



performance feedback
**CPR TO REVIVE YOUR
VETERINARY TEAM**

A product of the AVMA Future Leaders Program of 2016-17

INTRO

We have developed CPR to Revive Your Veterinary Team to raise awareness and increase interest in deliberately creating a positive veterinary workplace culture.

WORKPLACE CULTURE:

“Culture is the character and personality of your organization. It's what makes your organization unique and is the sum of its values, traditions, beliefs, interactions, behaviors, and attitudes.”¹

Veterinary businesses definitely have workplace cultures. From a small clinic to a state-of-the-art tertiary referral hospital to production animal medicine practices, universities and industry – workplace “culture” is both a tangible and intangible concept; it’s the “vibe” of the place. To be sure, many workplaces try to purposefully create a harmonious and collegial environment. Unfortunately, it is easier to recognize a dysfunctional or toxic workplace culture than it is to determine how to craft or steer toward a positive workplace culture.

It can be a challenge once the “vibe” of an organization is entrenched – but working to shift the culture towards healthier habits is well worth it. Just spend one day on veterinary-specific social media sources and the reasons to shift towards a positive culture will be evident. From changing veterinary business environments to poor employee retention, compassion fatigue, burn-out, and even suicide – these are all reasons to create a healthier workplace.

There are few veterinary-specific resources, but interest and research into this area is growing. The American Animal Hospital Association recently published a white paper analyzing the relationships between organizational culture and veterinary practice metrics.² Major conclusions included, not surprisingly, that positive perceptions of leadership skills, teamwork, staffing, and even the relationships with veterinarians were all correlated with higher practice metrics. Other veterinary publications have also highlighted the impact of culture on a veterinary workplace.^{3,4} Notably, a positive culture can increase productivity, support stronger financial results, and lead to superior client service.³

An intentional re-shaping of workplace culture must incorporate active communication with an effort to reduce conflict and promote unity. Generally, people are well-meaning but entrenched within habits that may not be sufficiently serving their colleagues or the veterinary workplace. First, it is necessary to recognize and acknowledge the actions your staff are already taking to make the workday go well. Second,

your team must realize that you understand and appreciate their current efforts. Third, understand that you are essentially coming to them with a request that they do more work to change habits that seem to have served them well. It is wise to solicit feedback on any habits you have that are not working for others, and it is important to create a safe way for people to tell you what is not working for them.

Only inside a framework of moving forward together will your team be willing to undertake the daily effort to change existing habits. Within that framework, you can then create the call-to-action, highlighting the gap between where your culture is today and what you see is possible. Compassion and kindness on your part are vital. As the leader of change, you will be scrutinized to see whether you, too, are changing what the team identifies as your not-so-useful habits. Acknowledge to your team that changes are initially hard (slipping back into old habits will be common at first), but with team buy-in and support, new ways of behaving will become second nature in time.

The intent of CPR to Revive Your Veterinary Team is to add to the growing body of resources on creating a positive veterinary workplace culture. Tips to consider: conduct a culture assessment, coach and encourage coaching, lead by example, and recruit for a cultural fit.⁴ Incorporating these and other recommendations, we developed three individual toolkits in the focus areas of new hire training, performance feedback, and team meetings:

New Hire Training: Connect with your hires
Coordinate & Promote Relationships

Feedback: Provide Effective Feedback
Cultivate, Prepare, Receive

Meetings: Resuscitate Team Meetings
Communicate, Participate, Reward

This document will aid you in your efforts, and we hope it will also pique your interest in delving more deeply into other resources.

References

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2 Fukami, Cynthia. "Understanding the Impact of Organizational Culture in ..." *Understanding the Impact of Organizational Culture in Veterinary Practices*. AAHA and the Daniels College of Business University of Denver, 2015. Web. 19 May 2017.

3 ACC, Jeff Thoren DVM. "Practice Culture Part Two: Supporting & Sustaining Your Practice Culture." *Veterinary Team Brief*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 May 2017.

4 Pearson, Steve. "Is Your Office Culture Negatively Affecting Your Well-Being?" *Veterinary Practice News*. Lumina Media, 08 Apr. 2015. Web. 19 May 2017.



