

## 4 Guiding Principles for Veterinary Professionals



Rebecca Rose with Drew Barrett (now DVM) Pingree Park, CSU August 2010

**PACE** for the lifetime of your veterinary career. In your career as a veterinary professional, these key points (professional, accountable, confidence, and empowerment) will support you in all phases, in all communities and in all aspects of your life. These guiding principles are timeless.

### **INTRODUCTION:** How this came to be

In the upcoming week (August 15, 2017), I will be at the Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma participating in their first Veterinary Freshmen Orientation. When their Student AVMA President reached out to me, tears welled up in my eyes because of the joy I felt due to the invitation.

Zach wrote, “We are in the process of planning the first-year orientation for the incoming class of 2021. I found your contact information on the VBMA Speaker database. After discussing with our committee, you were our top choice for the keynote speaker at our orientation this fall. I look forward to hearing back from you, as we would really love to have you as a part of our first-year orientation!”

Overjoyed and honored, that’s me!

Since then, I have had corresponded with the Administrative Support Specialist in the Dean’s office. She asked me to incorporate the student’s guiding principles into my Keynote Presentation. Katie wrote, “Our guiding principles are empowerment, professionalism/respect, confidence (in themselves, the institution, and their abilities), and accountability. If there is a way to incorporate these principles into your time with our students, that would be fabulous!”

Over the past couple of weeks, I have been lamenting over the presentation, seeking a way to be impactful and inspirational. The following is what I developed.

### **KEYNOTE ADDRESS:**

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#### Professional

In all of your dealings within school, veterinary hospitals, organized veterinary medicine and life, presenting yourself in a professional manner will serve you.

What does it mean to be a professional? Beyond the verb and noun definition, there are qualities of a professional we can all relate to and envision.

When I imagine a professional I see someone who is:

- Respectful and respected
- Polished and polite
- Inspirational (in-spirit) and influential
- Approachable and honest
- Curious and in-awe

Consider what your vision of a professional is. Who, in your eyes, represents a professional? Bring the traits and characteristics of that person into your day and career.

When speaking with veterinary teams, the term “respect” is always at the top of the list when defining a professional. We comment on how respect begets respect.

What does that mean? Give respect: be non-judgmental, accepting, listen, and recognize each person’s right to beliefs and opinions. Receive respect: in who you are, with your beliefs, opinions, aptitudes and attitudes and do it graciously and with gratitude.

Throughout your studies (career and life) there will be opportunities to fall off the “respect begets respect” wagon. Perhaps in the case of an instructor, fellow classmate or with another person in your life. Remember, it is through personal reflection in tough times and in perceived uncomfortable situations that we experience the most personal growth. Ask yourself, “What is the lesson in this relationship or circumstance?” Remember that lesson and let go of the past.

Professionals are respected by their peers, which is the highest regard to be held in.

## Accountable

I find it ironic when I ask team members, “How many of you would like for your co-workers to be more accountable?” Every hand in the room goes up! Then I reverse the question and ask, “How many of you feel you hold yourself accountable?” Once again, all the hands go up. I think that is funny and apropos!

Apparently, everyone on a team wants everyone else on the team to be more accountable.

The truth is, accountability begins with you, in each day, in each moment. That can be a hard pill to swallow.

As you become more aware of your actions (those that serve and those that DON’T), recognize the habits you are proud of (yes, that felt appropriate!) and those that need be improved upon (could have responded, acted, or felt differently). Celebrate what’s GOOD and learn from the moments you could have improved upon (without remorse).

There will be times in the upcoming four years (and into your career and life) where you will fall off the “accountability” wagon, resulting in blame, finger pointing and accusations (real or false). During a time of self-awareness you may catch yourself blaming or passing the buck and realize accountability begins within. Remember the lesson in looking in the mirror and viewing an honest reflection in accountability, then let the past go.

## Confidence

This is not the first time I have participated in a veterinary student orientation. Actually, this is my eighth! Now, as in previous conversations with veterinary students, I want you to know, YOU MADE IT! You are in veterinary school! In four years you will be a graduate! Let's applaud your future!

