



Building a Collaborative, High Performing Team Environment

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Introduction

The benefits of good team dynamics can be seen in various places; on the sports field, within community organisations, as well as the workplace. Each team, no matter where in the world you are or what you do is expected to produce results; however performance can be stalled when team members don't work together well. On the other hand, what happens when your team work as one? Remarkable things happen.

You've selected this article to read for one of many reasons. Maybe you already have a great team environment and just want to compare with our research, maybe your team is falling apart at the seams and chaos is about to reign. Whatever the reason, we thank you for taking 10 minutes of your time to fill your mind with some great information.

Within this publication we present 3 topics associated with the building of a collaborative team environment. These are respectively: Team Member Motivation; Developing Team Effectiveness; and The Benefits of Performance Reviews.

Team Member Motivation

So many times as Managers and Practice Owners we are faced with the realities of work life balance, pressures of work and staff who are impacted by personal and professional aspects on a daily basis. This in turn can cause a range of issues in the workplace, thus impacting motivation and morale of the individuals and the team as a whole. It is important to get to know your staff as individuals to determine what motivates them. Each team member is unique.

What motivates people?

No question about human behaviour is more frequently asked or more perplexing to answer. Yet knowing what motivates each team member is intrinsic to establishing and maintaining effective relations. It is absolutely fundamental to the practice of management - the art of getting things done through people. Leading expert Dean R. Spitzer, recognised as one of the world's leading authorities on performance measurement and management, presents his personal synthesis of the literature; a collection of principles derived from theoretical and applied research on human motivations.

Take the time to peruse the following 30 points and consider which ones you can implement within your practice.

1. Use appropriate methods of reinforcement

Reinforcement is the key to human motivation. People behave in anticipation of positive and rewarding consequences. By using reinforcement appropriately, you can significantly increase motivation.

Appropriate reinforcement means the following:

- Rewards should always be contingent on performance; if you give rewards when they aren't deserved, they will lose their reinforcing value.
- Don't give too much reinforcement; too much is almost as bad as none at all.
- Reinforcement is personal; what reinforces one person may not reinforce another. Find out what is pleasant for people and use these pleasant consequences as reinforcers.
- Dispense reinforcers as soon as possible after the desired performance occurs. Then the employee will be more likely to associate the reinforcer with the performance.

2. Eliminate unnecessary threats and punishments

Threats and punishment have sometimes been considered acceptable motivational tools, but contemporary thinking contradicts this view.

Threats and punishment are negative; they encourage avoidance behaviour, rather than positive behaviour. In addition, the effects of threats and punishment are often unpredictable and imprecise. Threats and punishment are also inconsistent with the other steps presented in this article.

3. Make sure that accomplishment is adequately recognised

Most human beings need to be recognised, but individual accomplishment often seems to get lost in larger organisations. People need to feel important, regardless of how modest their position is. Frequently, the focus of recognition on organisations is entirely on the upper echelons.

4. Provide people with flexibility and choice

Whenever possible, permit employees to make decisions. Choice and the personal commitment that results are essential to motivation. People who are not given the opportunity to choose for themselves tend to become passive and lethargic.

5. Provide support when it is needed

And make sure that employees don't hesitate to make use of it. One key characteristic of the achievement-oriented person is the willingness to use help when it is needed.

Employees should be encouraged to ask for support and assistance; otherwise they will become frustrated. Asking for help shouldn't be considered a sign of weakness; it should be considered a sign of strength.

6. Provide employees with responsibility along with their accountability

Nothing motivates people as much as being given appropriate responsibility.

Appropriate responsibility means responsibility that is neither too high nor too low for the employee. Often employees are held accountable for tasks that are others responsibility. This is unfair and can lead to frustration. Few people will reject accountability as long as the tasks in question are within their areas of responsibility.

7. Encourage employees to set their own goals

At least they should participate actively in the goal setting process. People tend to know their own capabilities and limitations better than anyone else. In addition, personal goal setting results in a commitment to goal accomplishment.

