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A Foundation for Success

Why defining vision, mission, core values, and standards of care is critical for startups and newly acquired practices.

BY PETER WEINSTEIN, DVM, MBA

Veterinary medicine is a profession and a business. It is rooted in compassion, science, ethics, and service, while also operating in a competitive, financially complex environment. For veterinary hospitals — especially startups and newly acquired practices — success depends on far more than clinical competence. The most resilient and high-performing practices are built on a clear foundation of vision, mission, core values, and standards of care. These elements provide direction, alignment, consistency, and accountability, shaping not only what the hospital does, but how and why it does it. They are foundational needs for a truly successful business.

When clearly defined and communicated, and revisited regularly, these guiding principles serve as the cultural and operational backbone of the practice. When absent or vague, practices often drift, experience internal conflict, deliver inconsistent

care, and struggle to scale or integrate change. Understanding what each of these components is — and why each is essential — allows veterinary leaders to intentionally build practices that thrive clinically, financially, and culturally.

Vision Statement

A vision statement describes what the veterinary hospital aspires to become over time. It is forward-looking, inspirational, and aspirational. The vision answers the question: What does success look like in the long term?

In a veterinary hospital, a vision might describe the practice's desired reputation or the impact it hopes to have on patients, clients, team members, and the broader community.

A strong vision is not focused on day-to-day tasks or revenue targets; instead, it paints a compelling picture of what the organization is

striving toward. For example, a veterinary hospital's vision might be to become the most trusted source of compassionate, high-quality veterinary care in its region, or to set the standard for collaborative, fear-free, and evidence-based medicine. The exact wording matters less than the clarity and emotional resonance the vision creates.

For startup veterinary practices, the vision acts as a North Star. In the early stages, decisions about equipment, services offered, pricing, staffing models, scheduling, and growth pace must be made quickly and often with limited resources. A clear vision helps founders evaluate these decisions through a consistent lens: Does this move us closer to the practice we are trying to become?

Without a defined vision, startups risk building reactively rather than intentionally, leading to misaligned investments, cultural confusion, and eventual burnout. A compelling vision also helps attract the right team members — people who believe in the same future and are motivated to help build it.

In practice acquisitions, vision becomes even more critical. Acquired hospitals often inherit legacy systems, habits, and cultural norms. A clearly articulated vision helps unify the existing team and new leadership around a shared future, rather than allowing the practice to remain anchored to the past. It provides a reason for change that goes beyond “new ownership” and helps reduce resistance by showing where the practice is going and why it matters.

Sample vision statements:

- **LinkedIn:** Create economic opportunity for every member of the global workforce
- **Disney:** To be one of the world's leading producers and providers of entertainment and information
- **Nike:** To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete* in the world (*If you have a body, you're an athlete.)

BY THE NUMBERS

According to the 2025 AVMA Report on the Economic State of the Veterinary Profession:

- **56.3%** of practices had no vision statement.
- **44.1%** had no mission statement.
- **57.7%** had no value statement.

Mission Statement

If the vision describes the future, the mission statement defines the hospital's present-day purpose. It answers the questions: Why do we exist, and what do we do every day to move toward our vision?

A veterinary hospital's mission typically encompasses the services it provides, the patients and clients it serves, and the values that guide its approach to care. It should be practical, actionable, and relevant to daily operations. While the vision inspires, the mission directs.

For example, a mission might emphasize delivering high-quality medical care, educating and partnering with clients, supporting team well-being, and practicing ethical and evidence-based medicine. The mission should be short enough to remember but meaningful enough to guide behavior.

In startups, the mission helps translate ambition into action. New practices face countless operational demands, and it's easy for teams to become task-focused without understanding the larger purpose. A clear mission aligns daily behaviors — how clients are greeted, how cases are discussed, how time is managed — with the broader goals of the practice.

The mission also provides a framework for accountability. When challenges arise, leaders can reference the mission to reinforce expectations and priorities. It keeps the practice from drifting away from its original intent as pressures mount.

