

By Jeff Thoren, DVM, ACC

Dr. Thoren, an ICF-certified coach and *EVT* editorial advisory board member, is founder of Gifted Leaders, LLC (giftedleaders.com), a diverse network of coaches and consultants who help people realize their individual and collective potentials.



SHOW UP

to Build a 5-Star Practice

Sustaining a successful veterinary practice depends on the team's ability to work together to deliver relationship-centered care and service that result in client loyalty. Satisfied clients are great, but *loyal* clients—those who happily return to you and recommend you to their friends—are the real secret to success.

Loyal clients rate an experience at your practice 5 out of 5, while satisfied clients give you a 3 or 4. Now, 4 out of 5 has always sounded pretty good to me, but according to Frederick Reichheld in *The Loyalty Effect*, customers who give a rating of 4 are six times more likely to defect to another business than those who give a 5.¹

But there's a catch: creating an emotional connection with your clients starts with looking at how each member of your health care team "shows up" and how their "affect" impacts others.



Emotional Contagion

The emotional state of the client is influenced by the emotions displayed by the service provider via "emotional contagion"²—the tendency to catch and feel emotions that are similar to and influenced by those of others. Think about when you had to tip-toe around a coworker or family member who was in a foul mood, or being influenced by someone who lifted your spirits through a positive outlook.

While it may be impossible, and clearly Pollyanna-ish, to think we can eliminate all negative emotional content, research in

continues ►



Relationship-centered care is a clinical philosophy that stresses partnership, careful attention to relational process, shared decision-making, and self-awareness (see November 2009, page 14).

The core principles:

1. Relationships in health care should include the personhood of the participants.
2. Emotion is an important component of these relationships.
3. All health-care relationships occur in the context of reciprocal influence.
4. Forming and maintaining genuine relationships in health care is morally valuable.

positive psychology indicates that there is a “tipping point”—a positive-to-negative interaction ratio of 3:1—above which individuals, teams, and organizations begin to flourish.³ One study found that teams with a ratio > 3:1 were significantly more productive, displayed more positive attitudes (support, encouragement, and appreciation), less negative attitudes (disapproval, sarcasm, and cynicism), had greater job satisfaction, and demonstrated a higher degree of engagement.⁴

Take Responsibility for Your Emotional Wake

Growing evidence supports the idea that a team’s emotional state is directly linked to factors such as morale, rapport, and important team performance indicators like client loyalty. Your success depends on each member’s skill at managing his or her emotional impact on the team and the group’s ability to build a collective interaction ratio > 3:1.

What can each team member do?

1. Ask, “How am I ‘showing up’?” Acknowledge your role in creating a workplace culture where emotional contagion works for you, not against you. The outcome of each personal interaction—verbal or nonverbal—can lead to one of two

outcomes: you are seen as inviting, or as cold and indifferent. Even the smallest interaction can affect whether you build up your team’s positive interaction ratio or tear it down.

2. Develop self-awareness through reflection. The practice of reflection, like many skills that make us more effective, doesn’t come naturally. It requires stopping what you’re doing long enough to assess what’s working, what’s not, and why, so you can adjust your behavior to achieve a better outcome.⁵ Our tendency as humans is to rely continually on habituated patterns of behavior even if they may not be working for us.

To develop your capacity for reflection, schedule 10 to 20 minutes at the end of each day to ask yourself questions like:

- ★ **What impact did I have on other people today?**
- ★ **What kind of emotional wake did I leave behind for others?**
- ★ **What do I need to do differently?**

Becoming more aware of how you are currently operating often leads to an increased ability to choose different, more effective behaviors.

3. Get feedback from trusted team members.

Generally, we don’t ask, listen, learn, and consistently follow up with others regarding the effectiveness of our actions and behaviors. Why don’t we ask for feedback? Perhaps it’s because our past experience with “receiving feedback” ranks right up there with going in for a root canal! There is a fundamental problem

Try This Ask several trusted colleagues (people who will give you honest and constructive input) a question like, “What can I do to help build our team’s positivity-to-negativity ratio in the future?” Listen to each person’s ideas, resist the urge to explain or defend your behavior, say “thank you,” and then decide what you are willing to commit to trying based on their suggestions.

with feedback: it usually focuses on what has already occurred—not on future possibilities and potential.

One solution, then, is to ask for *feedforward* instead of *feedback*. By asking a simple question like, “How can I be better at _____?” we focus on the promise of the future, which is typically more energizing, useful, and even fun.

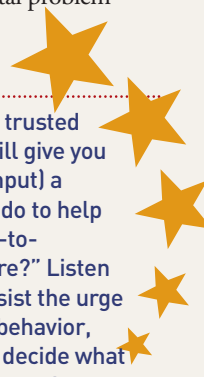
4. Be more intentional about how you show up.

This is a natural extension of the first three steps. By taking personal responsibility for your emotional wake, becoming more reflective, and gathering feedback, you will develop a sense of how you need to show up to best serve your team and your clients.

I began to refine this skill during my classroom training in professional coaching. While I was learning new coaching skills and developing the related competencies, it was natural for me to focus on the “doing” aspects of the task, for instance the step-by-step models and specific techniques of coaching. I quickly realized it was equally important to be intentional about the “being” and relational aspects of the coaching conversation. I found that, for me, it was important to remember to “be curious and have fun” and I still make a conscious effort to keep that intention in the forefront of my thinking during any coaching interaction. By choosing to be compassionate, or humble, or respectful, or whatever attribute is most important for you at that moment, you will contribute to building client loyalty and a 5-star practice. ■

References

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Skillsets addressed in this article: relational competencies, self-awareness, social awareness