

When Clients Behave Badly: DO THIS

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Meet Your Consultant



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While everyone has an occasional bad day, some clients behave badly every time they visit your hospital. Stop the drama. Get guidelines on how to correct bad client behaviors and when to fix or terminate relationships.

Learn conflict-resolution techniques for these situations:

- The no-show client
- The explosive client
- The undecided client
- The time-sucking client
- The know-it-all client

BONUS: Facilitator's guide to implement the training

Why clients get mad and what to do about it

A study found 85% of veterinarians and their teams have felt intimidated by clients’ actions or language, according to the British Veterinary Association.¹ It’s a global problem, which intensified during COVID and reopening phases. Hospitals got scathing reviews on social media and disrespectful language over the phone. Veterinary teams feel beaten down and busier than ever.

Your response to clients’ bad behaviors will turn them into friends or enemies. Learning conflict-resolution techniques will help you cope and gain skills to rescue client relationships.

Let clients vent. This lets them express the cause of the complaint, which you will address. Don’t interrupt (it’s like sticking your finger in a volcano). You may ignite more anger if the client considers your interruption as rude. Just listen. Clients will rarely say everything in one breath. They will seek attention, ramble, and come back to the main point.

- Is the client repeating phrases that give you clues to identify the real issue?
- Is it technical or personal?

If you let the client talk until finished, his emotional high will subside, and he will be open to your response. While clients want to be heard, they don’t need to be heard by everyone in the lobby (and bullies love an audience). If an angry client is causing chaos in the lobby, use a combination of body language and corrective words. If you’re sitting at the front desk and the client is standing, his body language dominates you and puts him in control. Stand up and get eye-to-eye so you’re on equal ground. Escort the pet owner into an exam room, business office, or employee break room where you may talk

privately. To gracefully move the client from the lobby to an exam room, step out from behind the front desk, start walking toward an exam room, and:

SAY THIS: *“Let’s step into an exam room so you may have my complete attention, and we can find a solution together.”*

Never respond with emotion. The client isn’t angry at you. She’s angry at the situation, expense of treatment, tired, or simply having a bad day. When clients use bad language, it’s out of frustration. They feel they’re not being taken seriously, or the issue isn’t understood. You will never win a shouting match.

Once the client has finished talking, offer supportive and empathetic comments such as:

- I understand...
- I am concerned that...
- Thank you for letting me know about...
- I hear that you’re worried about...
- I know this is a difficult decision...

To take control of the situation, acknowledge there is an issue. Speak in a calm tone. Upset clients want to hear what you have to say—it’s why they shared their concern with you. Clients want your help in resolving the problem.

Explain your understanding of the situation to the client. Reiterate key points and priorities. Ask the client to confirm your understanding is the same as hers.

Provide a solution. It doesn’t matter who is right or wrong or how the problem started. It just needs fixed. If the client complains that a client service representative (CSR) was rude during the scheduling call, thank her for letting you know. Explain that you will talk with the CSR and address the issue directly. This client is doing you a favor by bring the issue to your attention. Other clients may have had similar experiences, which don’t meet your standards of service. By knowing, you can privately coach and train the employee.

Decide to fix or terminate relationships. Mending client relationships is always the best choice. The lifetime value of one client with one pet can be \$8,900 or more.² Upset clients may post negative online reviews and influence community opinions of your practice. Seek solutions and put forth your best effort to save the client relationship. If you’re unable to resolve the situation, the client may leave on his own, or you may choose to fire him based on specific criteria.

After gathering details of the incident, determine whether the situation can be remedied, or is it in the best interests of the practice to terminate this relationship?³ When making this decision, consider:

- How long has the client had a relationship with the practice?
- How often does the inappropriate behavior occur?
- How severe were the client’s actions?
- How did the incident effect employee morale?
- What are the potential legal implications?

