

The Ultimate ROI: Veterinary Employee Wellness

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If focusing on happiness will improve your sales by 37%, productivity by 31% and accuracy of diagnosing by 19% why are we still teaching our teams how to sell product? The above statistics were presented by Harvard trained Psychologist, Shawn Achor, during his viral TED Talk. As I travel around the United States, helping practices with their employee and business health, I take the approach that Shawn (and science) suggest: Success is a result of happiness, not the reverse.

What is employee wellness? I'm glad you asked. There are many topics that fall under, and are impacted by employee wellness. Some of the most popular topics are: compassion fatigue, burnout, work-life balance and suicide awareness. In addition, there are subtopics that are impacted by these wellness topics: practice culture, effective communication and conflict resolution.

Often, when thinking about return on investment (ROI) practice owners and managers think, "How much additional revenue will this investment generate for me?". While revenue is important, there is another side to ROI. Investing in a wellness program for your team will not only generate more revenue, but it will also save you in expense categories. These expenses fall primarily in the areas of payroll, recruiting and training. One of the most notable aspects of my 2016 AAHA Specialty Practice of the Year award was our practice's attrition rate. This impressively low attrition rate was simply an effort to get the right people on the "culture bus," which meant getting the wrong people off.

Any change begins with measuring the current status of that which you want to change. How do you know if you are treating kidney failure correctly? You run a diagnostic, implement a treatment plan and then run your diagnostic again in the future to measure changes. Your employee wellness program should be no different. Yet, where do you start?

Step 1: Understand what motivates your employees, and how they like to feel appreciated.

The best way to do this is to simply ask them. These questions can be in the form of a stay interview, a group discussion or a specific appreciation survey. What I've learned is that there are many different types of appreciation. According to *The Five Love Languages*, by Dr. Gary Chapman, the five love languages are: words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time and physical touch.

Step 2: Run your initial diagnostic.

This is the tool that you will use to measure changes over time with your wellness program. It will tell you if you are implementing the right treatment plan, or if you need to change your approach. An important note about this step is you must have realistic expectations. Despite the perfectionist nature of veterinary professionals, your diagnostic results will never be perfect. There will always be one or more employees who are disgruntled in the workplace, for one reason or another. Don't go into this step expecting perfection, because you will be let down 100% of the time. Now that I've crushed your perfectionist hopes and dreams, let's decide on what tool you will use. An Employee Workplace Satisfaction Survey is essential for measuring current culture and satisfaction. This can be supplemented by other wellness diagnostic tools such as:

- Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL5) Assessment
- Veterinary Employee Wellness Assessment (VetSupport)
- Emotional Intelligence Assessment

Step 3: Implement “treatments”

Now that you have all the information necessary to increase happiness in the workplace, make changes. After evaluating the results in step 2 you must do something with the feedback. The worst thing you can do is ask for feedback and do nothing with it. Look for consistencies and make a treatment plan to address these opportunities. Look for low-hanging fruit, or the easiest things to improve happiness. Be realistic with this step; everything will not happen overnight.

Step 4: Rerun the diagnostics

Generally, this will be no less than 6 months after step 2. I recommend re-running the diagnostics every 6-8 months until you are to the maintaining stage of your wellness program. Once you are happy (realistically!) with where your employee wellness is, you can transition to running your diagnostics once a year.

Simple, right? No, it's not. Speaking from a lot of experience owning a practice myself, and working with many across the country, this is an exhaustingly frustrating process. However, the results are extremely rewarding. I can't help but to think that seeing your team happy and successful is equivalent to raising a well-behaved and mature child. A lot of work on the front end, but extremely rewarding on the back end. Aside from happiness and lower attrition rates, what results can you expect from putting all this effort in? You'll have to attend my KPI workshop to get those answers!

The Ultimate ROI: Veterinary Employee Wellness Worksheet

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OBJECTIVES

Understand what employee wellness is, where to start and what returns you can expect from your investment.

TOOL KIT

STEPS TO CREATE A PROGRAM

- Understand motives and appreciation
- Initial measurement
- Implement treatment
- Re-measure and maintain

TOOLS

- Employee satisfaction survey
- Emotional Intelligence Assessment
- Burnout/Compassion Fatigue Assessment

ROI EXPECTATIONS

- Lower staff turnover
- Less miss charges
- Happier clients

KEY POINTS:

- Success is a result of happiness
- ROI is more than just income
- Workplace wellness impacts employees, clients and patients

WORKSHOP EXERCISES

Wellness Program Development

KPI Brainstorming

Strategic Planning