net

QUESTION	PERCENT	Total Respondents
Do you perceive unfairness or imbalance in how “teachable moments” are administered in your practice?		
1 Yes	60%	
2 No	40%	
		156
What is the number one reason that people leave their jobs?		
1 Perceived unfairness	61%	
2 Money or compensation package	20%	
3 Lack of a challenge	19%	
		128
Are there written evaluations done in your practice?		
1 Yes	59%	
2 There’s supposed to be, but they get postponed or forgotten	29%	
3 No	12%	
		166
If yes, how often?		
1 Once a year	71%	
2 Twice a year	21%	
3 More often than twice a year	8%	
		142
During performance evaluation, are you evaluated on more than just tasks? (E.g., behavior, attitude, and/or professional appearance.)		
1 Yes	98%	
2 No, only on the tasks I do	2%	
		148
Have you been acknowledged for a job well done within the last...?		
1 Three months	76%	
2 Six months	7%	
3 Twelve months	3%	
4 I can’t remember the last time	13%	
		152

III. ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONSEQUENCES: “In The Trenches”

Is there an employee at your hospital who “gets away” with a problem behavior?		
1 Yes	90%	
2 No	10%	
		115
If yes, what is the effect on other team members?		
1 They don’t care, they think she’s perfect too	0%	
2 They try to ignore it, since they also “get away with” some stuff	26%	
3 They resent it	74%	
		54

III. ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONSEQUENCES: Employee Development

Dr. Carin Smith, Smith Veterinary Consulting
 carin@smithvet.com (509) 548-2010

QUESTION	PERCENT	Total Respondents
Other than “1, 2, 3, you’re fired,” (or, “verbal, written, out”) are you clear about the specific consequences * for your actions?		
1 Yes	29%	
2 No	71%	147
<i>* Consequences should be specific for the problem. Examples include dock in pay, send home, or send to CE focused on the issue, with required report-back.</i>		
Does your practice manager, owner, or team leader carry through with consequences for performance problems?		
1 Yes	23%	
2 Yes, with some people more than others	53%	
3 No	23%	133
With regard to “positive” and “negative” consequences:		
1 Our hospital has specific positive consequences to reward positive behavior.	17%	
2 Our hospital has specific negative consequences to discourage unwanted behavior.	12%	
3 Our hospital has both	25%	
4 Our hospital has neither	45%	143
What type of problem behavior is most common in your practice?		
1 Technical deficiencies or errors (e.g., sloppy x-ray or lab work, improper phone protocol, poor medicine or surgery)	7%	
2 Record keeping / legal issues e.g., Medical records not filled out by day’s end and/or unreadable; DEA drugs not locked; OSHA noncompliance	26%	
3 Work values / work ethics e.g., chronically late, poor professional appearance	4%	
4 Bad attitude e.g., Doesn’t get along with others, rude, or moody**	63%	27
<i>**Note: Managers need help in two areas with regard to this issue: -Are employees unhappy and feeling powerless to do anything? If so, they will exhibit a “poor attitude.” -Managers need to clarify vague words like “bad attitude,” and give specific examples, in order to give effective feedback, to ask for specific changes, and to monitor results.</i>		
In my practice, we often see problem behavior from: ***		
1.The owner(s)	31%	
2.The practice manager	5%	
3.Both	26%	
4.Neither	39%	65
<i>***Note: See the attendee distribution: 23% owner, 53% manager.</i>		

III. ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONSEQUENCES: Legal

Charlotte Lacroix, DVM JD, Veterinary Business Advisors
 clacroix123@earthlink.net (908)534-2065

Most of Dr. Lacroix's questions have ONE correct answer

QUESTION	PERCENT	Total Respondents
The best circumstances for Dr. "Had-it" to fire a 5 yr employee and minimize the "legal" damages...		
1 Have a job description the employee was given 5 yrs ago	3%	
2 Undocumented multiple verbal warnings	3%	
3 Five annual performance evaluations in employee's personnel file <i>correct</i>	85%	
4 Multiple complaints about employee from clients and other staff members	9%	120
Which of the following carries the MOST risk for the employer who later wishes to terminate an employee?		
1 Meeting with employee frequently to communicate job expectations	0%	
2 Consistently overstating an employee's performance to avoid hurt feelings <i>Correct</i>	51%	
3 An employer's failure to provide annual performance evaluations *	46%	
4 Using the job description as the basis for the employee evaluation	2%	134
<i>*Number 3 is not the correct answer, because an overstated review is worse than no review at all.</i>		
T or F: It is illegal for an employer to use consequences other than termination to reprimand an employee. For example, it is illegal for an employer to reduce an employee's pay or vacation time.		
1 True	24%	
2 False <i>Correct</i>	76%	127
Which of the following is false?		
1 Laws protect employees, not employers	9%	
2 Governmental agencies and courts favor employers <i>Correct (It's false)</i>	78%	
3 Employers are presumed to have kept records	6%	
4 Ambiguous personnel policies are interpreted in favor of employees	7%	68
Hiring the wrong person leads to...		
1 Turnover cost to the business estimated at 1/3 to 2x annual salary		
2 Firing an unsatisfactory employee and legal problems that go with it		
3 Right back where you started looking for a new hire	1%	
4 All of the above <i>Correct</i>	99%	115