I want you to know in the core of your being you have what it takes to BE a veterinarian. You will receive the education and skills in order to make a diagnosis, prescribe medication, initiate treatments and perform surgery. Every faculty member supports you in this endeavor! Other veterinary professionals in the Teaching Hospital, your family and your friends support you in your desire to become a veterinarian. You have a LARGE network of support!

Your confidence will derive from studying, practicing and being the best you can be. Upon graduation, the sky is the limit. Feel confident in your ability to practice veterinary medicine.

When I worked at a mixed animal practice in rural Colorado, we often hired newly graduated veterinarians. I vividly recall the senior veterinarians explaining to a new hire, "Decide to DO something, and take action." You will have graduated and passed your veterinary board exam, trust your education and skills. YOU GOT THIS!

I know there will be times you will fall off the "confidence" wagon. In the practice of veterinary medicine there is self-doubt and perhaps mistakes will happen. Every veterinarian in the past and in the future has felt or will feel this way. A wise veterinarian wrote in her article [When Veterinarians Makes Mistakes<sup>1</sup>](#), "The irony of veterinary science is that it's deeply human. So much so that it perfectly mirrors the many deficiencies, failings and flaws that characterize our hominid experience. It is, by its very nature, shockingly imperfect." Thank you, Patty Khuly, VMD, MBA, for your insightful words!

There will be times within the fast-paced hours of your working day where you will need to pull yourself back onto the "confidence" wagon. Do it and continue on. Remember the lesson and let go of the past.

## Empowerment

The principle of empowerment is the key to a happy life and success as a veterinarian. Seems a bit counterintuitive, doesn't it? You may be asking, "How does giving authority to someone else to do something make me a happy, successful veterinarian?"

I'm glad you asked!

As a veterinary student, you will be gathering for the next four years. This includes gathering knowledge, viewpoints, skills, tools and deciding on your direction within veterinary medicine. You will learn how to make a diagnosis, prescribe medication, initiate treatments and perform surgery.

Once graduated, you will work with a team of veterinary professionals to practice what you just gathered in school. When you actively apply the most valuable principle, empowering others to support you in practicing veterinary medicine, it is then you and your team will reach the highest potential in serving animals and clients in the best way possible.

Over the next four years my advice to you is to gather, then empower. Your veterinary team is eager to assist you in being the best veterinarian you can possibly be, because teams are dedicated to offering the very best veterinary care. When veterinarians embrace their education and their “Doctor Things” (diagnose, prescribe, initiate treatments, and perform surgery), and then empower their team to do all the other duties and tasks, then there is career satisfaction for everyone on the team.

Entrust that your team is knowledgeable, caring, motivated and supportive. Understand that your veterinary teams, made up of a kaleidoscope of colors (that is personalities, talents and passion), are willing to make the practice of veterinary medicine the very best it can be with the resources and innovative ideas at their fingertips. Empowerment is based upon the idea that giving veterinary team members skills, resources, authority, opportunity, motivation and accountability for actions and outcomes will contribute to higher levels of competence and career satisfaction for EVERYONE!

There will be times you fall off the “empowerment” wagon. There will be times you realize you are micro-managing, unable to delegate (for whatever reason) or not allowing others to help you. In those instances, remember the lesson and let go of the past. In the next moment, ask your team for assistance. Because, together, you offer the best veterinary care possible!

You’ve got this! You have made it into veterinary school. You will be graduating as a veterinarian in four years. Please, when you fall off the PACE wagon, simply pick yourself up, brush yourself off, remember the lesson and move forward, again!

**Professional**

**Accountable**

**Confidence**

**Empowerment** for the lifetime of your veterinary career!



Yours in veterinary team development,  
Rebecca Rose, CVT

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Invite Rebecca to your orientation or team training.

1 <http://www.veterinarypracticenews.com/when-veterinarians-make-mistakes>

This document can be viewed at: <http://catalystvetpc.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/PACE-complete-version.pdf>