

# Skills for success as a new graduate in beef practice

K. Lewis, DVM

Salt Creek Veterinary Hospital Weatherford, TX 76086

## Abstract

Becoming a successful beef cattle practitioner takes more time, effort and gumption than other sectors of veterinary practice. This makes the profession daunting but extremely rewarding! Reaching this goal requires an ability to perform physical tasks and process individual animal cases, all while encouraging herd-based medicine and consulting. When you graduate veterinary school, all of those factors are daunting. This discussion flows through how to process that and establish a plan for the beginning of your career.

**Key words:** food animal practice, associates, recent graduate, skills

## Introduction

Beef cattle practice varies widely based on clientele, location and tradition in the practice you choose. However, a basic skill base will persist as a desired starting point for all new associates. A young veterinarian should possess this skill base and also a slew of personality traits to ensure they have a successful start in practice.

## Discussion

### Base skillset

A successful candidate for a food animal position should have a base knowledge of production schemes and the ability to restrain and safely evaluate animals. A young veterinarian in beef cattle practice should have the ability to take a complete history and perform a complete physical exam on individual animals.

From a herd production stance, focusing education on preventive plan development and reproductive evaluations (pregnancy determination and breeding soundness exams) will be most frequently used when starting out of practice. As a practical tip: subscribe to popular press magazines to see what topics are being discussed and that your clients will ask you about.

## Planning for practice through personality traits

### Define mentorship

All practices will vary in what clinical skills are expected of you from the start. As a practice group, we expect we can teach you nearly anything with time. What is more important for you as a clinician and for bovine practice as a whole, is longevity. Clinician contribution to mentorship of young associates is directly related to how successful that mentorship has been at retaining associates. Seasoned clinicians expect to offer you mentorship in your first year, but for sure your first 6 months in practice. Define what this mentorship needs to look like for your success. Do you like your hand held, or do you thrive on trial and error? Define the specific items you need to not feel alone.

## Know your value and your currency

Currently, the veterinary hiring market has left new graduates expecting 6-figure starting salaries and practice owners reluctant to contribute to their “real education”. Consider finances of a starting veterinarian’s salary. Decide what is important to your future. If you expect to be paid like a seasoned veterinarian, you will be expected to be able to perform as such.

For calculation, for a well-managed practice, veterinarians should be paid in full package no more than 25% of their production. In our experience with developing veterinarians, you will not pay for yourself for 18 months. Frequently, in that time frame, you have decided something beside money is most important to you. You will be ahead as a clinician if you evaluate the items that are important to you and your happiness now. Choose a job and forge a career path that allows you to reach those items, over time, with hard work.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, know the job you are taking; know the lifestyle associated with that profession; seek out a job that allows you to be educated in the field; identify your currency; realize your value now and your potential with hard work.