For acquired practices, the mission helps redefine identity without erasing history. It clarifies what will remain central and what may evolve under new leadership. When consistently communicated, it reduces uncertainty and builds trust by answering the team's implicit question: What is expected of us now?

Sample mission statements:

- **Starbucks:** To inspire and nurture the human spirit — one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time
- **Spotify:** To empower creators to make their best work and get it in front of the audience they deserve
- **Facebook:** To give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected

Core Values

Core values articulate the principles and behaviors that define how the veterinary hospital operates. They answer the question: How do we treat our patients, our clients, and each other?

Core values reflect the behaviors the practice actively expects, rewards, and protects. They are decision-making tools, not slogans for the wall. When clearly defined, they guide hiring, firing, performance reviews, conflict resolution, and leadership behavior.

In startups, culture forms quickly, whether intentionally or not. Early hires set behavioral norms that can persist for years. Defining core values early allows leaders to shape culture deliberately rather than allowing it to develop by default.

Clear values help founders hire people who align with the practice's expectations and make it easier to address performance issues early. When a team member's behavior conflicts with stated values, leaders can point to shared commitments rather than personal preferences.

In acquisitions, core values help bridge cultural gaps. Existing teams may have deeply ingrained habits and expectations. Clearly articulated values provide a neutral framework for change, helping teams understand which behaviors are essential moving forward. They also help leadership assess which legacy practices should be preserved and which should evolve.

Examples of core values from various veterinary websites:

- ▶ Compassion
- ▶ Integrity
- ▶ Teamwork
- ▶ Respect
- ▶ Accountability
- ▶ Lifelong learning

Standards of Care

Standards of care define the clinical and professional expectations for how veterinary medicine is practiced within the hospital. They answer the question: What level of care do we commit to providing every time?

Standards of care should be evidence-based, ethically grounded, and adaptable as medical knowledge evolves. They are not about rigidity; they are about consistency. They allow individual clinicians to practice medicine within a shared framework, ensuring that patients receive reliable, high-quality care, regardless of which doctor they see. From a risk-management perspective, standards of care protect the practice legally and ethically by demonstrating a commitment to accepted medical norms.

For startups, standards of care help establish credibility and trust quickly.



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New practices must earn client confidence, and consistent medical approaches reduce confusion and errors. Clear standards also support less experienced clinicians by providing guidance and reducing variability.

In acquired practices, standards of care are essential for alignment. Legacy hospitals often have wide variations in how medicine is practiced. Implementing shared standards helps reduce internal conflict, improve case outcomes, and create a consistent client experience. Over time, they also support smoother onboarding of new staff.

Standards of care to consider implementing at your practice:

- ▶ Physical examination
- ▶ Pain management
- ▶ Vaccination
- ▶ Spay/neuter
- ▶ Intestinal parasite testing and prevention
- ▶ Heartworm testing and prevention
- ▶ Pre-anesthetic blood testing
- ▶ Chronic medication screening

Implement Early, Update Regularly

Vision, mission, core values, and standards of care are most powerful when implemented early, before habits harden and misalignment takes root. Early adoption allows these principles to shape decisions, culture, and operations from the outset, rather than being retrofitted later under stress.

For startups, early clarity prevents costly course corrections. For acquisitions, it accelerates integration and minimizes cultural friction. In both cases, these elements reduce ambiguity, which is one of the primary sources of team dissatisfaction and burnout in veterinary medicine.

These guiding principles are not static. Veterinary medicine evolves, client expectations change, team composition shifts, and practices grow or diversify. Revisiting your vision, mission, values, and standards ensures they remain relevant and authentic. It also reinforces their importance, keeping them alive in daily conversations rather than relegated to a forgotten document.

You should think about your vision, mission, values, and standards of care every day. Virtually all decisions will be guided by them. They are not administrative formalities; they are foundational tools for building sustainable, ethical, and successful hospitals. For startups, they provide clarity and intentionality from day one. For practice acquisitions, they create alignment, trust, and a shared path forward.

When established early and revisited often, these principles empower veterinary teams to deliver consistent, high-quality care, navigate change with confidence, and build practices that are not only profitable but deeply fulfilling places to work and to receive care. **TVB**