

Veterinary Economics provided us with the current State of the Veterinary Industry report in the August 2009 issue. In the article titled "Learning to Leave it" the author featured interviews with three veterinarians who all expressed their preference for spending time with family over the pursuit of financial success. The statistics in the article support the perception that veterinarians currently practicing today, place a higher priority upon family demands, as 80% of men and 84% of women state they wish that they could devote more time to family. The veterinarians who took part in the study must be conflicted, as 75 % of men and 71% of women believe they successfully balance their job with their personal life. An overwhelming majority of the participants believe they have a balance, but want more family time. The anecdotal inclusions provide the reader with insight that financial and career sacrifices will likely need to be made in order to achieve this sense of balance, that's not "balanced" the way the veterinarian would really like it.

I wonder if veterinarians have devoted so much time focusing on their inner conflict between personal fulfillments, economic requirements and work - home life boundaries that they have neglected to consider the possibility of a solution.

I contend that the current day veterinarian can solve this dilemma by utilizing a new resource to aid him or her in attaining the highly coveted "quality home life" while managing to grow their professional value and boost their bank accounts. I'm a practice owner, and practicing veterinarian, as well as a husband and father, and I want to help others benefit from the system I developed.

The system I designed allows me to charge for my time and expertise, by asking my clients who wish to speak to me after regular hours, to pay a fee for my advice over the phone during emergencies. My clients in crisis are grateful for the opportunity to pay to contact me, as opposed to listening to a recorded message that impersonally channels them to an emergency care center, even if they might not need to be there. Because I'm available over the phone I can spend time with my family while still offering "extended hours" of service.

This process which allows my clients to pay to speak to me grows revenues, not only via the fees I take from the calls, but more significantly from the business I direct back to my practice when the office next opens for business. Research done on the After Hours Assurance system by Vieth Consulting has concluded that in the general public, 90% of the veterinary emergency callers who believe they have an emergency, do not have a medical need to be seen immediately. Within the network of veterinarians who use the After Hours Assurance system (offered by On Call Solutions) 65% of veterinary clients who were convinced they had an emergency, learned they did not need to receive emergency treatment. When I can responsibly advise my clients who have paid to speak to me to come to see me the next day, I keep the money for those services in house. I share the call fees with my associates, which means they are happy to take one or two calls over the weekend and be compensated for doing so.

How does this help my home life? I have always believed it is the responsibility of a veterinarian to be available for advice over the phone. But our 4 doctor practice was receiving as many as twenty five calls a weekend, most of which were not emergency related. Once we placed a fee on those calls, our call volume dropped to two to four calls a weekend. Our doctors are no longer harangued by inconsiderate

callers, and our home lives improved instantly. My associates and I have more money in our paychecks at the end of the month, which improves our home life as well. And because we offer advice over the phone, we can still refer real emergency cases to our preferred emergency clinic, which means we don't have to leave the house to treat patients at odd hours.

I wanted to allow other veterinarians to enjoy the benefits of this method because it's good for the veterinarians, the industry as a whole, the pet owners, and the animals for whom we took an oath to care. By being available for advice when the office is closed, I save my clients time and money by preventing them from making unnecessary trips to emergency clinics. When I can assist a worried pet owner in caring for their animal, the animal gets better care. When my patients get the best care, and I can save their families' money, I build trust. In our current economy it is vital that we build trust in our industry, as well as the trust our individual clients have in us, so that they continue to designate their limited resources to the care of their animals. Our livelihoods and careers depend on it. If we create solutions to help safeguard our careers, we will be afforded the luxury of our internal debates over work versus family time. The reality is... Our debate will discontinue if we find ourselves unemployed.

Rather than beat ourselves up over personal decisions, let's reconsider the opportunities we can capitalize upon in order to be properly compensated for our work, and find creative and efficient methods to create more time for our families. If we focus on new alternatives, we will all enjoy a little more "balance".

Respectfully,

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