Which clients should you fire? Sever relationships with clients who berate your team, threaten your staff, or put employees’ health and safety in danger, advises Dr. Caitlin DeWilde, owner of The Social DVM, a veterinary digital marketing firm in St. Louis, Missouri, and a former practice owner.⁴ “Are those the kinds of clients you want, especially when you’ve got plenty of other pet owners beating down your door trying to get in?” asks Dr. DeWilde. “We’re scheduling five weeks out for preventive care. That’s never happened before. I’d rather give those appointments to people who are grateful for the risk we’re putting our team through. Now is a good time to be a choosy about the kind of clients you want.”

You may decide to fire a client after an acute incident or in response to a chronic problem.⁵ Certain behaviors warrant zero tolerance: physical violence, racial statements, and obscene or aggressive language. Quickly and clearly communicate the behavior is unacceptable and you're terminating the relationship. Alert law enforcement when necessary.

"Talk about their experience, how you want them to be happy, and how your clinic is not making that happen," advises Dr. Andy Roark, an author and speaker from Greenville, South Carolina. He shares this conversation as an example:

SAY THIS: *"It's important to me that you are happy with the veterinary services you receive. Our hospital does not seem to be meeting your needs. At this point, I do not feel that continuing our relationship as your veterinarian makes sense. You need to find another veterinary care provider who can better serve you. We will support you in this transition and will transfer your pets' medical records to you, to another veterinary hospital, or both. Thank you for giving us the chance to serve you up to this point."*

Here are signs you should fire a client:

- Late or delinquent payments
- Disrespectful or discriminatory behavior
- Recurring rude behavior
- 3 or more no-shows for appointments or procedures
- Makes unreasonable demands
- Negotiates prices
- Consistently declines treatments

After you've exhausted conflict-resolution efforts and are unable to continue the relationship, send a "You're Fired" letter. It's easy for clients to delete or overlook emails or texts. When firing a client, always send a postal letter by a traceable method to confirm delivery and receipt.

Sample "You're Fired" client letter

Dear <client name>:

<Your Veterinary Hospital> takes pride in its compassionate, professional staff. We expect mutually respectful relationships with our clients. You've indicated displeasure with either our services or our healthcare team <list specific instance sticking to facts>.

Because of your interactions with our team, <Your Veterinary Hospital> will no longer provide veterinary, boarding, or grooming services for your pets. OR Because we are unable to provide you with satisfactory service, we can no longer retain you as a client.

For your convenience, I have enclosed medical records for <pet name> so you may seek services elsewhere. We are confident you will find another veterinarian who can accommodate your requests.

This letter severs our business relationship. Any future communication to <Your Veterinary Hospital> should be directed to me.

Sincerely,
<signature>
Doctor or manager name

Enclosures: Medical records for <pet name>

The no-show client

More than half of hospital managers reported higher no-shows during the pandemic, with most being new clients, according to a Veterinary Hospital Managers Association (VHMA) study of 304 practices in November 2020.⁶ No-shows reached a high of 60% in April 2020 and dropped to 35% in July 2020, according to the AVMA report on *COVID-19 Impact on Veterinary Practices*.⁷ Because appointments were hard to get, some new clients would call four hospitals, make four appointments, and go to the earliest one without cancelling the other three exams.

What no-shows cost your hospital

Besides the frustration of empty appointments, no-shows can cost your hospital THOUSANDS. Before the pandemic, the average no-show rate was 11%.⁸ The study of 250 practices assumed one full-time doctor sees 3,000 appointments per year. Veterinary accountant Denise L. Tumblin, CPA, of WTA Veterinary Consultants in Columbus, Ohio, advises that your average doctor transaction (ADT) should be 3.2 to 3.5 times your exam fee.⁹ The *AAHA Veterinary Fee Reference*, 11th ed., reports an average of \$51.37 for an adult canine preventive exam.¹⁰ Your ADT should be \$180 or higher (\$51.37 x 3.5). If one doctor has 330 annual no-shows (3,000 appointments x 11%), he risks losing \$59,400 annually (\$180 ADT x 330 appointments). If your hospital has three full-time veterinarians, no-shows cost you \$178,200 annually.

