

Five ways veterinary staff can lead by example

About The Author

3–4 minutes

The trends toward greater diversity and inclusion throughout the veterinary profession pose fresh challenges to old top-down styles of leadership and management. Forward-looking veterinary practice owners and managers can establish practice cultures that allow others' leadership to shine.

1. Create a culture of veterinary leadership

[Keynote speaker and consultant](#) Steve Wunch recommends taking your business model, services, and job title out of the equation. Instead, think about what you would want from yourself as a leader and ask these questions:

- What would I want people to say about me when I'm not in the room?
- What would I want my legacy to be if I left this company?
- How did I help to support people?
- How did I remove obstacles from people's success?

When leaders demonstrate their values and support [performance expectations](#) for teams by how they do their own work, Wunch calls it “leadership by walking around.” Values drive behavior and behavior breeds behavior, inspiring staff to follow your example in their own veterinary leadership efforts.

However, creating a culture of growth and bottom-up veterinary leadership does not mean only [hiring people](#) exactly like you or that all forms of leadership look the same. Instead, Wunch says, “you

need to hire people who will respond and resonate and work well with you."

2. Teach and praise emerging veterinary leaders

Veterinary leadership also touches consistency, quality control, and continuity in ways that best serve clients and patients. Wunch went through the Disney Institute for Leadership Development earlier in his career. There, he learned that leaders must be teachers and should train their replacements "so that if you left, the ship could continue to sail without a hitch."

Terri Norvell, a [business adviser and leadership trainer and coach](#), also explains that leadership comes from praise and recognition. "Whatever you acknowledge and praise, you're going to get more of that," she says. "What I have found in this society, across industries, is that we typically focus on the problems. When, in reality, more is always going right than wrong."

While immediate thanks and enthusiasm amid the bustle of daily practice work well, it helps to systematize gratitude and praise with 10-15-minute individual meetings with every direct report, weekly or every other week. Ask key questions:

- What are you proud of?
- What do you plan to learn or how do you want to grow next?
- How can I help you be more effective and clear obstacles?

Norvell says, "People want managers to clear the obstacles, so they can show up, shine, and serve."

One last question, she says, is not for the faint of heart: "What can I do better?" It demonstrates that your style of veterinary leadership includes your own improvement and growth.