Key Communication Techniques for the Veterinary Health Care Team

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Effective Communication Techniques

Learning Objectives

• Define Communication
• Goals of Communication
• What is effective communication?
• Communication Barriers
  • Communication Noise
• Skill #1 Non-Verbal Communication
  • Improving non-verbal communication
  • What does personality have to do with communication?
  • Assessing Understanding
  • Ineffective communication
  • Explaining Medical Issues
  • Communication in difficult situations.
  • Delivering bad news
  • Assessing Understanding
  • Minimizing liability
• Meetings as a communication tool
• Communication resources

Effective Communication

Definition of communication?

• "A transfer of information, thoughts or ideas to create shared understanding between a sender and a receiver".

• The information may be written or spoken, professional or social, personal or impersonal to name a few possibilities.

• "Effective communication is the communication which produces intended or desired results".
Key Communication Techniques for the Veterinary Health Care Team

Communication Goals

- To change behavior.
- To get action.
- To give and get information.
- To ensure understanding.
- To persuade.

- Effective communication achieves your goals in the shortest time.

Communication in Veterinary Hospitals

- The California Veterinary Medical Board cites communication breakdown as one of the top reasons for clients to file a complaint against a veterinarian or practice.

- There is a direct correlation between employee communication skills and practice profitability.

- Communication skills rate second only to job knowledge in your work life success.

Communication in the Veterinary Field

Why do we need it?

- In the information age, we have to send, receive, and process huge numbers of messages every day.
- Effective communication is about more than just exchanging information; it’s also about understanding the emotion behind the information.
Key Communication Techniques for the Veterinary Health Care Team

Communication

Why does it need to be effective?
• Helps us better understand a person or situation.
• Enables us to resolve differences.
• Build trust and respect.
• Create environments where creative ideas, problem solving, affection, and caring can flourish.
• Misunderstandings can cause conflict and frustration in personal and professional relationships.
• Better connect with your spouse, kids, friends, and coworkers.

Communication Techniques

What is effective communication?
• While effective communication is a learned skill, it is more effective when it’s spontaneous rather than formulaic.
• A speech that is read, for example, rarely has the same impact as a speech that’s delivered (or appears to be delivered) spontaneously.

Effective Communication

The communication process
• The communication process involves:
  A sender
  A receiver
  Message
  Channel
  Feedback
• Can actually be a very complex process.
• Think “2 way street”.
Effective Communication
What should the sender do?
• Create a climate of trust and confidence.
• Express ideas clearly and concisely.
• Be explicit about expectations.
• Strive for a balance between too much/too little information.
• Be aware of the non-verbal elements of your message - remember that people tend to believe what they see more than they hear.
• Give the receiver time to process your message.

Effective Communication
What should the receiver do?
• Pay attention to what is being communicated.
• Clarify anything you are unsure about.
• Confirm your understanding of the message.
• Be aware of your non-verbal behaviors - remember that people tend to believe what they see more than they hear.

Effective Communication
The communication process
- The message
- The channel (speaking, writing, graphics, etc.)
- The recipient
- The messenger
- At least some code in common
- What I mean
- The message
- Behaviour/output
- What I understand
- The messenger
- The message
- The channel (speaking, writing, graphics, etc.)
- The recipient
- At least some code in common
- What I mean
- The message
- Behaviour/ output
- What I understand
Avoid Communication Pitfalls

Communication Barriers to Communication

“Noise” Barriers – 3 Types
- Content
- Process
- Context

Barrier to Communication
Communication Noise: Content
- Excessive use of complex vocabulary, jargon and/or abbreviations.
- Incorrect pronunciation of words.
- Too much/too little information.
- Unclear messages.
- Speaking too quickly.
- Conflicting information.
Effective Communication
Communication Noise: Process
- Lack of eye contact.
- Non-supportive or disinterested facial expressions.
- Lack of/excessive eye contact.
- Inappropriate gestures and/or body posture.