While you may be tempted to collect deposits for new client appointments, don't. You'll create the impression that your hospital is "all about the money," start new relationships with sour experiences, and risk negative online reviews. You'll also need to create a deposit policy to define whether deposits are refundable or non-refundable, which cancellation reasons will be accepted, and how far in advance appointments must be cancelled. A VHMA study found only 10% of hospitals collected deposits for new client appointments.

4 strategies to prevent no-shows

You can radically reduce no-shows with multiple confirmations and online forms. Apply these strategies to both new and existing client confirmations.

Strategy 1: Confirm appointments earlier and multiple times. Don't wait until the day before appointments or procedures to remind clients. You will get deadbeat no-shows.

Include in appointment confirmations:

- Pet name
- Time and date of appointment
- Link to online patient history form that must be submitted 24 hours prior
- Bring stool sample
- Download app for messaging and payment
- Reply to confirm or reschedule
- COVID safety protocols (i.e., must wear mask, limit of one client and one pet per appointment)

Add for new clients:

- Link to new client form that must be completed 24 hours prior
- Email to send adoption or medical records
- Driving directions

Send 4 confirmations

When to confirm	Type of reminder
1. Immediately after appointment or procedure is booked	Text, app, or email
2. 2 weeks before appointment	Text, app, or email
3. 4 days before appointment	Text, app, or email
4. 2 days before appointment (<i>Call if unconfirmed.</i>)	Text, app, or email

Confirmation 1: Immediately after appointment or procedure is booked

Your website should have new client and patient history forms based on the reason for the visit. You will have different patient history forms for checkups, illnesses, progress exams, technician appointments, day admissions, and new puppy/kitten exams. Get examples of online forms from Lake Road Animal Hospital in Horseheads, New York at <https://lakeroadanimalhospital.com>.

Most pen-and-paper forms take 20 minutes to complete compared to online forms in less than 10 minutes.¹¹Your hospital's online forms will have required fields. Ask your website provider to design your online forms or use website form makers such as www.jotform.com and www.formstack.com. Clients will click a "submit" button after the form is complete. Data will be emailed to a specific email at your hospital such as records@yourveterinaryhospital.com. This allows you to quickly locate completed forms and add data to electronic medical records.

New clients:

TEXT/APP THIS: We're excited to meet <pet name> at <time, date>. Complete new client form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required to guarantee your appointment. Email medical records to records@yourveterinaryhospital.com. Bring a stool sample that is fresh within __ hours. Download our app <link> to pay after the exam. Get driving directions at <link>. Reply C to confirm or RS to reschedule.

EMAIL THIS: Healthcare emails have a 33% open rate.⁶ To get higher better open rates, use the pet's name and a call to action in the subject line. People skim emails so use bullets and graphic buttons to improve readability and response.

Subject line: <Pet name> has a new patient exam at <time, date> | Complete form 24 hours ahead

Email message: We're excited to meet <pet name> for a new patient exam at <time, date>. To prepare for your first appointment at our hospital, please:

1. Complete the new client form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required to guarantee your appointment.
2. Email adoption or medical records to records@yourveterinaryhospital.com.
3. Download our app <link> to pay after the appointment.
4. Bring a stool sample that is fresh within __ hours to your pet's exam.

Get driving directions at <link>. If you have questions before your appointment, please email/text/call us.

Confirm

Reschedule

Existing clients:

TEXT/APP THIS: <Pet name> has an appointment at <time, date>. Complete patient history form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required to guarantee your appointment. Bring a stool sample that is fresh within __ hours. Download our app <link> to pay after the exam. Reply C to confirm or RS to reschedule.

EMAIL THIS:

Subject line: <Pet name> has an appointment at <time, date> | Complete patient form 24 hours ahead

Email message: <Pet name> has a checkup at <time, date>. To prepare for your appointment, please:

1. Complete the patient history form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required to keep your appointment. The doctor will review information in advance to prepare for your pet's exam.
2. Bring a stool sample that is fresh within __ hours to the appointment.
3. Download our app <link> to pay after your exam.

Confirm

Reschedule

Confirmation 2: 2 weeks before appointment**New clients:**

TEXT/APP THIS: <Pet name> has a new patient exam at <time, date>. Please confirm this still works for you. Complete new client form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required. Email adoption or medical records to records@yourveterinaryhospital.com. Reply C to confirm or RS to reschedule.

