

# Coaching your team to win - how a small tweak in your communication can have a huge impact

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## Abstract

Veterinary medicine, like any other professional field, requires continuous learning and skill development to provide optimal care for animals and their owners. Coaching, as a dynamic process of guidance and support, is a leadership communication style that plays a pivotal role in facilitating the growth and proficiency of veterinary professionals. This paper explores the significance of coaching in a veterinary setting, elucidating its benefits in fostering clinical competence, enhancing communication skills, promoting teamwork, and nurturing professional well-being. By leveraging coaching methodologies tailored to the unique challenges of veterinary practice, clinics can cultivate a culture of continuous improvement, resulting in improved patient outcomes, client satisfaction and professional fulfillment.

## Introduction

Sustained success in the veterinary profession requires not only expertise in technical skills and knowledge, but also proficiency in non-technical competencies critical to both clinical and personal outcomes. The field is constantly evolving with advancements in medical technology, increases in client expectations and a string desire from the workforce to experience development and fulfillment in their roles. As such veterinary professionals need to be constantly adapting both their capability in management of clinical cases but also their non-clinical skills critical to sustainable success - including influencing and developing the team around them. Coaching emerges as a valuable communication tool in this endeavour, offering an interpersonal approach that ensures clinical objectives are met while simultaneously building the capability and confidence of the recipient.

## How coaching is performed

The foundation of an effective contemporary leadership style in a clinical setting is ensuring the team around us make the correct things happen but doing so while maintaining the highest regard for them. Coaching is the communication style that allows us to achieve this and involves simply moving from 'telling' to 'asking'; where we draw the solutions from the recipient rather than providing these to them. As opposed simply instructing people on what to do (mentoring), instead we challenge and involve our colleagues in relation to a path forward. Through this we can ensure higher levels engagement, innovation and accountability with the task at hand. When we coach our colleagues in seeing their strategy through to success, we also develop their confidence and self-reliance more rapidly.

## Promoting clinical competence

The art of being an effective coach relies upon selecting the correct circumstance for deploying this technique, being where the capability to navigate a situation is assessed to lie with the coachee. In these situations, it is assumed that the requisite clinical training, mentoring and feedback have already been provided. Provision of coaching in a veterinary setting then focuses on honing clinical approaches and the equally important skill of decision-making. Coaches empower the colleagues they interact with to navigate complex cases, client interactions and workplace relationships with enhanced confidence and competence.

## Facilitating effective leadership

Effective communication is paramount for leadership in veterinary practice, where positive interactions with team members are reliant upon maximising engagement and conveying a sense that their opinion matters. When we ask the team members for their opinion, they feel valued and more energised to perform. The autonomy in decision-making that occurs is also a powerful intrinsic motivator, supporting enhanced commitment, with the net result driving superior personal accountability. By incorporating active listening skills and empathy, coaching can also foster greater trust between leaders and their team, ultimately supporting workplace satisfaction and team retention.

## Enhancing patient outcomes

In the consulting room practitioners can enhance their relationship with pet owners by adopting a coaching communication style. Including clients in the decision-making process reinforces a relationship-centred approach by conveying a genuine commitment to partnering with them in determining the optimal healthcare pathway for the patient. Trust and rapport increase in-line with compliance to premium healthcare recommendations. By connection, relationship-centred communication supports long term client retention and stimulates referrals from these pet owners of like-minded friends and family. With an engaged and accountable team in support, and more effective consulting room skills deployed, practitioners utilising coaching can ultimately support the growth of a trusting and loyal client base who prioritise relationships and quality care.

## Fostering teamwork and collaboration

In a collaborative healthcare environment, effective teamwork is indispensable for delivering comprehensive and coordinated services. Coaching fosters a culture of mutual respect, open communication, and shared accountability among veterinary teams. By harnessing the collective expertise of team members with a diverse range of experience and perspectives, coaching optimizes innovation, workflow efficiency and promotes interdisciplinary collaboration. Adopting a coaching communication approach also provides an excellent framework for review and refinement of systems and initiatives whereby accountability remains with the team.

## Supporting professional well-being

The demanding nature of veterinary practice can take a toll on the mental health and job satisfaction of veterinary professionals. Coaching provides a supportive framework for addressing burnout, compassion fatigue, and work-life balance issues. By promoting self-awareness, stress management techniques, and resilience-building strategies, coaches empower individuals to prioritize their well-being and sustain long-term career fulfillment. Through reflective practice and peer support initiatives, coaching cultivates a resilient workforce capable of navigating the challenges inherent in veterinary medicine.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, coaching represents a powerful catalyst for enhancing veterinary practice by nurturing the growth and development of veterinary professionals. By focusing on clinical competence, leadership, relationship-centric communication, teamwork, and professional well-being, coaching facilitates continuous improvement and innovation in veterinary care delivery. Embracing a coaching culture empowers clinics to adapt to retain their people, optimize patient outcomes, and foster enduring relationships with clients. As the veterinary profession continues to evolve, integrating coaching into practice settings will be essential for realizing its full

potential in promoting animal well-being, more fulfilling careers and lasting commercial success.

## References

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