Effective Communication
Communication Noise: Context
- Busy, noisy environments.
- Stereotypical assumptions.
- Prejudices.
- Expectations that are implicit rather than explicit.
- Emotional or attitudinal issues which impact on communication.

Ineffective Communication
What do others see and here?
- Lack of enthusiasm
  - No emotion or flat tone, body language
- Fidgeting
  - Distracts from your message
- Not getting to the Point
  - Listener loses focus of the message
- How you’re delivering the message
  - Avoiding a conversation with a letter or email
- Distracting Words
  - Um’s, Ah’s & Urrs, slang, cursing.
- Who are you talking to?
  - Eye Contact
Effective communication skills #1: Nonverbal communication

- You can enhance effective communication by using open body language.
  - Arms uncrossed.
  - Standing with an open stance or sitting on the edge of your seat.
  - Maintaining eye contact with the person you’re talking to.

- You can also use body language to emphasize or enhance your verbal message.
  - Patting a friend on the back while complimenting him on his success.
  - Pounding your fists to underline your message.

Communication is not Created Equally

- Use nonverbal signals that match up with your words.
- Nonverbal communication should reinforce what is being said, not contradict it.
- If you say one thing, but your body language says something else, your listener will likely feel you’re being dishonest. For example, you can’t say “yes” while shaking your head no.
**Communication is not Created Equally**

**Tips for improving non-verbal communication**

- Adjust your nonverbal signals according to the context.
- The tone of your voice should be different when you’re addressing a child than when you’re addressing a group of adults.
- Take into account the emotional state and cultural background of the person you’re interacting with.
- Consider Age & Gender.

- Use body language to convey positive feelings even when you’re not actually experiencing them.
- If you’re nervous about a situation—a job interview, important presentation, or first date, for example—you can use positive body language to signal confidence, even though you’re not feeling it.
- Instead of tentatively entering a room with your head down, eyes averted, and sliding into a chair, try standing tall with your shoulders back, smiling and maintaining eye contact, and delivering a firm handshake. It will make you feel more self-confident and help to put the other person at ease.
Skill #2: Listening

Effective Communication
Listening is one of the most important aspects of effective communication.

Successful listening means not just understanding the words or the information being communicated, but also understanding how the speaker feels about what they’re communicating.

Listening versus Hearing

Is this listening or hearing? What is the difference?

Active listening Skills

Listening promotes being heard.

“... Seek first to understand, then be understood.” - Stephen Covey

1. Sit up.
2. Look interested.
3. Lean forward.
4. Listen.
5. Act interested.
6. Nod your head to show that you are tuned in.
7. Track the speaker with your eyes.
Personality & Communication Style

How do they effect communication?

Personality:
- DISC
- Myers-Brigg Type Indicator
  - Introversion or Extraversion, Thinking or Feeling, Sensing or Intuition, Judging or Perceiving

Communication Style:
- Assertive
- Aggressive
- Passive-aggressive
- Submissive (Passive)
- Manipulative – used sometimes.

Different sorts of behavior and language are characteristic of each.

Communication Styles

How do they effect communication?

Understanding styles

- React most effectively when confronted with a difficult person.
- Recognize when you are not being assertive or not behaving in the most effective way.
- Choose which communication style you use. Being assertive or direct is usually the most effective.
- Other styles are necessary in certain situations – such as being submissive or reserved when under physical threat (a mugging, hijacking etc.).
Personality Styles
How do they affect communication?

Communication
Using the Right Type

If your audience is:
- Introvert type
- Extrovert Type
- Intuitive type
- Thinking Type
- Sensitive Type

Use this Strategy:
- Write a memo
- Try out your ideas orally
- Present the big picture first
- Use logic Not emotion
- Express your concern about the people/pets needs of the organization

Personality Styles
How do they affect communication?
Personality Style
How do they effect communication?

Effective Communication
Role of a Veterinary Technician

Communication Skills:
- Communicate in a professional manner in all formats - written, oral, non-verbal, and electronic.