EMAIL THIS:

Subject line: Confirm <pet name>'s new patient exam at <time, date> | Reminder to complete form 24 hours ahead

Email message: <Pet name> has a new patient exam at <time, date>. Please confirm this still works for you. To prepare for your first appointment at our hospital, please:

1. Complete the new client form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required. If we do not receive your new client form in advance, your pet's appointment will be released to another patient in need.
2. Email adoption or medical records to records@yourveterinaryhospital.com.
3. Download our app <link> to pay after the appointment.

Confirm**Reschedule****Existing clients:**

TEXT/APP THIS: <Pet name> has an appointment at <time, date>. Please confirm this appointment still works for you. Complete patient history form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required. Reply C to confirm or RS to reschedule.

EMAIL THIS:

Subject line: Confirm <pet name>'s appointment at <time, date> | Complete form 24 hours ahead

Email message: We look forward to seeing <pet name> for an appointment at <time, date>. Please confirm this still works for you. To prepare for your appointment, please:

1. Complete the patient history form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required. The doctor will review information in advance to prepare for your pet's exam.
2. Bring a stool sample that is fresh within __ hours to the exam.
3. Download our app <link> to pay after the appointment.

Confirm**Reschedule****Confirmation 3: 4 days before appointment****New clients:**

TEXT/APP THIS: This is a friendly reminder that <pet name> has a new patient exam at <time, date>. Remember to complete new client form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required. Email adoption or medical records to records@yourveterinaryhospital.com. Reply C to confirm or RS to reschedule.

EMAIL THIS:

Subject line: Confirm <pet name>'s new patient exam at <time, date> | Reminder to complete form 24 hours ahead

Email message: We look forward to seeing <pet name> for a new patient exam at <time, date>. To prepare for your first appointment at our hospital, please remember to:

1. Complete the new client form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required. The doctor will review information in advance to prepare for your pet's exam. If we do not receive your new client form in advance, your pet's appointment will be released to another patient in need.
2. Email adoption or medical records to records@yourveterinaryhospital.com.
3. Download our app <link> to pay after the appointment.

[Confirm](#)[Reschedule](#)**Existing clients:**

TEXT/APP THIS: This is a friendly reminder that <pet name> has an appointment at <time, date>. Remember to complete patient history form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required. Reply C to confirm or RS to reschedule.

EMAIL THIS:

Subject line: Confirm <pet name>'s appointment at <time, date> | Reminder to complete form 24 hours ahead

Email message: We look forward to seeing <pet name> for an appointment at <time, date>. To prepare for your appointment, please remember to:

1. Complete the patient history form at <link> 24 hours before the exam, which is required. The doctor will review information in advance to prepare for your pet's exam. We are experiencing increased appointment requests. If we do not receive your patient history form in advance, your pet's appointment will be released to another patient in need.
2. Bring a stool sample that is fresh within __ hours to the exam.
3. Download our app <link> to pay after the appointment.

[Confirm](#)[Reschedule](#)**Confirmation 4: 2 days before appointment****New clients:**

TEXT/APP THIS: We're excited to meet <pet name> for a new patient exam at <time, date>. Complete new client form at <link> TODAY, which is required to keep your appointment. See you soon!

EMAIL THIS:

Subject line: REMINDER: New client form due TODAY for <pet name>'s exam at <time, date>

Email message: We are excited to meet <pet name> for a new patient exam at <time, date>. Your new client form is due today. To prepare for your first appointment at our hospital, please:

1. Complete the new client form at <link>, which is due TODAY. If we do not receive your new client form in advance, your pet's appointment will be released to another patient in need.
2. Email adoption or medical records to records@yourveterinaryhospital.com.
3. Download our app <link> to pay after the appointment.

See you soon! If you have questions or are unable to keep this appointment, please text/email/call us today.

Existing clients:

TEXT/APP THIS: We will see <pet name> for an appointment at <time, date>. Complete patient history form at <link>, which is due TODAY and is required to keep your appointment. See you soon!

