



6 Ways to Encourage Innovative Thinking in the Veterinary Practice

BY CALEB FRANKEL, VMD

One challenge rules the day in the modern veterinary hospital: attracting and retaining high-quality staff. If this is your No. 1 focus, know that it will likely remain so for years to come.

So, what can you do? Employers should take a good, hard look in the mirror. The last few years have been a blur, so it's a good time to take stock. Ask yourself, would the "you" of your early career take a job here? Would you see your hospital as a beacon of progress? Or would it appear an environment of stagnation,

where members of the veterinary staff survive rather than thrive?

If the latter is your answer, the good news is that this is fairly easy to change. Forward-thinking clinics are starting to realize that the veterinary teams of tomorrow seek environments that foster a progressive-minded culture. This may be through the technology in the hospitals, the medicine they practice or the culture of the hospital itself.

In this article, we'll discuss six ways to encourage innovative thinking within veterinary hospitals,

helping you to create a vibrant and innovative workplace culture.

1 Provide Room for Experimentation

In 1948, manufacturing giant 3M famously adopted an "innovate or die" mantra and instituted "15% time," where employees were given dedicated space and time to innovate on projects their teams were passionate about but outside of their day-to-day work. The point is that innovative thinking requires the right ingredients: time,

space and freedom. Encourage staff to set aside a small portion of their work hours for experimentation, allowing them to test new ideas, techniques and technologies. This dedicated time not only shows your commitment to innovation but also empowers employees to think outside the box and bring forward unconventional solutions.

2 Showcase Innovative Tools

As most leaders know, the most powerful way to effect change is to do, not say. One way to show your commitment to innovation is to constantly trial some of the industry's new tools. Every year, new drugs, devices, software and services pop up and are often easy to integrate into your workflow. Set a goal for your team of adopting something new per quarter to show that commitment comes from the top. Need a shortcut to staying up on the latest and greatest? The Veterinary Innovation Podcast (veterinaryinnovationpodcast.com) is an easy starting point!

3 Embrace Failure as a Learning Opportunity

If the fear of failure is holding your staff back, it's time to change that mindset. Make it clear that failure is an essential part of innovation and learning. Share stories of past failures, what was learned from them and how they ultimately led to success. By cultivating an environment where failure is embraced, your staff will be more inclined to take risks and push boundaries, ultimately leading to more creative solutions.

4 Encourage Collaboration Across Disciplines

Innovation thrives when perspectives collide. By promoting collaboration

across different disciplines within your veterinary hospital, you're likely to see new ideas and approaches emerge. This may be done by bringing together veterinary nurses and veterinarians, nonmedical and medical staff or different departments from larger centers for

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cross-functional meetings or workshops, encouraging staff to discuss their work with colleagues from other departments. This exchange of knowledge can spark new ways of thinking and uncover unique solutions that may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

5 Invest in Continuing Education and Training

To stay on the cutting edge, it's essential to invest in the ongoing education and training of your staff. Offer access to conferences, workshops and online courses to help them stay current with the latest advancements in veterinary medi-

cine. By nurturing a culture of learning, you'll not only help your employees grow professionally but also foster an innovative mindset that will continually elevate your level of care.

6 Reward and Recognize Innovation

Last but not least, be sure to reward and recognize staff members who demonstrate innovative thinking. This can be done through monetary incentives, awards or even public acknowledgment. By celebrating their successes, you'll not only motivate them to continue pushing boundaries but also inspire others to follow in their footsteps.

One of my favorite quotes is: "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one most adaptable to change."

In the end, just like Charles Darwin's position on the survival of species, veterinary hospitals trying to survive in an environment of fierce competition and extreme staff shortages need more than just competitive salaries and benefits to attract the workforce of tomorrow. Cultivating a compelling, innovative and *adaptive* environment is now essential for drawing in top talent and ensuring that your veterinary practice measures up.

Embrace these strategies and you'll lay the foundation for a veterinary hospital that not only appeals to the best and brightest professionals but also provides the best animal health care to your community. ■

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