

CATALYST's Gem in Ten
Trust Impacts Veterinary Teams, POSITIVELY
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Research in the healthcare setting has established that highly functional, highly coordinated healthcare teams results in more efficient medical care, reduced costs of delivery, improved patient outcomes and increased work-place satisfaction. At the foundation of every successful veterinary team is an environment built on **trust**. A trusting, well-trained team is able to manage the day-to-day events of veterinary practice, whatever they may be, in a way that leads to positive outcomes for the veterinary practice, the individual members of that team, and the client and patients in their care.

This past year, Dr. Jason Coe (dear friend, colleague, and associate professor at the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph) and I wrote a white paper on the concepts of veterinary teams, trust, and training improving patient care, increasing career satisfaction, and positively impacting practice profitability. The information presented in the Gem in Ten reflects the information we wrote.

Trust defines healthy workplaces. However, trust seems to be intangible concept; a perception, with varying definitions and described differently among teams. Until recently, trust has not been quantified. Now, we know we can quantify and measure trust, similar to other key indicators.

As written in the book, *The Speed of Trust*, the economics of trust simply state that trust always affects two measurable outcomes: "speed and cost".

When trust goes down, speed will also go down while cost will go up. This is a tax.

When trust goes up, speed will also go up while cost will come down. This is a dividend.

It has been said, "Every interaction, every work project, every initiative, every communication, every strategic or tactical imperative we are trying to accomplish is affected positively or negatively by trust." Therefore, the benefits of a trusting team are plentiful. A team that does not trust each other is doomed to fail. "Nothing is as fast as the speed of trust." And, "Nothing is as profitable as the economics of trust."

How do we measure trust?

First, you have to ask your veterinary team this question and engage in a discussion around trust.

Answer the questions

What is Trust?

Building trust can take a long time and we know trust can be destroyed in the blink of an eye. Trust is part of a culture that relies upon respect, knowledge and communication. Research suggests major detractors to trust in your veterinary practice are unresolved conflict, people who safeguard power or absentee leadership (Moore, thesis). Empowering your team to manage conflict proactively is important in building and sustaining an environment of trust and respect (Gittel 2009). This includes developing systems to address conflict when there are perceived power differentials among team members (e.g., practice owner versus kennel attendant). How a team is rewarded also promotes trust and shared goals. Rewarding the individual focuses attention on individual achievement and goals; whereas, rewarding the team promotes the value of working together to achieve team goals. It is important for us to ask ourselves how we want to support and grow the team. A combination of team

and personal goals may build a well-rounded team. “How should these goals be measured and rewarded?”

Four Elements of Trust

1. Able, demonstrating competency
2. Believable, acting with integrity
3. Connected, demonstrating care and concern
4. Dependable, follow through

Ken Blanchard, Building Trust; the critical link to a high-involvement, high-energy workplace begins with a common language, <http://www.kenblanchard.com/img/pub/blanchard-building-trust.pdf>

Team Exercise: Measuring and Improving Team Trust

Now, we know we can quantify and measure trust, similar to other key indicators. Ask your team, on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being low, 10 being high):

- How well do you trust your co-harts?
- How well does the veterinary team demonstrate competency?
- How often does the veterinary team act with integrity?
- How well does the veterinary team demonstrate genuine care and concern for:
 - Team members?
 - Clients?
 - Patients?
- How often does the veterinary team complete projects (follow through)?

In three months, after consciously focusing on improving trust, ask the same question. Has the needle moved?

Benefits of a trusting veterinary healthcare team include:

- A team that is mentally and physically healthy
- Strong bond and relationships between team members
- A collaborative environment
- Positive outcomes for clients and patients

Further Reading/Resources

Gittell JH. *High performance healthcare: using the power of relationships to achieve quality, efficiency and resilience*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009.

Lacrouix, Charlotte, DVM, JD. “Utilizing an Underused Resource; Veterinary Technicians.”

[http://veterinarybusinessadvisors.com/up/file/Utilizing_Veterinary_Technicians_\(CLacroix\)\(Newsletter_11.2013\).pdf](http://veterinarybusinessadvisors.com/up/file/Utilizing_Veterinary_Technicians_(CLacroix)(Newsletter_11.2013).pdf)

Delegation for Dummies: <http://veterinarybusiness.dvm360.com/delegating-dummies>

Covey, Stephen M. R. *The SPEED of TRUST: The one thing that changes everything*. Free Press, 2006