CPR FOR PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

CCULTIVATE FORMAL AND ONGOING FEEDBACK • PREPARE WITH EVALUATIONS • RECEIVE WITH EASE

Implementing feedback in a veterinary team is essential. Understanding how to deliver and receive effective feedback is a skill set that is key to team success, yet it is not included in traditional veterinary education. Therefore, many veterinary teams either avoid feedback altogether or provide it in a way that may unintentionally create more harm than good. Feedback has been thoroughly studied and adopted as an essential business practice outside our profession because it has been proven to ensure productivity of the organization, growth of the employees and manager, engagement of the team, and retention of key employees. Feedback is often dreaded within veterinary teams because

we do not understand how to give and receive it effectively. Given the recent emphasis on mental wellbeing, as well as the stress and burnout in our profession, it is important, now more than ever, that we work to strengthen our veterinary teams and the communication within them. Implementing a simple and complete feedback system that incorporates best communication and self-awareness practices, we as veterinary professionals can cultivate stability and positive growth in ourselves and our teams. We hope this feedback toolkit will provide relevant resources and skills to ALL members of your veterinary team.

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Performance Feedback: Cultivate Formal and Ongoing Feedback

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF FORMAL FEEDBACK SESSIONS

DO:

BEFORE THE SESSION:

- **Do establish a relationship** with on-going feedback before an annual review so that the relationship can survive candid feedback.
- **Do set individual goals** with employees at the beginning of the review year that contribute to the company's mission and strategy; solicit personal ambitions as well. Then review these goals at the formal review time – with goals, it's easier to hold staff accountable. Finding ways to integrate personal ambitions into company goals is called **job sculpting** and increases the chances of retaining talented people.
- **Do ask for feedback from all co-workers.** Solicit what they appreciate about the employee as well as what they would find helpful if they did differently. This process must be open and transparent.
- **Do ask for a self-review** before the review time. Employees should include things they've done over the year they are proud of.
- **Do make sure employees know their roles/have a job description;** this helps them articulate how their efforts feed into the company strategy and helps them stay engaged.

DURING THE SESSION:

- Focus most on the things the **employee has done well** - this motivates those who are competent at their jobs.
- Include **specific behaviors** you want the employee to stop, start, and continue: Be clear and specific.
- Be willing, on both the employee and the reviewer sides, to **reflect on one's role in any failures.**
- **When discussing promotions, be clear** on what competencies or experiences are needed, and if desired, create an action plan to achieve those.
- For **star employees, show gratitude** for their accomplishments and help them devise a plan of how they can continue to grow. Acknowledgement often gets skipped as the employer may assume they already know they're doing a good job. Higher performers should get positive and constructive feedback regularly, even when doing a good job. This keeps them engaged and more likely to stay.
- **Discuss accomplishments** of goals previously set, and plan time to work on setting future goals.

AFTER THE SESSION:

- Document all performance reviews with details. Consider consulting a lawyer on documents, especially when firing may need to happen.

DON'T:

- **Don't sugar-coat bad news.** Coaching works best to ask how they feel about how they are doing, what are they doing now that is not working, what they should adopt to be more successful, and what are they doing now that is highly effective.
 - Language needs to be **focused on behaviors** and stay away from judgmental comments. Coaching also entails removing obstacles as well as providing resources the employee thinks they need.
 - Allow the employee to engage by brainstorming solutions on their own. Then follow up with ongoing feedback. People unwilling to admit there is an issue will not be coachable.
- **Don't share anonymous complaints.** This will destroy trust between employees. Feedback from others, if used, must be provided with names attached.
- **Don't discuss salary** during the session, because the employee's concentration may focus on this topic instead. If this happens in the meeting, consider it at the beginning of the session.
- **Don't be vague or get animated** when delivering criticism to a defensive employee. Practice ahead of time and make sure the content is clear, the tone is always neutral, and temperate phrasing is used (such as "Do you see any flaws in my reasoning?" or "I'd love to hear your reaction to what I just said").

