

Fostering Productive Relationships with Your Client's Hispanic Workforce

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First, to be able to foster a productive relationship, we must ask, what is a productive relationship, and with whom are we having it? To a bovine veterinarian there are numerous key relationships in their practice, with the members of the practice itself, with clients and owners of production operations, with employees of production operations, with other industry professionals who work with their clients, to name a few. Today and in the foreseeable future, a veterinarian must position him or herself as an agent of change. Having said that, then we can define a productive relationship as: "a relationship based on trust and respect where people get to work with one another in order to implement change to produce a positive result".

"The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people." – Theodore Roosevelt

Successful veterinarians have the ability to develop relationships that last. Building relationships requires the building of trust. Successful veterinarians know that their technical skills and knowledge will only get them so far, the rest of the work is built on the interpersonal skills they have an continue to acquire throughout their career.

Second, you must ask, Why would veterinarians be interested in developing productive relationships with their client's Hispanic workforce? After all, isn't it enough to have a productive relationship with the owner of an operation, or with the top management? As the animal industry has evolved, forward-thinking veterinarian realize that they must develop relationships at all levels.

Key reasons for veterinarians to foster productive relationships with the Hispanic workforce:

- a. Increasing size of operations has called for decisions to be made not only at the top but also at middle management level and on the front lines.

- b. The veterinarian needs employees to help him/her implement change in systems, processes, and procedures/protocols.
- c. Employees who are trained effectively by veterinarians are better empowered and perform their work better.

Relationships are Based on Trust

One of the key components in productive relationships is mutual trust. Mutual trust is a shared belief that you can depend on each other to achieve a common purpose. If milkers in a dairy operation have been failing to detect mastitis effectively, a veterinarian might get involved in helping address the problem, say for example by training employees on what mastitis is, how to detect it, and making an agreement to reach a certain level of Somatic Cell Count on the bulk tank reading in a certain time frame. In this case, they may reach a common purpose together, the workers depending on the veterinarian for the technical expertise, training and helping formulate a plan, and the veterinarian depending on the workers to implement the plan that was agreed on.

More comprehensively trust is defined as "the willingness of a party (trustor) to be vulnerable to the actions of another party (trustee) based on the expectation that the trustee will perform an action important to the trustor, regardless of the trustor's ability to monitor or control the trustee."

When working with clients, veterinarians Building relationships requires the building of trust. Trust is the expectancy of people that they can rely on your word. It is built through integrity and consistency in relationships.

Relationships are Based on Respect

The second key component in productive relationships is mutual respect. Mutual respect is a shared

belief that you accept others for who they are. On a practical level, respect includes taking someone's feelings, needs, thoughts, ideas, wishes and preferences into consideration, and taking all of that seriously and giving them worth and value, keeping an open mind. In fact, giving someone respect seems similar to valuing them and their thoughts, feelings, etc. It also seems to include acknowledging them, listening to them, being truthful with them, and accepting their individuality and idiosyncrasies. Sometimes there will be disagreements, and you can agree to disagree, and still respect each other for it. For a veterinarian working with his/her client's Hispanic workforce involved trying to understand those people's viewpoint, recognizing they come from a different culture and might have been raised totally different, and still respect them for all of that. Respect in a sense is recognizing that everyone working on that operation can bring something to the table.

Effective Listening: The Bottom Line of Trust

If you listen well people will trust you. "You cannot establish trust if you cannot listen. A conversation is a relationship. Both speaker and listener play a part, each influencing the other. Instead of being a passive recipient, the listener has as much to do in shaping the conversation as the speaker"

A brief analysis on trust: In order to make a quick analysis on trust, we ask you to make 4 short lists of people:

1. Who do you trust?
2. Who don't you trust?
3. Who trusts you?
4. Who doesn't trust you?

Learning the Language

Many veterinarians have gone out and learned Spanish to try to keep up with the changes coming along with their client's workforce. This is an effort that needs to be applauded, but it is simply not enough. There are issues of cultural differences, differences in knowledge depth and width about animal production, differences in teaching styles, to name a few that need to be considered in the mix. So just learning the Spanish language may not help you communicate any better.