EMAIL THIS:

Subject line: REMINDER: Patient history form is due TODAY for <pet name>'s appointment at <time, date>

Email message: We look forward to seeing <pet name> for an appointment at <time, date>. To prepare for your appointment, please remember to:

1. Complete the patient history form at <link>, which is due TODAY. The doctor will review information in advance to prepare for your pet's exam. We are experiencing increased appointment requests. If we do not receive your patient history form in advance, your pet's appointment will be released to another patient in need.

2. Bring a stool sample that is fresh within __ hours to the exam.
3. Download our app <link> to pay after the appointment.

Confirm

Reschedule

Strategy 2: Require clients to complete online forms to guarantee their appointments. During scheduling calls for new client appointments, explain that the form requests important contact and medical history information that your medical staff will need. Your text and email confirmation will include the link to this online form, (see templates above) which must be submitted 24 hours before the exam. You'll use a similar approach with existing clients, asking them to complete a patient history form based on the reason for the visit.

Strategy 3: Contact clients who have not confirmed or completed forms two days before their appointments. Tell first-time clients that you must receive their completed new client forms by the end of the day, or their appointments will be released to another patient in need. This phrase is more friendly than the term "cancelled." For existing clients, you will remind them to submit the patient history form to guarantee their appointments.

Strategy 4: Cancel appointments if clients have not confirmed and/or forms have not been submitted. Call if clients haven't confirmed and/or returned forms the day before exams.

SAY THIS: *"We have reserved an appointment for <pet name> at <time, date>. We are experiencing increased appointment requests and have other patients on a waiting list. We need your confirmation and online form submitted today by X p.m. or <pet name>'s appointment will be released to another patient in need. Please text/email/call us with questions."*

IMPORTANT: If you leave voicemails for clients, send texts or emails as backup communication in case clients don't check their voicemail. Research shows 19% of millennials never check their voicemail.¹²

If clients don't confirm and/or submit forms by the end of the business day, send texts or emails to inform them that their appointments have been cancelled.

TEXT/APP THIS: We regret that we have not received your confirmation and/or online form, which is required to guarantee your pet's exam. Your appointment on <time, date> has been released to another patient in need. To reschedule, click here to book online or download our app <link>.

EMAIL THIS:

Subject line: Cancelled appointment for <pet name> at <time, date> | Please rebook

Email message: We regret that we have not received your confirmation and/or online form, which is required to guarantee your pet's exam. Your appointment on <time, date> has been released to another patient in need. To reschedule, click here to book online or download our app <link>.

The explosive client

Explosive Evan is a new client with a puppy. When the CSR explains today's services and preventatives are \$300, he explodes with, "It's how much, \$300?! What the #&%*! You should have told me how much it was going to #&%*!ing cost when I booked the appointment. I can't believe it. Veterinarians are all about the money!" Evan tosses his credit card on the counter. Two clients waiting in the lobby look up when they hear the ruckus. What should you do?

Acknowledge his concern and move him to a private place. If an exam room isn't available, use a business office or employee break room. An angry client will become more dramatic and try to get the

audience on his side. You don't want him to embarrass himself or have your hospital tagged in a social media post. Step out from behind the counter and walk and talk as you say this to Explosive Evan:

SAY THIS: *"I understand you are concerned about the cost of your puppy's care. Let's step into an exam room so you may have my complete attention, and we can find a solution together."*

Let the explosive client release steam. My pressure cooker has a steam release valve, which allows steam to escape before you may safely remove the lid. If you open a pressure cooker before emptying and blowing off the steam, it will explode. The same is true of Evan. Once you go into the exam room, ask him to share his concerns. You will help Evan "empty his steam." Listen, keep calm, and look him in the eye. Next, it's your turn to talk.

If you want clients to behave, you must be professional and kind, too. If expletives continue in the exam room, don't reply, "Get the f*** out." Instead, explain the expected behavior and how it will result in a solution.