- Don't worry about making the employee feel better while giving a critique. **Stick to the facts.** Ask them to recite back what they've heard to ensure they understand the message.
- **Don't give** a written review for the first time at the meeting. **Instead, give it in advance** so it can be processed in private.
- **Don't hold** the session where there could be distractions or added tension. **Consider a neutral, quiet location** in or away from the office.

DO'S & DON'TS OF ONGOING FEEDBACK:

Someone you work with needs some guidance (or some praise!) and it should not wait for a formal review... what is the best way to deliver this information?

DO:

- **Do give the team a heads up!** - Discuss as a team the importance of ongoing feedback and how you plan to implement this on a day-to-day basis. Encourage them to do the same.
- **Do give the feedback soon** - Discuss the issue as soon as possible.
- **Do be specific** - Tell them exactly what you'd like to change and how best to accomplish it OR praise them for a specific instance.
- **Do present it in a kind manner** - Think about what you are going to say beforehand and remember the golden rule of "doing unto others as you would have them do unto you".
- **Do explain the issue** - If you are requesting a change, make sure the person understands why the change is important, i.e. give some background.
- **Do showcase your communication skills!** - Make eye contact, be conscious of your tone and body language, and use active listening (give the person your undivided attention, clarify that they understand the issue, and ask them for feedback or if they have any questions).
- **Do show your gratitude** - Make sure the person knows how much you appreciate what they do, and if appropriate, couple the "criticism" with a "compliment".

DON'T:

- **Don't wait!** - Delayed feedback is not as effective.
- **Don't be vague** - Specific examples and instances are key.
- **Don't be too casual** - Mentioning the issue casually or "in passing" may make it seem trivial.
- **Don't forget your audience** - Depending on the individual, providing feedback in front of others may seem confrontational – or it may not! Tailor the delivery to the person receiving it.
- **Don't worry!** – If delivered in this manner, ongoing feedback is a very valuable team-building tool and your workplace will benefit immensely from this enhanced feedback system.



Performance Feedback: Prepare with Evaluations

SAMPLE EVALUATION FORM: SUPERVISOR, MANAGER, OR VETERINARIAN IN CHARGE OF INDIVIDUAL

Evaluator:	Person being evaluated:
Date:	Position:
Rank each (Does not meet expectations; Meets Expectations; Exceeds expectations):	
TEAM RELATIONSHIP <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
CLIENT/PATIENT RELATIONSHIP <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
QUALITY OF PERFORMANCE <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
Strengths of this person:	
Suggestions for resources to assist in team development:	
Recommendations for professional improvement of this person:	
Recommendations from this person to provide feedback to you:	
Other Discussion Areas:	
Signature (Optional): _____ Date: _____	

Performance Feedback: Prepare with Evaluations

SAMPLE EVALUATION FORM: PEER OF VETERINARY TEAM MEMBER

Team member being evaluated:	Supervisor:
Evaluator:	Date:
Rank each (Does not meet expectations; Meets Expectations; Exceeds expectations):	
TEAM RELATIONSHIP <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
CLIENT/PATIENT RELATIONSHIP <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
QUALITY OF PERFORMANCE <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
Areas that have built an effective relationship between you and team member being evaluated:	
Areas that have inhibited an effective relationship between you and team member being evaluated:	
Ideas for this person's improvement:	
Other Discussion Areas:	
Signature (Optional): _____ Date: _____	

Performance Feedback: Prepare with Evaluations

SAMPLE EVALUATION FORM: SELF-EVALUATION BY VETERINARY TEAM MEMBER

Name:	Supervisor:
Position:	Hire Date:
Rank each (Does not meet expectations; Meets Expectations; Exceeds expectations):	
TEAM RELATIONSHIP <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
CLIENT/PATIENT RELATIONSHIP <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
QUALITY OF PERFORMANCE <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS <input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET <input type="checkbox"/> MEETS <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS Comments:	
Accomplishments or pertinent activities since last review:	
Goals for self-improvement and improvement within the organization:	
Suggestions for supervisor assistance in helping to meet goals:	
Ideas for Team or Clinic Improvement:	
Other Discussion Areas:	
Signature (Optional): _____ Date: _____	

Performance Feedback: Receive with Ease

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR RECEIVING FEEDBACK

KEY POINTS:

- There is a difference between receiving feedback well (honest communication) and **accepting feedback** (to effect personal change).
- Focus on recognizing/identifying of your own feelings – PAUSE TO PONDER.
- Try to maintain self-control and adaptability.
- Understand your relationship to the other person.
- Try to remain empathetic.
- Feedback-seeking behavior is linked to higher job satisfaction; seeking negative feedback is linked to higher performance ratings.
- Recognize “where you are and where you want to go” in your profession or workplace.
- Shutting out feedback is detrimental: frank discussion fades, the transaction costs of communication become prohibitive, and the relationship grinds to a halt.

DO:

- **Do** remember that you, as the receiver, are in control of what you do and don't do; what you let in and what you chose to change. This concept equals “pull”, or mastering skills to drive your own learning.
- **Do** remember that the discussion should be about **behaviors** and **specific tasks** (e.g. not intangibles such as “attitude, intention or motivation”).
- **Do** try role reversal to understand the other person's viewpoint.
- **Do** ask clarifying questions and examples.
- **Do** ask for help from a manager or colleague.
- **Do** be mindful of non-verbal communication, such as your body language cues.
- **Do** try to **really** listen, instead of formulating your next response.
- **Do** try to be sure you understand the next steps, expectations, and measurable outcomes (of both parties).
- **Do** give credit to your evaluator or find something positive and authentic in common.
- **Do** try **really hard to set the example for how you would like the other person to behave too.**
- **Do** remember that assertive ≠ aggressive.

DON'T:

- **Don't** criticize other team members.
- **Don't** close off active listening.
- **Don't** assume closed body language cues.

IF THE PERSON GIVING FEEDBACK IS...	TRY THIS...
Aggressive, confrontational, or egotistical	Remain assertive and decisive, yet adaptive
Easily distracted, a poor listener, or impulsive	Remain enthusiastic and persuasive
Resistant to change or unresponsive	Remain consistent and predictable
Critical and hard to please	Remain detailed and systematic

THREE FEEDBACK TRIGGERS – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW AND HOW TO MANAGE EACH ONE

- Each one is sparked for different reasons and each incites a different set of reactions and responses.
- Each trigger can be an obstacle, because it can prevent skillful engagement in feedback conversation.
- If you can identify and navigate a trigger, then an effective feedback conversation can take place.
- This aligns with basic tenants of **Emotional Intelligence: Social Awareness, Self-Awareness, Relationship Management and Self-Management**

1. TRUTH TRIGGERS

Set off by the substance of the feedback; it is perceived as wrong, unfair or unhelpful.

SOLUTION:

- Understand: Clarify each other’s viewpoint.
- See your blind spots: Accept that you may not recognize something.

2. RELATIONSHIP TRIGGERS

Set off by the particular person who is giving the feedback; can cause hurt and anger.

SOLUTION:

- Don’t switch tracks; try to untangle “what” from “who”.
- Identify the relationship system. What is the dynamic, and what are we each contributing to the problem?

3. IDENTITY TRIGGERS

Set off by an internal “identity crisis”; you are suddenly unsure of what to think of yourself and you may feel threatened, insecure, and/or off-balance.

SOLUTION:

- Dismantle distortions. Keep giver’s words in perspective; don’t respond to your distorted perception.
- Cultivate a growth identity. Understand that both feedback and “how you are now” are fluid; learn to accept feedback and determine “where to go”.

FOUR SKILLS FOR MANAGING THE CONVERSATION:

1. Listening – ask clarifying questions, paraphrase, acknowledge the giver.

- Listen both on purpose and with purpose; be curious about why you may see things differently from each other.

2. Asserting – self-advocating, “sticking up” for yourself without being combative.

- Shift from “I’m right” to “Here’s what’s left out”; you are not attempting to persuade the giver, but rather you are working to build the “puzzle” together.

3. Process moves – these are points that turn the conversation in a more productive direction.

- Diagnose, describe, propose: See where the conversation is going awry and change its course.

4. Problem solving – Now what? What should one (or both) of us do about it?

- Create possibilities; dig for underlying interests.

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