8. Make sure that employees are aware of how their tasks relate to personal and organisational goals

Routine work can result in passivity and boredom unless employees are aware of how these routine tasks contribute to their own development and the success of the organisation. A few extra minutes of explanation can increase productivity tremendously.

9. Clarify your expectations and make sure that employees understand them

We all know what we mean when we say something but often others do not. Unclear expectations can result in a decrease in motivation and ultimately, frustration. In order to motivate others effectively, you must let them know what you want them to do and how they are expected to do it.

10. Provide an appropriate mix of extrinsic rewards and intrinsic satisfaction

Extrinsic rewards are rarely enough to motivate people on an ongoing basis. Employees also need to obtain intrinsic satisfaction from their jobs. Intrinsic satisfaction results from tasks that are interesting, varied, relatively short and challenging. In addition, you should realise that excessive use of extrinsic rewards, such as praise, can overwhelm intrinsic satisfaction. So be careful to provide an appropriate level of extrinsic rewards while permitting employees to experience the personal satisfaction that results from doing an appropriately challenging job well.

11. Design tasks and environments to be consistent with employee needs

Because people have different needs, what satisfies one person obviously may not satisfy another. The observant supervisor is aware of the more basic needs of employees, such as affiliation, approval, and achievement. People with different dominant needs require different working conditions. Although it is impossible to totally individualise working conditions, it is possible to give employees the opportunity to work with others. Employees with a high need for achievement should be given more task oriented activities. Good common sense can result in effective work design.

12. Individualise your supervision

People also require different supervisory approaches. In order to maximise individual motivation, you must treat people as individuals. Some people need closer supervision than others, and some people don't need much supervision at all. Motivation can be increased through facilitative supervision, providing the minimum amount of supervision that is required by the individual for optimal performance.

13. Provide immediate and relevant feedback that will help employees improve their performance in the future

Feedback is most effective when it follows performance. Feedback should be relevant to the task and should provide employees with clues on how they might improve their performance at the task. Never give negative evaluation feedback without providing informational feedback.

14. Recognise and help eliminate barriers to individual's achievement

Many poor performers might have all the skills and motivation needed to accomplish a certain task, but they are held back by some barrier or obstacle. If this barrier is not recognised and removed, this individual might remain an underachiever indefinitely. Many people who are labelled “failures” or “incompetents” are simply being hindered by relatively minor obstacles that supervisors haven’t recognised. The tragedy is that, after a while the employees may begin to accept the “failure” label as a fact.

15. Exhibit confidence in employees

Confidence usually results in positive performance. The “self-fulfilling prophesy” is one of the most significant features of current thinking in motivation. There is a great deal of research to support the contention that people who are expected to achieve will do so more frequently than others.

16. Increase the likelihood that employees will experience accomplishment

The old saying that “nothing succeeds like success” definitely appears to be true. Every employee should be provided with the opportunity to be successful or at least be a significant part of success. All employees who have contributed to a successful project, no matter how small their contribution might appear, should be given credit for the accomplishment.

17. Exhibit an interest in and gain knowledge of each individual under your supervision

People need to feel important and personally significant. Take time to get to know each person individually. Learn names of spouses and children; ask about families; find out about leisure activities. This personal knowledge of employees will provide clues as to what reinforcers can be used effectively in the future.

18. Encourage individuals to participate in making decisions that affect them

Nothing tends to inhibit motivation like a feeling of “powerlessness”. Employees should be made to understand that they have control over the things that affect them. One of the most reliable research findings in motivational psychology is that people who have no control over their destiny become passive, viewing the “locus of control” of their lives as external to themselves. Ultimately, this externality can result in learned helplessness.

19. Establish a climate of trust and open communication

Motivation is highest in organisations that encourage openness and trust. As previously mentioned, threat is one of the great obstacles to individual motivation, and it must be eliminated. Research on organisational climate and the preference for Theory Y philosophies of management tend to support this point (Editors Note: Theory Y is a model of workforce motivation developed in the 60’s).

20. Minimise the use of statutory powers

Rule of law is sometimes needed, but it does not encourage increased motivation. Whenever possible, the threat of laws, rules and consequent punishment should be discouraged. Attempts should be made to manage democratically, encouraging employee input and participation.