The Knowledge Gap

Working the relationship with employees also involves recognizing as veterinarians that a knowledge gap exists with employees. Experience tells us that when we ask employees about training sessions with veterinarians that sometimes they are talk down to, or utilizing language that is too technical and complex

to understand. In the teacher and trainer role, veterinarians benefit from adapting the message to their audience, using practical examples and using hand-on training opportunities in their sessions. Also in preparing materials, writing protocols and procedures, using the right language will help accomplish the job better.

Understand each other's Culture

In the process of fostering productive relationships with employees of our clients, we are well served by investing time in learning their culture. To complete the loop, it would also be good to help Hispanic employees understand the American culture. Culture in general is concerned with beliefs and values on the basis of which people interpret experiences and behave, individually and in groups. For example, Americans and Mexicans alike are taught to respect one another, and when you bring the aspect of eye contact in communication, generally, to an American it is a sign of respect to look at each other in the eye when communicating. On the contrary, in general, in the Mexican culture it is a sign of respect not looking directly in the eye when communicating, only briefly to acknowledge that one is paying attention. Broadly and simply put, "culture" refers to a group or community with which you share common experiences that shape the way you understand the world.

The same person, thus, can belong to several different cultures depending on his or her birthplace; nationality; ethnicity; family status; gender; age; language; education; physical condition; sexual orientation; religion; profession; place of work and its corporate culture, meaning the culture of the business where people work.

Culture is the "lens" through which you view the world. It is central to what you see, how you make sense of what you see, and how you express yourself. Having gone thru Veterinary schools for example is an experience that has shaped who you are. I am sure you can find Hispanic veterinarians who share similar experiences with you, and that could be an interesting part of fostering a relationship with them

Four Cultural Dimensions

To understand Cultures – both national and organizational – we can also try to understand them how they differ along many dimensions. Four of the most important dimensions are:

1. Directness (get to the point [American] *versus* imply the messages [Hispanic])
2. Hierarchy (follow orders [Hispanic] *versus* engage in debate [American])
3. Consensus (dissent is accepted *versus* unanimity is needed)

4. Individualism (individual winners [American] versus team effectiveness [Hispanic])

Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges

Cultural differences are often at the root of communication challenges. Exploring historical experiences and the ways in which various cultural groups have related to each other is key to opening channels for cross-cultural communication. Becoming more aware of cultural differences, as well as exploring cultural similarities, can help you communicate with others more effectively. Next time you find yourself in a confusing situation, ask yourself how culture may be shaping your own reactions, and try to see the world from the other's point of view.

Context in Communications

Context, meaning those parts of communication that are beyond the spoken word (eye contact, body language, setting where conversations occur, etc.) can also be used to explain differences in how cultures relate.

High and Low Context Communications

	Low Context (American)	High Context (Hispanic)
<i>Style</i>	Individual achievement stressed	Group harmony stressed
<i>Welfare Focus Communication</i>	Individual Business first Exchange information	Group (Family) Relationship first Build relationship
<i>Touch</i>	No need, uncomfortable	Sign of friendship
<i>Meaning</i>	Derived from words	Derived from context (setting, status, nonverbal)
<i>Eye contact</i>	Expected	Not necessary, sometimes disrespectful

The Veterinarian – a Recognized Authority

It has been well documented that the role of the veterinarian is recognized as an authority in the indus-

try. This is not only the case in the U.S. but also abroad. Veterinarians can leverage this fact and utilize it in fostering the relationship with employees of clients, for this recognition can give you power and authority to be used respectfully in the work you do everyday.

Fostering Relationships

In the end, fostering relationships means investing in them. At the base of fostering relationships is a continuous conversation or a series of them. The conversation is the relationship. Investing in productive relationship with Hispanic employees means caring about them beyond the mechanics of the work they do for your clients. Caring for helping someone learn something new, being interested in their personal lives as well as their professional ones. Going beyond the call of duty sometimes means in relationships engaging in conversations that are deeper in nature. All of this also fosters relationships long term.

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