

# Exceptional Customer Service Can Take Your Veterinary Practice to the Next Level

By Celeste Van Deinse, LVT, MWI Animal Health Business Coach



We all believe that our practices are delivering good customer service but, truthfully, not all practices are created equal. One of the best ways to see how you're really doing is to survey your clients. That way you can read firsthand the good, the bad and the ugly. If you do receive any undesirable feedback, for example, this allows you to put steps in place to head in a positive direction. Going the extra mile can set your practice above the rest, helping to reduce client turnover rates while attracting new clients.

Consider these points to help shore up customer service:

**Prioritize positive staff interactions.** The first impression that your clients have of your practice is with the initial greeting in person or over the phone so you want your receptionists to be friendly, warm and courteous. The client wants to be greeted with a warm "hello" and a smile, yes,

even over the telephone. Remember, this goes for the entire staff from the top down. Every interaction a client has with a staff member should be positive. If at any time a client has a complaint, deal with it immediately. The sooner it is dealt with, the greater your chances of turning the situation into a positive outcome.

**Provide a comfortable waiting room.** Offer an area for coffee, water and tea that pet owners can use while they wait. A television that is playing an appropriate station for everyone to enjoy, comfortable seating and reading material will help the wait time to pass much faster for the client. For extra bonus points from your feline owners, a separate waiting space is a feature they will really appreciate and surely tell other feline owner-friends about.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

## "Going the extra mile can set your practice above the rest, helping to reduce client turnover rates while attracting new clients."

**Give welcome bags to new clients.** This goodie bag is a thoughtful way to welcome a new client to your practice. Create a bag for cats and a bag for dogs. Each bag should be branded with your hospital logo and contain important information about the practice. Add toys, free sample bags of pet food, a measuring cup and other pet-friendly items.

**Make existing pets and their owners feel special.** Send home a treat for the pet at the end of a visit. It can be a food treat, toy or bandana (with hospital branding)—any of these items will make the owner smile and the pet happy. Make them both feel special and keep them coming back for more.

**Create puppy and kitten packs.** Creating packets of information and other items for a new puppy or new kitten is another way to connect with your clients and educate them at the same time. During their initial puppy or kitten visit, owners are given a lot of helpful information on how to care for their new family member. Sending them home with packets that contain the same information that was covered during their visit is a helpful client resource. If you have an area where a bulletin board can be placed, staff can take pictures of the new additions and post the photos for all to see.

**Consider the youngest owners.** When children come into the practice with their pets, make them feel special as well by offering a packet of crayons and a coloring book that teaches them about different pet topics. In the waiting room, a nice touch is to provide books, games or activities to keep them occupied. Their parents will thank you!

**Communicate with and inform clients.** Make sure the reception staff keeps track of arrival times of clients and their pets, so staff is aware of appointment wait times. If the wait is longer than 15 minutes, the staff needs to check

in and update the client. At this time, the client should be asked if there is anything he or she needs while waiting. When a wait time has become excessive, explain to the client the reason for the long wait and see if he or she wants to continue waiting or reschedule. Communication goes a long way to diffuse frustration before it occurs.

**Make follow-up phone calls a priority.** Calling an owner to check in on a pet after an appointment or a procedure is all part of good medicine, but it also goes a long way with a client as well. To an owner it says that the staff cares about his or her pet as if it was a part of their own family.

Exceptional service along with top-notch medical care is a winning combination. Your staff will create long-term client bonds and clients will spread the word to family, friends and other pet owners just in passing. Having both long-term and new clients are essential to the success and growth of your practice.

To discuss customer service further with an MWI Business Coach, reach us at [practicesolutions@mwiah.com](mailto:practicesolutions@mwiah.com).



Celeste Van Deirse is a Licensed Veterinary Technician (LVT) and a member of MWI's Business Coaching team.