

## Creating Your Epic Veterinary Practice – Three Part Series

David R. Bennett, MBA

Founder, Veterinary Practice Consulting

As the broader economy has recovered in the decade post-Covid, new opportunities exist. A new set of conditions, challenges, opportunities, competition, and consumer behaviors will demand a whole new outlook and way of operating your veterinary practice.

In the highly competitive market we exist within today, the client reference says **“the”** client and not **“your”** client. That is the first and foremost condition of the new environment. They are no longer necessarily your client. Every client is a customer of hundreds of different providers, in every aspect of life. Take one’s healthcare life (both wellness and sickness) or just one’s technology life (phone, iPad, internet provider, software, hardware, home office, car, etc., etc., etc.). Think of all the providers to whom an individual is exposed and with whom he/she deals. These clients can and will replace some of them in the blink of an eye. Your practice is on this list.

Think about all your client’s opportunities to make a change, and urgings by competitors of current providers that are staking everything on (and dedicating all resources to) changing her mind. And being right there to replace YOU, the current provider. We cannot and must not consider retaining the client just because you are meeting her needs. That is not good enough. It must be much more.

But this is not a bad thing. The challenges we now face give us an unusual opportunity to look more deeply into the mission of our practices and decide who and what we REALLY want to be for our clients and our patients. And resultingly, we can develop better, more effective strategies to teach clients how to value and deepen their relationship with us.

What does the new competition look like? “Fluffy” is now neutered inside a retail store, and her food, preventatives and many retail items are also in the same store. Why not? We can get human healthcare at the urgent care clinic in similar stores. We can get our eyes examined and be treated for glaucoma there. We can also get our family’s prescriptions filled there. So why couldn’t we, and wouldn’t we, eventually take care of Fluffy there at the same time?

This means your competition is no longer just the friendly neighborhood colleague. It includes large corporate entities, large retail store chains, online pharmacies, grocery stores and other retail chains all determined on providing additional services to customers they already have. And nearly all your clients are already their customers in one way or another.

These competitive players (many of whom are not veterinarians) and the playing field (cyber space, corporate stores) has become mind boggling. And the question becomes, why would I hire you instead of all that? When so many are vying to replace you as my provider, and they are pushing the envelope in so many paradigm-shattering ways, why would I choose you?



The Answer is Value. Because you showed me, and you used your time and specific messaging to teach me, the reason to choose (and stay with) you. And that reason is simply the value of doing so, relative to my other choices. Your messaging taught me to know what you know. You taught me to value the relationship within which comes the commodity (examinations, vaccinations, surgery, analysis, products, and diets) rather than just the commodity itself. You recognized that it is not about what people need. It is about what people choose. They can get what they need virtually anywhere, and someone has it more inexpensively and quickly. Flourishing in today's market is about simply recognizing and rising to the need to be more deliberate (that is the key word here – deliberate) about what your clients and potential clients know. We can no longer just hope things work out. We must carefully define exactly what we want to have happen (what perceived value we want to achieve) and develop the strategies that will get us there by design and not by hope. It is defining the valuable final product of your presence in the client's and patient's life, then working work backwards to achieve exactly what you want to achieve every time.

The good news for high quality practices is, despite the commoditization and distribution tendencies of today, 85 percent of people choose quality over price when it comes to healthcare. But the very same people will choose what is less expensive and more convenient if they do not perceive the differences in care and relationship. The key to that perception is your messaging.

In these sessions we are going to outline and discuss the strategies to create value in new ways, to thrive (flourish) in today's environment. These will include:

- Understanding the four ways we grow the practice.
- Utilizing a working definition of marketing.
- Reframing what it means to create value.
- Understanding and utilizing fundamental rules of marketing.
- Defining your educational objectives in each step of the exam process.
- Branding at all levels – practice, people, services.
- Strategies for taking the “selling” out of patient care.
- Strategies for teaching clients to value what you value.
- Strategies for increasing client retention – a better way than reminders.
- Strategies for increasing client patient compliance...achieve sustained revenue growth.
- Strategies for reactivating inactive clients.
- Strategies for increasing new clients through better referral programming.
- Strategies for making it all implementable.

### **Understanding the Current Environment**

The future of veterinary medicine looks as bright and promising as ever; however, the challenge to grow your practice and retain clients has changed dramatically and will continue to evolve even more in the future. The notion that “doing what we've always done” will be enough in the future, because we have



been successful in the past, is not a valid argument as we face some new rules of the game. The rules of the future are vastly different from those of the past, as the competitive environment has heated up. The external threats of today and the new ones of tomorrow have created new challenges; however, you still have control over your future if your team is ready. Getting them ready might seem daunting. Some of you might even think your team is already prepared to face these challenges. This third section of the track covers a proven method to assess your team's readiness. You will leave with the knowledge and understanding of how to assess individual and team strengths through a quick analysis, then conduct a more thorough ongoing evaluation process to assess skills and talent level, culminating into a plan of attack that ensures your team is ready to "market" your practice at a higher level.