21. Help individuals to see the integrity, significance and relevance of their work in terms of organisational output

The literature on job design emphasised that employees must be able to see that their tasks are related to the output of the organisation or the department. In addition, employees should be encouraged to work on “whole” tasks rather than piecework whenever possible. Significance of work and the consequent intrinsic satisfaction may well be the most important determinant of work motivation.

22. Listen to and deal effectively with employee complaints

Often task-irrelevant problems can greatly reduce productivity when they are not dealt with. It is important to handle problems and complaints before they get blown up out of proportion. In addition, people feel more significant when their complaints are taken seriously. Conversely, nothing hurts as much as when others view a personally significant problem as unimportant.

23. Point out improvements in performance no matter how small

This is particularly important when employees are beginning work on new tasks. The need to reinforce frequently during the early stages of learning is well known. In getting employees to improve performance, frequent encouragement can be useful; however, it should be reduced as the employee becomes more confident and proficient.

24. Demonstrate your own motivation, through behaviour and attitude

Nothing turns people off faster than supervisors who preach motivation but don't practice what they preach. The motivator must be motivated; this means animated, striving, realistic, energetic and so on. Modelling appropriate behaviour and motivation is a very powerful tool indeed.

25. Criticise behaviour, not people

Negative feedback on performance should never focus on the performer as an individual. A person can do a task poorly and still be a valuable employee. Too many people are inappropriately labelled "dumb", "incompetent" and "unqualified". The self-fulfilling prophecy lives and drains motivation.

26. Make sure that effort pays off in results

Effort is the currency of motivation; this is how people demonstrate it. If effort does not pay off, there will be a tendency to stop trying. A popular principle of human behaviour, the "principle of least effort", applies here. People will expend the least effort necessary in order to obtain satisfactory results. This principle indicated that effort is a scarce and valuable commodity. If effort does not result in accomplishment, effort will be withheld, just as money will be withheld if its purchasing power decreases too much. To a very great extent, motivation is the effective management of effort.

27. Encourage employees to engage in novel, and challenging activities

The literature on intrinsic motivation tends to support the need for both novelty and challenge in order to facilitate feelings of intrinsic satisfaction. Supervisors can provide employees with opportunities to try new things and assign tasks that are increasingly more difficult (but not too difficult).

28. Anxiety is fundamental to motivation, so don't eliminate it completely

There is a common misconception that all anxiety can increase motivation. That's why some of the best work sometimes gets done under pressure of time. Know your employees and determine the optimal level of anxiety.

29. Don't believe that "liking" is always correlated with positive performance

Too often, people believe that liking something is a prerequisite for performing it well. But educators know that just because a student likes a course or instructor does not mean that he or she will learn the material well. "Happiness indexes" are not always good measures or predictors of motivation. If a task results in reward and if the results are satisfying, the task itself could be boring and distasteful. In other words, a task can be intrinsically boring, while the consequences are highly motivating.

30. Be concerned with short-term and long-term motivation

Sometimes rewards and incentives are so remote in time that their motivating impact is weakened. People should be given short-term, as well as long-term, reinforcement. Conversely, people who receive only short-term reinforcement and incentives tend to fall short of optimal motivation: they lack a long-term perspective on their jobs. Effective motivational programs utilise a complementary set of short-term and long-term incentives and rewards.

Using these principles will undoubtedly make you more effective as a team leader and developer of others. Of course, nobody could be expected to do each one of these points, nor would it be wise. There is always the possibility of "motivational overkill". If however, you can gradually integrate these principles and considerations into your behaviour, each member within your team no matter what age will experience greater satisfaction. This internal satisfaction will by all means flow on to team effectiveness.

Developing team effectiveness within your veterinary practice.

“Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare (p.vii).” This is the way Patrick Lencioni opened his best-selling book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (Jossey Bass, 2002).

