

Building Client Loyalty To Grow Your Practice
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We talk about client satisfaction, but satisfaction really doesn't mean that much and it's not all that useful when there are new competitors arriving in the business arena. Customers often leave companies they are completely satisfied with, and veterinary facilities are no different. Client loyalty is a different matter. In this session, we will be exploring how to build trust and create a perception of value in our clients based on experiences in veterinary medicine and customer service research from a variety of other industries.

What is a loyal clientele? A group of customers that historically exhibit: Continuing patronage, increasing usage frequency, decreased price sensitivity over time, increased perceived switching costs over time, knowledge of services and policies, participation in "partnership" activities

Loyalty is the goal that we should be pursuing, and it comes from 2 places: Trust & Perception of Value.

There are six steps to building trust.

- 6) Be Similar (if you can) - express empathy and connect with clients on whatever level you can.
- 5) Be Authentic - be true to yourself and the medicine that you want to be practicing.
- 4) Educate - remember that your clients don't have the education you come with. They know how expensive heartworm treatment is to them now, they don't understand the cost of not treating.
- 3) Act with Integrity - remember that your core values should not be influenced by external validation. When you act with integrity and authenticity in your communication with clients your passion will come through.
- 2) Behave in a Reliable Fashion - no, this doesn't mean if you are usually 30 minutes behind, it's okay to always be 30 minutes behind, nice try. It means be stable, the clients and patients, not to mention your coworkers are counting on knowing how you'll communicate and how to come to decisions with you.
- 1) Invest in the Long Term - every interaction is an opportunity to build relationships that matter with this client.

Value is perceived based on 4 factors

1) Benefit - What the client thinks that they get when you offer them heartworm prevention. For some this may be just getting you off their back and getting a tasty treat. We can influence their perception of benefit through education.

2) Sacrifice - What clients think they gave up. This could be anything from putting off or canceling a vacation to raiding their 17 year olds college fund. We need to have empathy and understand where they are coming from to influence this perception.

3) Personal Preference - A client's personal opinion of the service and/or how it's delivered. What one client prefers will differ from one client to the next. One client may prefer to do an phone consultation prior to surgery because they are banking time off for their pets recovery. Another may prefer to be seen so that they can see you draw out the acl surgery on a paper towel in the exam room because that's what helps them understand what's happening to their pet. Meet your clients where their preferences meet your medicine, and do it with consistency and integrity.

4) Perceived Situation - Severity of the medical condition affects perceived value of service. We all know the detriment that heartworms can inflict on a pet. We feel like we've talked it through with clients and made it clear. Are we in endemic areas, do we make it clear that they are going to contract the disease and it's preventable? Are we acting with integrity. When we look back, will we be able to say "I educated them to the best of my ability" or will we be asking "Why didn't I do better"

Loyalty is what compels clients to drive past 5 other veterinary clinics on their way to see you. It's what makes them bring their pets to you earlier rather than later in the disease process, and it helps make Dr. Google a friend rather than an adversary. It does require investment on your part. Are you ready?