SAY THIS: *"If I hear that language again, I won't be able to help you and your pet. Unless we can find a better way to communicate so we may find a solution together, I am going to ask you to leave."*

Review the services and products provided. Place the printed invoice on the exam table, standing L-shaped or shoulder to shoulder with Evan so you may review the information together. Don't talk "at" him from across the exam table, which can be perceived as confrontational body language.

SAY THIS: *"Thank you for sharing your concerns with me. I have a better understanding of your perspective now. We want you to be happy with the services that <puppy name> received today. Let me review what the doctor did today. <Puppy name> had a nose-to-tail exam to check his growth and development. He was vaccinated for <list vaccines> to protect him from <disease names>. Because intestinal parasites are common in puppies, <puppy name> received an intestinal parasite test and deworming medication. You have doses of flea/tick and heartworm preventatives. These services and products reflect our medical standards of care to ensure puppies are protected from diseases and parasites. What questions can I answer about these services or fees?" <Client responds.> "Are you satisfied with the information I have provided?"*

Close with a statement of appreciation. This sets up good behavior for future visits.

SAY THIS: *"<Client name>, I appreciate you sharing your concerns and the opportunity to explain our hospital's standards of care. We both want <puppy name> to grow up healthy and happy. Your next puppy exam will be on <date, time>. Do you want to know the expected fees to help you prepare for your puppy's next appointment?"*

Support your team. There is a difference between a difficult and an abusive client. Difficult clients can be annoying but are a far cry from someone who is blatantly abusive, explains Meg Oliver, CVPM, a hospital manager at Cicero Animal Clinic in Brewerton, New York.¹³ "If you think you can be rude to our CSRs and sweet to our doctors, this is not the place for you," she says. If the situation escalates, a veterinarian or manager may need to get involved. Back up your team.

SAY THIS: *"Our team takes pride in mutually respectful relationships so we may provide the best client service and patient care. Your words and attitude upset my employee. For you to continue*

to be a client here, I need you apologize to <employee name> before you leave today. We value your business and want to make sure we will communicate positively in the future.”

The undecided client

Since her cat was 6 years old, you’ve been advising Indecisive Ina that her cat needs a dental treatment. Every year, you revisit the subject and provide a treatment plan. For the third year in a row, you’re going to share the same medical recommendation for Ina’s now 9-year-old cat (hopefully, third time is a charm!). Some clients struggle to decide and need support. Ina’s hesitation and indecisiveness are causing serious health consequences for her cat.

Help the undecided client “see” the problem. Research shows 65% of people are visual learners.¹⁴



During the exam, point out the cat’s swollen and red gums. Take photos of pets’ mouths to document the need for treatment. Smartphones allow you to adjust exposure, crop, and mark up images. Zoom and crop to enlarge images of painful conditions such as resorptive lesions. Print, text, or email images to clients. Dr. Jan Bellows, Dipl. AVDC, ABVP, of All Pets Dental in Westin, Florida, shows how to use smartphones as teaching tools in his YouTube video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BO51ZMuJaA).

Discuss your diagnosis, need to treat, and consequences of doing nothing. Answer for the client, “Why should I treat?”

SAY THIS: “<Pet name> has Grade 4 dental disease. She needs a dental treatment now to treat the infection, reduce dental pain, and slow the progression of her dental disease. Bacteria in the mouth passes through the bloodstream and will permanently damage the kidneys, heart, liver, and lungs. Treatment will help prevent painful abscesses and possible oral surgery. Because oral health impacts overall health, you will see long-term benefits. I will have my technician explain the steps of a dental treatment and our anesthetic protocols. What questions may I answer about my diagnosis?”

Present a treatment plan and teach with photos. Use slideshows or photo books to illustrate the steps of dental treatment. Take photos of each step, from preanesthetic screening to nursing recovery care. Include digital x-rays that show normal and abnormal dental x-rays. Seeing exactly what will happen each step of the procedure will increase clients’ understanding and ability to decide now.

Invite discussion. After explaining the treatment plan, encourage questions. Ask, “What questions may I answer about your pet’s procedure?” This phrasing invites pet owners to share concerns (fear of anesthesia) or to seek more information. This wording is more effective than the yes-or-no choice of “Do you have any questions?”