What is team work, or rather, team effectiveness? Team effectiveness is more than just ‘getting along’ or ‘being productive’. An effective team is one that delivers output which exceeds targets and expectations. Good teams don’t just happen. They are a mix of some very specific attributes. Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger developed the excellent T7 Model in 1995, outlining the key components of team effectiveness. In it, they conclude that an effective team is made up of seven key attributes.

The following 5 attributes are considered INTERNAL influences:

- **Thrust** – a common purpose about what needs to be accomplished or team goals
- **Trust** – in each other as teammates
- **Talent** – the collective skills of the team members to get the job done
- **Teaming Skills** – operating effectively and efficiently as a team
- **Task Skills** – executing successfully or getting the job done

The following 2 attributes are considered EXTERNAL influences:

- **Team-Leader Fit** – the degree to which the team leader satisfies the needs of the team members
- **Team Support from the Organisation** – the extent to which the leadership of the organisation enables the team to perform

This model reflects the need for *all parties* to be involved in a veterinary practices success. A successful team must exhibit all 5 of the internal factors *and* be supported and lead by management. Just as each individual member is required to develop and achieve within a team, the practice owner, manager and senior team members must commit to building their skills and ability to support.

‘Trust’ and ‘Thrust’ are often the greatest challenge of any team. Established employees leave, new ones join and communicating the practices common goal and vision can often be forgotten. Internally, a team must trust each other, trust in the actions required and trust in the external factors such as the leader of the team. Trust in a team is about truthful communication and appropriate transparency.

‘Talent’ is about recruiting and developing your team. A well deployed team will be well-equipped to grow and affect change on your organisation’s service and profitability. Conduct smart recruiting by ensuring you have clear selection criteria, not just for technical competency but for behavioural competencies as well. Match employee’s strengths to specific positions and ensure they feel they are kept up to date with industry changes. Match staff members to projects that meet their motivations. Additionally, don’t forget to invest, and encourage the team to invest in their ongoing development. It is recommended for veterinary practice owners to think outside the box with team education. Do they really need another pathology seminar or would it be wiser to invest in a skill that builds the team? Conflict Resolution; smart recruiting practices; communication; emotional intelligence and personal effectiveness are all topics that serve two purposes. Firstly, it develops skills within the team member, and secondly these newly acquired skills reverberate throughout the practice, thereby benefiting the rest of the team.

‘Teaming’ and ‘Tasking’ are about how the team operates as a whole and how they get the work done. A successful team is one organism, moving in the same direction. Teaming is about the capability of each team member to make good decisions, resolve team conflict, contribute to a positive atmosphere and assist in managing each one’s work tasks. Within those tasks a successful team should all have focus and be taught the skills to simply plan, develop and monitor their tasks. Hold team meetings regularly using a structured approach. Include the team in the business planning and demonstrate open, courteous communication. Additionally document the systems that are created through protocols and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Consistent, professional service by the entire team builds client trust and profitability.

This T7 Model clearly demonstrates the importance of external influences in the overall success of teams. This means YOU! Successful teams have a leader that they trust to support, coach and guide them. Additionally, the unified approach to priorities from a practice partner level also makes a team more successful. You cannot expect your team to follow a protocol if you do not follow it yourself. Teams cannot be high performing unless the necessary organisational and leadership support is provided. (Not sure how to provide that support or where to start? The [Crampton Consulting Group](#) has a Business Coaching division that can provide assistance at any level.)

Performance Reviews

An excellent resource for ensuring employee motivation is the Performance Review (templates available through <http://www.ProvetCCG.com.au/shop>). Let's continue with our next thought in understanding the need for regular, consistent performance reviews.

The performance review process is an organised method for giving employees constructive feedback on their job progress in alignment with the practice job descriptions, which reflect the company policies and procedures and standards. If it is properly used, a review process can be a positive process for the employee and the supervisor. It is usually undertaken six-monthly or annually - as a structured discussion between each employee and their immediate manager. We suggest that you only use the performance review in a positive, helpful way and at all times use it in conjunction with the job description so the review process offers no surprises.