Communication Tasks:
- Apply understanding of interpersonal skills and team dynamics in all aspects of team dynamics
- Utilize appropriate interpersonal and public relations skills
- Demonstrate telephone etiquette
- Recognize the legality of the veterinary-client-patient relationship
- Develop and provide client education in a clear and accurate manner at a level the client understands (i.e., oral and written form, including educational handouts)
- Apply crisis intervention/grief management skills with clients

Decision-making abilities:
- Taking into account the patient, client, staff and circumstances, the veterinary technician will effectively and accurately acquire and convey information utilizing an appropriate communication mode.

Communication
- Can we afford not to communicate effectively?

No!
Communicating to Pet Owners
Explaining medical issues

Chunk and check:
- Give a portion of the information and then check in with the client to see how he or she is doing.
- "Whether a dog develops hip dysplasia is influenced by many things. It might be due to genetics, something in the environment, or even diet.
- So it's possible that Chance may even be the only dog from his litter to have clinical signs of hip dysplasia.
- Does that make sense to you?"

Communicating to Pet Owners
Explaining medical issues

Acknowledge nonverbal cues:
- "You look a little confused, which is not unusual.
- Many of my clients have a hard time digesting all of this at once, and it's even more difficult now because it's happening to Chance."

Pace yourself and speak in terms clients will understand:
- Keep in mind that the information is new to them and that medical terminology is frequently like a foreign language.

Guidelines for Communicating
How to discuss bad news!

- Choose a quiet place
- Ensure there will be no distractions
- Provide a warning (eg: "I have difficult news to share")
- Be attentive to your own and your client's nonverbal messages.
- Make eye contact.
- Sit at the client's level.
- Respond appropriately, (eg. "I see that this shocking to you. Should I go on or do you need a moment?").
- Facilitate a discussion.
- Finish with a plan for the next contact.
Assessing Understanding
Did they understand the information?
• Use a rating system to assess understanding.
  "On a scale of 1 to 10, how comfortable are you that you understand what a total hip replacement will mean for you and Chance?"
• Offer to help them clarify what they will share with loved ones about the condition.
  "I know you'll be talking with your wife about this visit later. Do you want to go through it once so I can help you with anything that you are unclear about?"

Assessing Understanding
Did they understand the information?
• Encourage questions by normalizing their reactions.
  "This is a pretty complex topic, and most people have many questions about it. It is pretty challenging to explain, too, so I want to make sure we are on the same page. Do you have any questions?"

Questions??

• Provide information to take home
  Presentations using visual aids are 43 percent more persuasive than unaided presentations according to a study by 3M Visual Systems Division.

Communication Affects Liability
Reducing Risk
Outcomes of effective communication in veterinary medicine:
• Decreased malpractice risk.
• Increased client satisfaction.
• Increased compliance with treatment recommendations.
• Improved diagnostic accuracy.

Most common reason for litigation:
• Patient perception that the veterinarian did not care.
• Poor delivery of medical information.
• Poor listening by the veterinarian and/or staff.

International Communications Industries Association, Inc.
**Improving Team Communication**

**Meetings Are Important**

- Streamline & Improve Communication
- Creating a Team Atmosphere
- Team Building & Morale
- Reduce Miscommunication
- Brain Storming
- Collaboration
- Set Goals

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**Improving Communications**

**Team Building**

- Solicit Feedback
  - How was the meeting?
  - Was the topic relevant?
  - How was the meeting conducted?
  - Make sure co-workers perceive it the same way.
  - Use feedback to make changes for future interactions.
  - What worked or not.
  - Suggestion box for anonymous feedback.
Communication Resources

- Communication Solutions For Veterinarians, Wendy Myers www.csvets.com
- Textbook: Client Satisfaction Pays, Dr. Carin A Smith, AAHA Press.
- Veterinary Communication website: https://www.veterinarycommunication.org/practitioner/

Thank You!

Q & A

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