Ask for a commitment to treat. You want Indecisive Ina to decide and book the procedure during today’s appointment. When clients hesitate, present two options and tell them they need to decide now, advises Dr. Philippe Moreau, MS, DECVIM-CA, DECVN, owner of PDG Medi-Productions, a digital communication company for veterinarians in Limoges, France.¹⁵

SAY THIS: “<Client name>, we have discussed the need to treat <pet name>’s dental disease for several years. I showed you photos of problems in her mouth and the steps of the procedure to help you understand the critical need to treat now. We both want to prevent dental pain and

possible oral surgery. My next available procedures are <Date 1> or <Date 2>. Which do you prefer?"

Use the yes-or-yes technique to guide Indecisive Ina to book now. If she still hedges, call her in 7 days to revisit the need to treat while the discussion will still be fresh in her mind.

Follow up with a medical callback. Veterinarians should call clients with pets that have Grade 3 or 4 dental disease, which is a more serious condition and merits a medical callback from the doctor. When a doctor calls, it elevates the importance of the procedure. Call one week after the diagnosis, giving the client the time to decide without the pressures of being at the hospital or to consult with family members. Your call communicates that you care, even if the client remains indecisive. This callback also eliminates future accusations of "You did not tell me that it was so important..."

SAY THIS: *"Hello, <client name>. I am calling to follow up on the discussion we had last week about <pet name>'s Grade 4 dental disease. Now that you've had some time at home to think about the treatment, what questions may I answer?" <Client responds.> "If you're ready to schedule, I am available <Date 1> or <Date 2> for <pet name>'s procedure. Which do you prefer?"*

The time-sucking client

Time-Sucking Tina brings her dog for a 20-minute checkup. She chats up the CSR when she arrives and talks to the technician for 10 minutes at the beginning of the exam. Only 10 minutes of the appointment remain, and the veterinarian hasn't even begun his exam. While you may be tempted to book Time-Sucking Tina in 45-minute appointment slots in the future because she always runs over, don't. Doing so confirms this chatty behavior is acceptable. Here's how to give this appointment a makeover:

Set expectations when booking. When Time-Sucking Tina calls to schedule her dog's appointment, share a summary of services due and ask about any health or behavior concerns.

CSR SAYS THIS: *"<Client name>, thank you for calling to schedule <pet name>'s checkup. <Pet name> is due for an exam, vaccines, heartworm/tick test, an intestinal parasite screen, and refill of preventatives. Does <pet name> have any health or behavior concerns you want to discuss with the doctor?"*

If the client mentions a health or behavior concern, this changes the type of appointment from a checkup to a sick-patient exam, which is a longer appointment.

Summarize appointment instructions at the end of the call. Share the time, date, doctor name, length of the exam, and what to bring.

SAY THIS: *"We will see you for <pet name>'s checkup at <time, date>. Your appointment will be __ minutes with Dr. <Name>. Please bring a teaspoon-sized stool sample that is fresh within __ hours. You will receive a text/email confirmation shortly so you may add the appointment to your calendar. If you have questions before <pet name>'s checkup, please text/email/call us."*

When Time-Sucking Tina arrives, the technician will ask about health and behavior concerns at the beginning of the exam so there are no surprises of "Oh, yeah. Could you also check...?"

NURSE SAYS THIS: *"Good morning, I'm <nurse name>, the nurse who will assist Dr. <Name>. For your pet's checkup, we will do a nose-to-tail exam, vaccines, heartworm/tick test, an*

intestinal parasite screen, and refill preventatives. I will take a brief history, collect samples for testing, and get your pet's vital signs. Then the doctor will begin the exam. Does your pet have any health or behavior concerns you want to discuss with the doctor?"

The nurse explains her role so Time-Sucking Tina knows which tasks the nurse will complete. If the pet owner begins a lengthy description of the patient's symptoms, wait until she completes a sentence or takes a breath. Jump in to reclaim leadership of the conversation.

