

Rural veterinary practice

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Abstract

The beef industry is steeped in tradition. This is 1 aspect that draws producers into the industry and entices generation to follow generation. While it is always good to honor tradition at the same time one must adapt to the changing times. It has been said the change is neither inherently good nor bad; just inevitable. As veterinarians we also have traditions that shape our industry. It is up to us to shape the practice that we work in to make it an acceptable environment that we are willing to work in. One of the areas that we must focus on is helping our clientele become comfortable with a mindset that will allow us to provide them the beneficial services we can offer. The challenge for the practitioner is to provide high quality service to their clientele and receive adequate financial compensation for these efforts. The practice I work in is not the model practice that every practitioner should strive for. What works for one practitioner may not fit another's personality or skill set. As veterinarians being pulled in several directions by the general public, it is easy to lose sight of trying to enjoy the journey.

Key words: rural practice, veterinary, career

Résumé

L'industrie bovine est ancrée dans la tradition. C'est un aspect qui attire les producteurs dans le secteur et séduit génération après génération. Bien qu'il soit toujours bien d'honorer les traditions, il faut aussi pouvoir s'adapter aux changements au fil du temps. On dit que le changement n'est pas bon ou mauvais en soi seulement inévitable. En tant que vétérinaires, nous avons aussi des traditions qui structurent notre industrie. C'est à nous à façonner la pratique dans laquelle on travaille pour en faire un environnement acceptable dans lequel nous voulons travailler. L'un des aspects sur lequel nous devons nous concentrer est de faire en sorte que notre clientèle soit confortable avec un état d'esprit qui nous permettra de lui fournir les services bénéfiques que nous pouvons offrir. Le défi pour les praticiens est de fournir un service de haute qualité à la clientèle et d'être rémunéré adéquatement pour ces efforts. La pratique pour laquelle je travaille n'est pas un modèle de pratique convenant à tous les praticiens. Ce qui fonctionne bien pour un praticien ne sera pas nécessairement compatible avec la personnalité ou l'ensemble des compétences d'un autre. Parce que les vétérinaires sont tirillés de toutes parts par le grand public il devient facile d'oublier de profiter du voyage.

Introduction

The beef industry is steeped in tradition. This is 1 aspect that draws producers into the industry and entices generation to follow generation. While it is always good to honor tradition, at the same time one must adapt to the changing times. It has been said the change is neither inherently good nor bad; just inevitable. As veterinarians we also have traditions that shape our industry. It is up to us to shape the practice that we work in to make it an acceptable environment that we are willing to work in. One of the areas that we must focus on is helping our clientele become comfortable with a mindset that will allow us to provide them the beneficial services we can offer. The challenge for the practitioner is to provide high quality service to their clientele and receive adequate financial compensation for these efforts.

Quality of Practice and Maintaining our Edge

It is important to address quality practice from 2 fronts; not only molding clientele but molding your own business. These steps can help prevent burnout that large animal veterinarians are prone to. Burnout—this is a dreaded topic that often comes up at places where veterinarians gather. It is an issue that can develop 3 years after graduation or 30 years out of school. Large animal veterinarians deal with many factors that can lead to burnout. Five years into practice I experienced firsthand the feeling of not enjoying my work. Not only did I not enjoy it but had begun to dread practicing at all. There is no right or wrong way to handle this issue. Some people leave practice altogether. Others try to modify the working environment to a more appeasable environment.

As veterinarians we are expected to provide certain services to producers. This often has been described as “fire engine” practice. Pulling calves, replacing prolapses, routine herd work, and after-hours emergency call can become mundane and lead practitioners to either leave practice or become dissatisfied with their lifestyle. Often the time it takes to provide these services leaves us little chance to guide these producers in other endeavors. Veterinarians should be one of the most knowledgeable people a producer comes in contact with. With proper preparation, we can become part of the total management team in a beef operation. Much has been discussed regarding the shortage of large-animal veterinarians. It is my thought that this is due to quality of life issues and not to financial compensation.

Attracting Clients

I believe that over time a practice starts to take on the attitude of the practitioners. For this metamorphosis to take place current clients must be molded into the desired mold or clients that fit this mold need to be added to the practice base. I have tried to find a balance between these 2 means of improving client base. Our practice has set a goal of recruiting clients that fit our desired client base. This has been done directly and indirectly. I have called potential clients and invited them to lunch to discuss what I could do to help make them more profitable. I have also sent mailings and information packets to potential clients. When we have clinic producer meetings a percent of those invited are not clients, but clients that we would hope to have in the future. Proximity to our practice is secondary to the potential of the client.

Producer meetings will help mold your client base into what you hope it to be. Our clinic, like many surrounding clinics, has an annual dinner for producers. At this meeting we provide information, but it is for the most part a feel-good meeting. We want to thank the patrons that have supported us by being our clients. An annual/semiannual meeting is also held for paid admission. A limited amount of people are allowed to attend. These meetings are some of the best client interactions I have. Although our fee for attending is not large, producers that attend have a mindset that they are not going to a meeting for a social event, but for continuing education. These are excellent recruitment tools if the quality of information is of a high standard.

Planning for Future Veterinarians in our Practice

We also have put into place several steps to try and mold our practice into what we hoped it to be. Several steps were taken to make our practice appealing to new graduates. On the most basic level we have employed a high school student at our clinic at nearly all times. This spot is reserved for a student that is a prospective veterinarian. By mentoring these students we hope to help some of them reach their goal of veterinary school. It is also very beneficial to have an interested, young student with you; keeping you on your toes and upbeat. Much of the trouble with bringing veterinarians into a rural practice is finding people who want to live in these areas. Often rural practices are in areas that don't boast a huge social venue. However, if this area is home it has innate

appeal. By being involved with young people from within the area we hope to spark an interest for veterinary medicine in an individual that someday would like to return to the area. Our clinic also has tried to reach out to regional veterinary teaching hospitals in an effort to host students. We also have a steady stream of students enrolled in veterinary school that we host as well. Having future graduates along on farm calls helps keep my knowledge base current and keeps me striving to perform at a level that is acceptable.

CE is Critical

Continuing education has also been very helpful in my quest to regain enthusiasm for practice. The comradery and networking at these meetings can be invaluable. I have found that being current in my knowledge has made practice less mundane. It is much easier to have a positive approach when using knowledge that you know is on the cutting edge. In today's world of internet usage it is not unusual for producers to have done research on their own. High quality continuing education hours will give you the confidence to welcome these progressive producers into your practice.

Maintain Long-term Focus

The environment that we work in every day is a huge determinant or boost to our happiness. It has been said to look at the 4 people you spend the most time with because as time passes you will begin to resemble these people more and more. To remove some of the frustration and manual labor from the long work hours our clinic hired a technician to ride on farm calls. It was also decided to cater to our clients, especially those that fit the mold of the client we wanted to retain. Non-clients are charged a different fee schedule on emergency, and appointments are turned away if no time is available.

Conclusion

The practice I work in is not the model practice that every practitioner should strive for. It is, however, much more enjoyable for me now than in years past. What works for 1 practitioner may not fit another's personality or skill set. As veterinarians being pulled in several directions by the general public, it is easy to lose sight of trying to enjoy the journey.