

General Session II

Marketing Veterinary Services

Dr. Larry Hutchinson, *Presiding*

Selling Your Practice to the Client

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Coffee stains on the food tray means we have poor engine maintenance.

I ran across that statement recently in a management article, and thought, "How true it is." The public judges us on things they see with which they are familiar. If we neglect to return their phone call, would we also forget to give their animal's afternoon medication? If our bill to the client is sent incorrectly, would we also read their animal's X-rays incorrectly? Spider webs in the waiting room certainly would indicate rust on our surgical instruments! If the receptionist shows unconcern over the client's need to leave quickly to pick up a child at school, will the doctor really care whether their animal responds or not?

Selling your practice is a people problem. Selling your practice is marketing. Marketing can be divided into two areas. One is the controversial area of advertising or merchandising through the media in a competitive way your prices, your services, your products, your whatever. The second area of marketing is what I'm interested in discussing today and that is simply AWARENESS—making the client aware of what services you can provide for him and what benefits he can be assured of receiving should he choose to become a client of yours. And remember, it is his choice. Nobody makes him come to your office. You may be the only game in town, but unless you adequately meet that client's needs, he can decide to either go many miles for better service or to do without veterinary service altogether. It's his choice. If you're going to be his choice, you're going to have to meet both his expectations and his needs.

How do you increase his awareness? First of all—No coffee stains on the food tray—or the door slams before you ever get the opportunity to show adept you are at rebuilding the engine. Make first impressions impressive. A friendly greeting; a well organized, efficient, and clean waiting and reception area; courteous and helpful telephone service, complimentary coffee in the waiting room; toy boxes and children's books to help passify restless youngsters. Make the client's trip to your office as pleasant as possible. Don't fumble the ball. Make sure you at least get a chance to throw

for the end zone. You'll never score if you don't.

Once given the opportunity to perform, I'm sure the American public can be satisfied if given good service. I have the opportunity outside of our practice to sit on the board of three different organizations: one is public (rural electric co-op), one is private (bank), and one is professional (American Embryo Transfer Association). Across the spectrum covered by these boards, the demand by each constituency is SERVICE. As a student, I was told not to worry if people complained about your prices, but to really be concerned if they complained about your service. Poor service does not satisfy even at a cheap price.

Good service comes from caring and from concern enough to see that the client is satisfied—even those hard to please, long winded, story-telling price shoppers. I haven't said a thing new today. I only remind you that many talented and intelligent people have been less than successful in their practices and businesses because they failed to walk a mile in their client's shoes. Surveys show that every satisfied client leaves your office and tells 3-5 other people. But every less than satisfied client exits and will tell an average of 24 other people what he thought of you and he may even include your ancestors.

Rejuvenating or even resurrecting practices is not impossible if attitudes can be adjusted and re-oriented toward the client and his needs. Consider Johnson & Johnson, the maker of Tylenol, for example. After devastating cyanide poisoning episodes, sales plummeted, other competitors stepped up advertising their products, and numerous customers clamored for their money back on the products they had purchased. Johnson & Johnson met every complaint courteously, fairly, and always with the customer's best interest in mind. And they won. And as veterinarians today in a troubled agriculture economy and facing the threat of manpower surpluses, we too can win if we keep client concern as numero uno.

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*The leading cause of pinkeye.



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