NURSE SAYS THIS: *"Let me repeat the two problems your dog is experiencing so I can go get the doctor now and keep your appointment on time."*

This redirects the conversation and lets the client know you value her time. Another approach might be, *"The doctor will need to hear those important details from you. Let me finish the brief history, and then you can share more information with the doctor."*

After the exam is complete, Time-Sucking Tina rambles. The doctor needs to see his next appointment, but Tina won't quit talking. Doctors and technicians need to partner to rescue each other when they get trapped in long-winded client conversations. To rescue the veterinarian from a chatty client, the technician will say, *"Doctor, is there anything else you need as you wrap up your appointment?"* This subtly tells the doctor his next patient has arrived and prompts the chatty client to ask final questions.

Use body language to signal the pace of conversations. Use stools for doctors and technicians in exam rooms. When a doctor sits to explain his diagnosis and recommendations, his body language communicates, "You have my complete attention, and I want to focus on you and what your pet needs." When he stands, the body language politely signals, "Our visit is finished."

Use a secret code. Let's say your hospital has three exam rooms. Establish a secret code with your team such as saying the next client is in Exam 4. Because you don't have four exam rooms, this lets the medical team know that rooms are overflowing, and you need to get appointments back on track. Say, *"Excuse me, Dr. <Name>. I have your next patient ready in Exam 4. Can I bring you anything as you wrap up this appointment?"*

The know-it-all client

Know-It-All Kate has already diagnosed her pet. She consulted Dr. Google and a neighbor whose niece works at a pet store. Her dog, Jimmy Chew, has been vomiting and had diarrhea for three days. She's feeding Jimmy Chew boiled chicken and rice to entice him to eat.

Kate tells the veterinarian, "It's just stress. My daughter and her husband are visiting this week with their 4-year-old twins. My grandson chases Jimmy Chew around the house and sneaks food to him under the dinner table. Little Johnny hates vegetables." Now the zinger: "I don't need any of those expensive lab tests. Jimmy Chew is in perfect health. Can you please write a prescription for Metronidazole? I'm going to get it filled at Walmart," explains Kate.

Despite your hatred of Dr. Google and retail and internet pharmacies, Kate is a good client. She wants the best care for Jimmy Chew and took time to research symptoms and treatments. Acknowledge the Know-It-All's efforts, and then provide solutions.

SAY THIS: *"I appreciate your concern about your pet's symptoms and your interest in searching online for information. Vomiting and diarrhea can have many causes, including certain foods, anxiety, toxic substances, viruses, parasites, intestinal obstruction, and more. To get an accurate diagnosis, I will ask you questions about your pet's symptoms and perform a nose-to-tail exam."*

We may need to take x-rays or perform blood work to get more information on your pet's condition. Then I will talk with you about my diagnosis and treatment choices. We both want an accurate diagnosis of your pet's condition. You did the right thing by bringing your pet to our hospital today."

Here are tips on handling Know-It-Alls:¹⁶

Don't let them dictate your standards of care. If you write a prescription and forego an appointment, you communicate that your standards of care are negotiable.

Don't engage in arguments. If you bicker over the Know-It-All's opinions or diagnoses, you will be perceived as rude. It's pointless to argue.

Don't skip explaining lab tests or medical recommendations. Even though a Know-It-All may not accept your expert advice, she deserves and needs to hear it.

Provide education. A Know-It-All wants answers. Sharing correct information will empower her to make the best choice for her pet.

Be agreeable. If a Know-It-All insists her cat has ear mites, reply, *"Your cat may have ear mites, which the ear cytology will confirm or rule out. You took the right step by bringing your cat to us for diagnosis and treatment."*

Put doctor recommendations in the electronic medical record. If the Know-It-All declines recommendations, note it.

Which goals will you implement from this training?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Facilitator's Guide: When Clients Behave Badly: DO THIS

Choose a facilitator to lead your team's discussion. Create plans to implement goals you learned in this training program.

1. Which no-show strategies will you implement?

2. How will you guide undecided clients to commit to treatments?

3. How will you help angry clients manage their emotions and work together toward resolution?

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