

Becoming invaluable by carving out a niche in your practice

Keelan Lewis, DVM

Salt Creek Veterinary Hospital, PO Box 1618, Weatherford, TX 76086

Abstract

The answers to two important questions when you are a veterinary student or a new associate make a huge difference in their success or failure at the practice: 1) How do you be good at your job and 2) be happy doing it? The simple answer is culture of the practice. In this discussion, Dr. Keelan Lewis will discuss her experience developing new associates into the unique niche culture of her practice.

Key words: mixed practice, practice management, competence

Résumé

Les réponses aux deux questions importantes quand vous êtes un étudiant vétérinaire ou d'un nouveau faire une énorme différence dans leur réussite ou leur échec à la pratique : 1) Comment être bon à votre emploi et 2) être heureux de le faire ? La réponse est simple : la culture de la pratique. Dans cette discussion, le Dr Keelan Lewis va discuter de son expérience dans l'élaboration de nouveaux associés dans le créneau unique culture de sa pratique.

Introduction

When you begin searching for a job following veterinary school, you will have a list of items that you are told to look for in a practice to assess its fit for you. I have interviewed numerous potential associates and groomed countless veterinary students and I can say with confidence, throw that list away! The most important characteristic of a veterinary practice team that will work for both parties is culture. For example, the culture of our practice may be described as an all female, family oriented mixed animal group of practices in rural north Texas. This unique niche allows us notable job satisfaction but requires a select set of veterinarians to thrive. To be a veterinarian, to be considered invaluable in our unique niche, you must provide these items to our practice: desire to be a competent mixed animal clinician, be tough and brave but respectful, develop a strong production animal knowledge base, be willing to use your brain, and be committed to a lifestyle.

Desire to be a competent mixed-animal clinician

Mixed animal practice is alive and real. We are not discussing being a large animal veterinarian who occasionally holds vaccine clinics. In our area of the world, rural practice

that encompasses a solo practitioner who is actually a large animal veterinarian who begrudgingly vaccinates dogs is not sustainable. Rural mixed animal practice has to write a new definition that allows it to thrive in the population of available veterinarians and a clientele that has money to pay you. My definition of rural mixed animal practice is "working in an area with more animals than people while offering medicine, techniques, and expertise available in the big city". Success for my definition of rural mixed animal practice requires that young eager veterinarians want to work under this definition.

Be tough and brave but respectful

Rural mixed animal practice is both mentally and physically challenging. We are often asked if we are accepted by clients even though we are women. We have never been rejected by our client base for gender. Perhaps this happens in other parts of the country, but in our part of the world we are readily accepted. Our practice members believe this is mostly due to being respectful first but also tough and brave. A since respect for our clients is evident in the way we communicate with them and we work hard to maintain a healthy level of respect that goes both ways. Everyone makes mistakes, especially when they are just starting out; but those are more easily forgiven by clients when they are handled in a respectful way. Rural communities support members of their community that have earned respect by working hard. Keep in mind that a strong and robust work ethic and some "try" go a long ways in being accepted into a community.

Develop a strong production animal knowledge base

Not everyone grew up on a ranch or other type of production agriculture. That's ok! That does not mean you can't learn how to drive through a gate, run a chute, and load an alley. If you are headed to a rural mixed animal practice, take opportunities to learn these if you have not already. Garner this knowledge prior to graduating from vet school and it will help gain clients' acceptance and respect more quickly. Our practice can mentor and support new grads through learning most veterinary related things but hard work and general livestock ability we cannot easily teach. Make sure you know these items!

Be willing to use your brain

Our profession is struggling to stay relevant within an agricultural industry that is constantly evolving to be more self-sufficient. We must stay a step ahead of this by providing information and solutions that others cannot. We

require that you use your education and brain to establish practical solutions, and useful protocols for clients that are based on science and feasibility. If we lower our profession to the level of the feed store manager then we can expect him to be replaced.

Committed to a lifestyle

Being a rural mixed animal veterinarian is a lifestyle commitment not a job. This is probably the hardest but most important category. You will instantly be a valued member of our rural community. That title comes with expectations.

The support offered to you must be returned. This is one of the primary areas of burn out amongst veterinarians. Constantly being a veterinarian regardless of where you are is exhausting and seems cumbersome until members of my community protect or support our clinicians in the same manner. So...lean in! Become a part of the community you work in. Being committed to a lifestyle doesn't mean that you should not have a healthy work-life balance.

Becoming an invaluable member of a rural mixed animal practice takes dedication and sincere commitment. But the return is so worth it!