

Communication for a performance evaluation

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Abstract

Annual performance reviews are often met with a lot of stress and anxiety. When the process is unstructured, it can intensify these feelings even more. Mastering communication skills, learning how to take feedback in an objective way and partnering with your manager is a recipe for success to co-create your professional development plan and take the fear and frustration out of performance reviews.

Introduction

Veterinarians in general are highly driven and goal-oriented individuals. Once we graduate, the path for growing in our careers is no longer defined by a curriculum – we are left to chart our own paths and desire mentorship to move forward. When we enter a busy practice and face culture as the “newbie” it can be difficult to manage building team and client relationships, develop your medical skills and continue to work toward growth goals. When performance evaluations come at the end of a year, it can be uncomfortable to hear feedback on areas of opportunity if this is the first time all year they have been discussed. Sometimes we can be caught off-guard and find ourselves in a flurry of emotions and defensiveness, leading to job dissatisfaction. If your practice does not have a formal and frequent process for obtaining feedback throughout the year, we will discuss how you can be a proactive participant in making the process routine, positive and productive.

Create a professional development plan

Job descriptions and expectations are often simplified to include things like, “practice high-quality medicine”, “acquire and retain clientele,” and “grow the business”. Sounds simple, right? Entering an established practice, you find it is important to align both your expectations of professional goals with those of the practice to obtain harmonious growth.

Alignment

To align your professional goals with those of the practice, it is advantageous to start by listing them separately. Some things to think about for your own professional development:

- Where are you now?
- Where would you like to go?
- Are your goals financial? Medical?
- What do you need to get there?
- What are the tools, skills and resources you will require?
- How will you develop and communicate your plan?
- Important example questions to ask regarding the practice goals:
 - ♦ What are the short-term goals for the practice?
 - ♦ What are the long-term goals for the practice?
 - ♦ What roles do you see the DVMs playing in working toward these goals?
 - ♦ In what area(s) do you feel this practice really excels?
 - ♦ What area(s) of opportunity do we have as a practice?

- ♦ Once you have established this baseline, how do you align? How do you differ? What clarification do you need?

Growing your career requires doing REPS

Just as building muscle requires challenging weight and repetition, growing your career requires you to reflect, evaluate, plan and succeed (REPS).

Creating a professional development plan at the beginning of the year creates a foundation for you to build from and revisit your progress throughout the year. This gives you opportunity to tweak or update your plan as the year goes on. It also provides you with a thorough reflection on your accomplishments throughout the year to share at your annual review. As is building and maintaining muscle, this process is ongoing, giving you an excellent view of how far you have come in your career.

Reflect

Start off by reflecting on your current state or role. Where are you today? What skills are needed to acquire for success in your current role? For your desired role or future state, what do you envision doing in the future? What skills are needed to acquire for success in the future?

Review your strengths and opportunities. How did you do this year? In what areas were my performance strong? What areas do you have opportunity to improve? What feedback did you receive?

Looking outward, reflect on the business needs. How can the business benefit from your skills and interest? How do your goals align with the business needs now and in the future.

Evaluate

“Comparison is the death of joy” – Mark Twain

Compare your skill set to the competencies outlined in your current and desired future role, not compared to others. Objectively rate yourself on how well you’ve performed the last year. Remember, meeting expectations is not a poor rating. You are doing the job you were hired to do. If looking for a promotion or pay increase, be sure you can provide specific and ongoing evidence to demonstrate how you have earned that next step.

Partner with your manager to outline and prioritize development opportunities to work on. This should be a co-creation so both parties are aligned and equally invested in your plan. Select 2-3 competencies to focus on in the next year. A pro-tip: use 2 opportunities and 1 strength to develop further.

Plan

Map out how you will work toward the competency goals you laid out for the year. A common strategy can include the 70-20-10 method¹ which describes recommended ratios on how to obtain skills and support needed to advance yourself in those areas – 70% on the job, 20% from social sources and 10% through

formal training. Overall, the most individualized approach will be the most appropriate for you; these figures are just launching points for planning.

Create SMART² goals. These are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based that will help you focus on the what, when and how you will achieve them throughout the year.

Succeed

When success is measured by improvements and not just victories, we are able to consistently move forward. Focus on being 1% better every day.³ Failures are hidden as opportunities for improvement and defining success as “being the best” is setting you up for disappointment. Not every tree in the forest can be the tallest, strongest and provide the most oxygen and shade to the world. But each tree has an important role to play as no forest is made of just one tree.

“Strive for progress, not perfection.” – David Perlmutter

Schedule check-ins for the year. If they are not on a calendar, they are less likely to happen. Ask your manager to meet quarterly to discuss your progress. Agree on expectations for a time limit and the structure of the meeting. Consider shorter monthly informal chats over coffee. Checking in routinely will help reduce the stress and anxiety over a formal annual review. When things are discussed over the course of the year, no one should be caught by surprise.

Receiving feedback

Many have stated that feedback is a mirror. It may be reflecting the needs, values and impressions for the person giving it.⁴ When discussing how you prefer to receive feedback, ensure your manager knows your preferred method as soon as possible. Do you prefer in the moment? In private? Direct or softened? With specific examples? Managers will often default to

how they prefer to receive feedback so it is important to share with them how you will best manage these opportunities. Once feedback is received, take a moment to ponder what you just heard before speaking. Recognize and identify your own feelings before you react. How you respond emotionally to feedback in the moment is very important. Maintain composure and avoid defensiveness as although the feedback provided may be different from your awareness, it may be how you are perceived. Understand the relationship you have with the other person and view things from their perspective. It is appropriate to ask for specific examples to support the feedback you have been given. This is important for both positive and potentially negative feedback. Empathy is an important skill in all aspects of veterinary medicine. Try to understand where the other person is coming from.

References

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