

## **PREVENT MAKING THESE COMMON MISTAKES IN YOUR PRACTICE!**

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Even the most intelligent practice owner will make a multitude of business mistakes. In fact, the willingness to make mistakes and learn from them is a key personality trait for business founders and leaders. Being aware of some common business failures other veterinarians have gone through can help you avoid making the same mistakes in your practice. To help you keep your practice running smoothly, we are sharing some common mistakes to avoid in part one of this two-part newsletter.

### ***Culture***

Workplace culture is an integral part of your practice! A positive culture helps everyone want to come in to work while a negative culture makes you wish you worked somewhere else - even when you own the place! Make sure that the culture in your practice is an inviting and healthy atmosphere for your employees as well as your clients, patients, and YOU! Here are a few of the things that can negatively affect the culture of your practice:

### ***Nepotism***

A very common component that damages the culture of a practice is playing favorites with employees or hiring family members that get special treatment, especially if they are not doing a good job. Treating anyone as though the rules don't apply to them leads to job dissatisfaction and low morale among your other employees. It could also lead to an erosion of confidence that will impact your effectiveness as a leader. If employees observe that underqualified relatives are being given positions in the practice or even promoted over those who are more qualified, this will create toxicity and reduce staff productivity. After all, if hard work isn't recognized or rewarded, why put forth the extra effort? If you hire relatives, make sure they are fully equipped to do the job and treat them as you would any other employee. If possible, have someone else direct and manage your family member and never circumvent that manager's authority. When the playing field is level, the concern that a family member will have unfair advantages can be mitigated.

### ***Founder's Syndrome***

It takes a dynamic entrepreneur with a clear vision to start a business from scratch. During those first weeks and months of operation, the founder often makes every decision, large and small (sometimes even trivial!), and employees learn to take every problem to the founder for resolution. This might work well at first. But as the business grows, a bottleneck is created when the founder must make every decision while also working to grow the practice. If you feel like nothing ever gets done and no one else takes initiative, your practice could be suffering from Founder's Syndrome (FS). What once was a huge asset to the organization now is becoming a liability. Because the founder was the driving force behind every decision, no organizational systems were developed, no training protocols were created, and no one other than the founder was involved in decisions. Founder's Syndrome is an organizational condition that sets in over time because, without organizational structure and systems to manage the practice, the practice is solely dependent upon the founder.

The good news is this syndrome is completely treatable! As a practice starts to grow, each life stage requires a different management style. For a practice to grow and evolve, it must establish and enforce control systems, formal lines of authority, policies, procedures, budgets, and strategic plans to reach its full potential. Even more, the founder should share their vision with all staff members and ask them to help that vision become a reality. Invite employees to participate in decisions that affect them directly. Allow them to take different approaches than you would have taken. If the same destination is reached, the road taken to get there may not matter.

### ***Staff Potential & Work Satisfaction***

Veterinary nurses are one of your practice's biggest assets! Unfortunately, they are often vastly underutilized. A veterinarian should not be doing ear cleanings while a nurse simply watches or restrains the patient. Underutilization is one of the biggest factors that creates frustration and dissatisfaction for nurses. They want opportunities to fully utilize their knowledge and skills, and if the practice owner does not allow them to do so, those nurses will leave for other veterinary practices where their expertise will be appreciated. When veterinary nurses are underutilized, the practice also loses revenue. If doctors are performing tasks that nurses can do, it limits the number of patients who can be seen.

Veterinary assistants should be utilized for more than cleaning and animal restraint. They can enter charges, soothe anxious patients, and communicate with your clients. Veterinary assistants can help with follow-up phone calls after routine appointments. Clients love this extra touch and it reinforces the idea that the practice cares about them and their pets long after the appointment.

If your practice still uses the title "receptionist" update the title to "client service representative". These critical team members do much more than answer phones and schedule appointments. They create the first impression of your practice with clients. They welcome clients in the door and help them feel comfortable in the lobby. They are the gatekeepers to the other team members and can help or hinder communication between clients, doctors and nurses.

You can get creative with other responsibilities as well, all the while staying within the respective position descriptions. In addition to providing staff with more fulfilling responsibilities, offer training and educational opportunities for each staff member. Statistics show that employees stay with a company longer and are more productive when they feel like the company is investing in them. By offering career development and actively seeking out opportunities to help your employees grow, you are signaling you care about their long-term success.

If you are nodding your head or saying, "mmmm hmmm" to any of these, don't wait, ACT NOW! Tackle the issue head on. If you don't know how, reach out to experts who do (visit [VetPartner.org](http://VetPartner.org)). Look out for next month's newsletter that discusses additional common business mistakes veterinarians make including cashflow, exit strategies and technology issues.