Benefits of regular Performance Reviews

- Helps to identify and recognise the productivity and willingness of employees
- Provides information that the practice can use to plan training programs and review management processes and operating procedures
- Strengthens the relationship with the employee
- Helps to pinpoint areas needing development before performance difficulties become serious
- Recognises employee contributions and skills
- Can be used as the basis for wage increases and the payment of bonuses
- Identifies employees for future promotion or special projects
- Encourages the manager to raise issues of concern in a supportive way
- A system for treating all employees fairly
- Ensures formal communication occurs between supervisor/manager and team member

You use performance reviews to not only provide advice and assistance for each team member but to collect information about training programs and possible improvements to the practice.

The Performance Review Process

A review of each team member's performance is held by conducting a structured meeting. At this meeting you use the designated performance review form to guide the discussion. Focus the discussion on the team member's performance since the previous appraisal or since starting work. It is important to note that any performance review conducted is to be carried out in conjunction with the provided job description.

■ **Steps:**

1. Give a performance review form to the employee no less than 1 week before the review meeting to allow the employee time to think through the issues and assess.
2. As a manager you also complete a form prior to the meeting to ensure you are constructive in your approach. *Ensure you collate and give examples of any feedback you offer the employee.* For example, on Monday I noticed that you did xyz. Take note of the rating system and ensure the team member is well informed on the process.
3. Set a meeting date and stick to it. If the time needs to be rescheduled, ensure you give the employee adequate notice.
4. During the meeting, work logically through an *uncompleted form* ensuring that discussion is held on the ratings each party documented on their own form per task;
 - Record key performance objectives as agreed on with the team member. If the team member is new to the practice you may discuss what you wish them to achieve during their induction program.
 - Work through each duty and rate the employee's ability to undertake the performance criteria (standards) as discussed with them and as per job description and company manuals (SOPs).
 - Discuss the overall ratings per category on the form
 - Discuss career goals and training requirements as per the form
 - Set new key performance objectives for the next period
 - Summarise the discussion; ensure both parties agree on discussion held
 - Both parties sign the form and place form in personnel file

Managers and Supervisors must play an active and responsible role in conducting performance reviews. How they handle the process can directly impact staff perception of it.

Performance Review Tips

- Allow plenty of time. You show this is an important discussion by giving each team member a reasonable period of uninterrupted time. Use thirty minutes - 1 hour as a guide and vary it from there.
- Focus discussion on work goals and expectations. Keep your comments aligned to job performance in areas such as accomplishments, work quality, communication with colleagues and customers, and areas of difficulty.
- Problem-solve difficulties or concerns rather than criticise performance. Explain your concern then ask the team member for suggestions as to how he or she might improve. Try to agree on a solution. Always give an example.

- Listen to the employee's point of view. After explaining a concern, stop talking and start listening. The employee's point of view could be something you haven't known or considered.
- Give realistic ratings based on performance not personality. Be honest by recognising strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses are usually opportunities for development, not reasons for criticism.
- Always have documentation or clear examples to support a low rating. Look for a consistently low performance on the task, not a one-off occurrence.
- Set realistic performance goals for the next review period. These goals should be based on performance that you can reasonably expect to see improved. Make sure that the results can be measured.
- Employee respect for the process will be greater if you take an active interest between reviews. If necessary, provide coaching, additional training, or some other help. The process must not be just an annual event.
- Keep records. You and the employee should sign the review form. Give the employee a copy and make sure that the original is filed. This is evidence of your support and assistance for your team members.

Make the review a positive experience by using encouragement, praise, recognition, and congratulations, to acknowledge the person's effort, commitment and progress.

Listening, problem-solving and goal-setting can be used to recognise achievements and improve performance. A positive approach and on-going support are the name of the game to developing employee potential.

and in Conclusion...

Successful teams become stronger when members learn to work together. They have clear, acceptable goals. The team members trust and respect one another. They communicate often and openly. Team members have talent for creating and implementing ideas. The leader 'fits' the needs of the team. The notion of 'teams' has the potential to be one of the most powerful drivers of success in a busy veterinary practice today. However, highly performing teams don't just happen. They take time to evolve and mature. They take proper leadership. They take a lot of time and effort in teaching them to work together, but with the right resources it can be done very effectively.

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