

This Isn't Middle School!! Who Are These People?!

Debbie Hill, CVPM SPHR-SCP CCCFP

Does the amount of staff drama in your practice ever feel like you are back in middle school?

Those petty complaints about who likes whom and why some think they are the only ones working can take all of the energy that you had hoped would go to great ideas for marketing or revising your phase training plan. The goals of the practice are squashed by individuals who refuse to work with each other. The day in day out range of emotional ups and downs can be hard enough to navigate but add in some personal life issues and a few mean staffers and the drama can become stifling. The ensuing turnover keeps the whole practice disrupted and managers can find it very difficult to build a client-focused team.

Everyone says they want to be part of a great team. I hear this from both employers and employees but doubt many know what to do to make it happen. This session will look at how holding everyone accountable to clear rules and understanding the differences in the people that make up the team, and the need for those differences, can ease staff drama.

There must be clear rules for all to follow regardless of position, longevity or popularity. It often appears that some people are above the rules and everyone knows it. Consider Doc's best surgery tech who is late to work every third day and is never reprimanded. Or the snarky receptionist who has been with the practice for years and is the person new hires are sent to mimic. Yet the reality is that she is a poor teacher who shares nothing that could diminish her power and she holds onto her knowledge tightly. It may be that she just never leaves her self-appointed throne and orders others around. Employees continue to come and go with explanations of mean staff members and minimal training. Since much of this is never reported or the team has just given up since these sacred cows are beyond reproach, it can be difficult to pinpoint the underlying problem.

The practice handbook needs to support the practice values and aligning team members to those values creates structure that minimizes confusion when emotional flare-ups occur. The first step is to be sure that there are clear values that are shared with the team regularly. Your 4-5 values that are the basis for every decision made may not be the same as the place down the street. Core values run so deep that it can be hard to think others don't share them. The practice owner and management team may draft these in a brainstorming session with the final say going to the practice owner.

Often our handbooks and manuals are a compilation of rules that are indeed necessary to run things efficiently and protect the practice from potential liability. Those parts are needed but confusion starts with the addition of all those policies. We often forget to tie these policies back to our values. Consider these examples: respect for others, quality patient care, care of clients as well as patients. Being on time for work shows respect for others. Maintaining adequate inventory levels helps ensure quality patient care. Completing staff training prepares the team to care for clients as well as patients. Everyone needs to be reminded of the core values as they can get lost in the day to day drama.

Being clear about the role of each department can minimize some of the front to back drama. We need the skills of every position to get things done in a veterinary practice. Someone has to answer phones, someone has to take out the trash, someone has to place catheters and someone has to get all of the paperwork filled out correctly. When a technician tells the kennel staff to clean a kennel for the next pet, does it come out

demanding or respectfully, motivated toward the patient? Focusing on patient and client care instead of internal power struggles can be the start of building that team that everyone says they want. I would like to think that most employees do not intend to be demeaning and if they heard themselves, would be appalled at how they sound when “asking for help.” Awareness can be the key to change.

Managing multiple generations and personalities can seem like an impossible juggling act but all that individuality offers an opportunity to meet the needs of a broad client base. That client who drives you crazy is likely just different than you. The person who wants to chat with clients and coworkers, often to the irritation of others, may fill a need for nervous pet owners. The client who has Googled dosing recommendations for the latest NSAID can drive your team crazy. It helps to have someone on the team who is comfortable with giving lengthy, detailed instruction. A team that recognizes and values these differences in each other and in clients has a huge hiring advantage and, likely, minimal staff turnover.

Analyzing the make up your team offers insights into where training or conversations need to happen. It may be that the team needs training on how to communicate with people that are not just like them, whether younger, older, more educated, less educated, introverted or chatty. Organizational charts are generally drawn to show a team hierarchy. Instead, you can look at a cycle where everyone needs to focus on the goal of patient and client care, instead of what each person wants. This eliminates some of the disrespectful conversations that come from having individuals boss each other around. The starting place for change is creating a clear plan for staff training on acceptance and inclusion that outlines the values and goals of your practice.

This Isn't Middle School!! Who Are These People?! Worksheet

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TEAM BASICS

VALUES

RULES

POLICIES

MEET THE TEAM

GENERATION

PERSONALITIES

LONGEVITY

HOW THEY FIT Who's the boss of me?

DOCTORS

KENNEL TEAM

MANAGER

TECHS

RECEPTION

THE PLAN Your Practice Values (3 most problematic polies to enforce & a solution)

1

2

3

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Tech Team	Generation	Personality Style	Time w/ Practice

Reception Team	Generation	Personality Style	Time w/ Practice

Kennel Team	Generation	Personality Style	Time w/ Practice

Associates	Generation	Personality Style	Time w/ Practice

**ORGANIZATIONAL CHART
BY DEPARTMENT –
IT'S NOT ABOUT US!**