### **Why Spend Time Developing Talent Within your Team?**

To be viable in the future and be competitive, the most valuable weapon you have at your fingertips is your team. The key questions to ask yourself are 1) Are you preparing them for the day-to-day value transactions with your clients? 2) Is your team ready to go with a purpose-driven understanding and approach to gaining and retaining clients? Veterinary practice owners and leaders might answer these questions easily with a resounding "yes", but truth be told, most veterinary teams are not as ready as they seem. Why not?

Many veterinarians (owners) have not been formally trained to assess talent, evaluate talent, or to teach and train people to enhance their skills and talents. In fact, many avoid these practice necessities because it is easier to just "not go there." Team members therefore are not intimately involved enough, nor are their talents leveraged well enough, and they do not see the opportunity they have to make a difference. So, the result is that most teams are not as ready as we would prefer.

We also must look at businesses that are successful and understand why they are, then apply the lessons learned to our veterinary practices. Businesses that are extremely successful usually have one common element...talented people that know how to make a difference. They understand their company mission (or purpose) and translate it into developing special, service-driven relationships with clients that result in trust and loyalty. We often achieve this in our veterinary practices to some level, but there is so much more to accomplish.

Team members must be taught that every time a client interacts with us, we are being judged and compared to competitors that offer similar services. We must teach our teams the concept of the "***Moment of Truth***." We have an unlimited amount of these "***Moments of Truth***" in our daily work but tend to underestimate how important each "***Moment of Truth***" really is and how this relates to our ability to compete! We also must teach our teams that one "***Moment of Truth***" gone wrong is enough to lose a client. ***The stakes are high!***

### **Training your Team to Enhance Practice Growth**

Once you realize that your team is the greatest resource available to you it is time to move individuals



and the whole team to a higher level of performance. We will call this **“synergistic performance”** aimed at excellence. This means that training and development will need to take a front and center focus. This does not translate into on-the-job training, but instead to a systematic (easy to implement) process to advance talent. The specific steps for developing this systematic process are...

- Establish clear practice priorities (mission and core values) and ensure everyone understands and supports these values. More simply said, this is why you do what you do.
- Assess each individual’s performance and how well they support your practice priorities using a quadrant assessment tool discussed in this session.
- Develop protocols and training tools (how things are to be done) that set an expectation of excellence.
- Evaluate and provide frequent feedback on the performance of each team member, then more formally on an annual basis, and set unique improvement goals to “raise the bar” toward excellence.

### **Mission & Core Values...Why you Do What You Do**

We often teach our team members to communicate (market) to our clients by teaching them to tell clients what we do and how we do it. This approach is informative; however, we are not reaching these clients emotionally. We all know pet owners are incredibly emotional when it comes to their pet’s health and the human/animal bond they share, so why not spend more time teaching your team to communicate with clients on that level. This is mission, or purpose-driven messaging that will help you gain and retain clients.

### **Assessing your Team**

It is important, if not imperative, to determine the individual skill and talent level of each team member, as well as the cumulative skill & talent level of the whole team. This track will demonstrate to you a simple quadrant method to quickly assess each individual and your team so that you know how to enhance what exists today. You will spend time working through the assessment tool and will take home your assessment and be ready to move the team in the desired “Northeast” Direction!

### **Developing Protocols and Training Tools**

When we write down goals, we tend to have a much higher likelihood of achieving success. The same can be true with how we expect to build quality into the delivery of veterinary medicine, most specifically how we communicate and educate clients, clearly communicate medical recommendations, and achieve a higher level of patient compliance. This is all about messaging...and it is not merely human resource management!

### **Evaluating Performance and Setting Goals to Achieve Excellence**



When team members understand what is expected of them, are well trained, and receive timely and formal input and feedback, they tend to improve performance over time. If you really want to grow your practice and be more competitive it is time to overcome the fear of leading people and having difficult conversations. Instead, think of these activities as part an overall people strategy to teach your team how to market your practice well through incredible communications that far exceed what any other competitor in your market can do.

## **The Relationship Between Client Understanding and Perception of Value and Growth**

In our veterinary practices we have repetitive processes, such as...

- Wellness Examinations
- Sick Examinations
- Surgical & Dental Procedures
- Puppy / Kitten Visits
- Senior Examinations

These represent only a few, but suffice it to say there is much work to be done to enhance communications at every step within each of these processes. Clear, easy to understand client communication in every step of every process is the key to a winning marketing strategy. Spend time working on enhancing your communications in every process step (Moments of Truth), and include your team members.

Sports teams spend much more time practicing than they do playing the game. We need to bring this concept to veterinary practices. Of course, you do not have more time to practice than you spend caring for patients, but we sure need to make time to prepare your team, to provide them knowledge and tools to successfully market the wonderful services offered at your practice. This involvement will translate into your team being fully ready to differentiate your practice from all the rest, to disqualify clients from ever needing to look elsewhere, and more effectively compete for practice growth and client retention!

\*Rewards

Designed ten years ago and implemented into hundreds of veterinary practices, this operating system provides the framework to prepare you and your practice team for the future by taking logical and strategic steps to proactively manage every aspect of your veterinary business. Since Covid-19 has dramatically changed the profession, it seems logical to examine how to take control and lead the way into the future.

