

Practice Tips

Moderator: Mark Hardesty

Persistence, personality, and positivity: How to make your niche work

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Abstract

Creating a successful niche in today's competitive and financially stricken dairy industry requires persistence, personality, and positivity. A synopsis of how those 3 qualities aided in developing successful recurring employee meetings on Michigan dairies will be reviewed.

Key words: dairy, employee training, niche development

Résumé

La création d'un créneau performant dans une industrie laitière qui est actuellement très compétitive et aux finances appauvries demande de la persévérance, de la personnalité et de la positivité. Un récapitulatif expliquant comment ces trois qualités ont aidé à l'organisation de réunions d'employés récurrentes et fructueuses dans des fermes laitières du Michigan sera présenté.

Introduction

A key to success in today's bovine practice is carving out a niche that makes the veterinarian invaluable to his clients. The work will take one so far; after all, anyone can do the "work." It is the relationships and uniqueness of the individual's niche that keeps the clients calling. Developing a successful niche requires thoughtfulness of how and who will benefit, marketing, and the ability to adapt to a changing industry with little or no fear of failure. This article is based on the author's personal experience of developing recurring employee team meetings on dairy farms in Michigan.

Persistence

The quote that says, "Shoot for the moon and miss, you are among the stars" by anonymous sums up the pathway to getting a successful niche off the ground. Persistence and presence are the initial key drivers in creating relationships that last with employees and producers. Initial needs by the producer are simply that, initial needs. Frequent farm visits with various groups and at various times gives insight into

the inner workings of the group. These visits also highlight potential areas of impact for the veterinarian to work on. Recurring visits create trust, and that persistent presence will cause even the most stubborn employee to respect the process. The initial request may have been for an educational class on day of calving; however, the real need is in the parlor. The relationship formed by presence will open the door for the next step.

Each idea at the start is flawed. At Thumb Veterinary Services, the meetings have evolved from strictly overhead lectures to hands-on, on-farm, in-clinic, and verbal examination, just to name a few. It started on 1 farm with calving training. The first employee meeting was strictly lecture-based. It was not a complete failure, but in retrospect, many things were flawed. The Spanish spoken was subpar. Only 1 teaching style was used. Few pictures were used in the presentation, with too many words to an illiterate group of employees. Yet, with all those failings, the client requested a repeat class because of fewer dead-on-arrival calves after the meeting. With persistence and patience, the ideas will turn into processes that are sustainable. It is essential to use the initial idea as a baseline and move forward with constructive criticism for positive lasting results.

Critical to niche development is buy-in from clients. The managers and/or owners need to be intimately involved as continued services are often determined by them. Not all work can be financially measured. Emotional turmoil and job stress are not on the milk check, fat on the cattle's back or black in the checkbook. When faced with possible discontinued service, the owner or manager's input are crucial to continue. The relationships forged with these upper levels of managers create an openness that all team members recognize. In the author's experience it takes approximately 3 months for a complete "buy-in" for a farm and veterinarian to create a successful team atmosphere for meetings. The first month, managers are onboard while employees are skeptical. In the second month, some members of all groups are questioning or lacking feedback. In the third month results are present and if positive, the meetings are maintained. If negative, it is back to the drawing board. Results need to be presented whether positive or negative. Success relies on learning from both result types.

Personality

Even if the service you are offering is in place by someone else, are they doing it as well as you? There is a saying, “no one but you can do you.” In creating a niche, it is important not to set one’s self up for failure by entering into a position that makes one uncomfortable. One method is to use the DiSC® profile. In the DiSC® personality profile, the C-(conscientious) personality type is less likely to lead a group “fun day” than the I (inspiring) personality. Whereas, a D-directing personality type may be less successful or professionally fulfilled when analyzing data than a C personality. Whatever the niche, the personality must fit. Understanding and effectively communicating with different personality styles is key as well. For initial success, choose clients that have a personality type that accepts change quickly, are easy to communicate with, and are open minded. Three progressive farms were the first clients of the author. All team members were approachable and honest while receiving feedback. The teamwork and meshing of personalities led to success on those farms.

Marketing and selling a service is much easier if it sells itself. Repeatedly shown, word of mouth is the best recommendation. Good recommendations not only come from clients but from their employees as well. Setting a good example, humility, and humor are characteristics that have proven successful for the author. Employees on dairy and calf ranches come from varying levels of education and experience. Humbly, the author has learned more from these employees than she feels she has taught them. When memorable moments with employees are experienced, the employees will speak volumes for the teacher.

Importantly, continuing education in specialized areas is key to continued success. Producers, clients, employees,

and competitors are continually learning. Maintaining and developing new skills will assist in staying above the rest. One example is using education on employee management and teaching to understand how to lead groups and teach individuals from all 3 learning styles (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic).

Positivity

Whether the niche is nutrition, bull testing, computer record analysis, or palpation, it is the owner’s. It needs to be enjoyed. Negativity is not only visible, it is felt. Clients will turn away quickly if it is suspected. The animal industry relies heavily on teamwork. If one is negative their ideas, albeit good, are often overlooked and/or discarded. Negativity may stem from lack of knowledge. Not knowing something is not failure. Great leaders build a base from confidence. Confidently say, “I don’t know, but I will find out.” Initially, the author did not bill 10% of work in her niche area the first 2 years. Although not her primary job, it takes years and positive feedback to and with clients to build a strong, consistent base. Maintaining positive relationships through failed attempts will assist in building a strong client base.

Conclusions

Niche development has many factors that create success. For the last 10 years, persistence and positive personality have assisted in creating a maintainable and billable skillset for the author in the area of employee team trainings and meetings. What started as, “Can you speak Spanish and tell my guys how to pull a calf?” has turned into a career for more than 1 privately employed, not consulting, veterinarian.