

of veterinary professionals to what we can do about it. New leaders and influencers are developing throughout the ranks as stakeholders no longer defer to large associations to make decisions for the entire profession and industry.

Leaders of new veterinary schools seeking accreditation were on-site and seeking partnerships to launch successful programs. The shock of multiple new programs gave way to enthusiasm about a new generation of veterinarians coming online throughout the United States.

New companies and new organizations were visible,

offering innovative technologies, data solutions, service delivery models and, yes, telemedicine. I'm not prepared to announce that veterinary medicine no longer fears change, but it's clear that the ranks of those opposing change are shrinking.

The only thing missing in Orlando was good weather, and of course, many attendees returned to miserable conditions throughout the country. Nothing VMX could do about that; otherwise hats off to CEO Gene O'Neil and his NAVC team. They know how to throw a great conference at a time when the pet health care industry needed it.



Mark Cushing is a lawyer and the founder and CEO of Animal Policy Group LLC, based in Scottsdale, Arizona; Portland, Oregon; and Los Angeles. He's a

frequent speaker at veterinary medicine and other animal policy conferences. Mark is a former partner of major regional and national law firms and served as an adjunct professor of law at the Lincoln Memorial University Duncan School of Law in Knoxville, Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland and the University of Oregon School of Law. Most recently, he's the author of "Pet Nation," a book released by Penguin Random House that illustrates an inside look at the forces behind how our pets transformed American society and culture. Mark can be reached at mark@animalpolicygroup.com.

COLUMN

The essential elements of a successful hiring plan in 2024

Evaluate how your organization is doing in these key areas, then use the results to improve your hiring process.

By Stacy Pursell

This more than likely goes without saying, but I'm going to say it anyway: Recruiting and hiring in the veterinary profession these days is not easy. It does not appear as though 2024 is going to provide fewer obstacles and challenges than 2023 did.

Since this is the case, veterinary employers must make effective recruiting and hiring a priority in the year ahead. If not, employers will not be any more successful in their efforts this year than they

were during the past year. However, before you make recruiting and hiring a priority, you must recognize all that it entails. And with that in mind, I'd like to present the essential elements of a successful plan to attract, recruit and hire top-tier veterinarians in the new year:

Conduct a thorough needs assessment

The first step in any successful recruitment plan is a thorough needs assessment. Understanding

Highlights:

- With the right plan in place, veterinary employers can successfully recruit and hire new team members in the coming year. The first steps of a successful recruitment plan include a thorough needs assessment and the creation of a strong employer brand.
- Professional networks and social media platforms like LinkedIn are valuable tools for connecting with prospective veterinarians. By maintaining strong ties with veterinary schools, employers can engage with students who will soon be looking to join a practice.
- Veterinary clinics that invest in onboarding programs, support a positive workplace culture and encourage continuous learning and development are more likely to retain new employees in the long term.

the specific requirements and gaps in your veterinary team is critical. Evaluate the current workload, patient demographics and scope of services your practice offers.

Identify areas that require additional expertise or where the workload is overwhelming for the existing team. This assessment sets the foundation for developing a targeted recruitment strategy.

Develop a compelling employer brand

In a competitive job market, having a strong and appealing employer brand is instrumental in attracting top-tier talent. Veterinary professionals are not only looking for competitive salaries but also for positive work culture, opportunities for professional development and a commitment to work-life balance.

Craft a compelling narrative about your practice, emphasizing its values, commitment to animal care and the opportunities for career growth. Utilize social media, your organization's website and other online platforms to showcase its unique aspects.

Utilize online platforms and networks

In the digital age, online platforms and professional networks are valuable tools for recruiting veterinarians. Leverage social media platforms like LinkedIn to connect with potential candidates. Engage with veterinary communities, participate in discussions, and establish your practice as a prominent and supportive player in the industry.



You can also utilize job boards, but be sure that it doesn't constitute the majority of your efforts in terms of recruiting and hiring. Due to the overall shortage of veterinarians and the corresponding lack of qualified candidates, the "post and pray" method is particularly ineffective at generating consistently positive results.

Build relationships with veterinary schools

Establishing strong relationships with veterinary schools is a proactive approach to pipeline

building. Collaborate with career services at veterinary schools to create internship programs, participate in career fairs and offer educational opportunities. By engaging with students early in their academic journey, your organization can become top-of-mind when they're ready to enter the workforce (or before they even graduate).

Offer competitive compensation packages.

Competitive compensation is a cornerstone of successful

veterinarian recruitment. Research industry standards and ensure that your compensation packages align with or exceed the market average. Consider additional perks such as health care benefits (if you are not offering this, it will be difficult to hire), continuing education opportunities and flexible scheduling. It is worth mentioning that a comprehensive compensation package not only attracts top talent but promotes employee retention too.

Strive to conduct a streamlined application and interview process

A cumbersome application and interview process can deter even the most qualified candidates. Streamline your recruitment process by utilizing user-friendly online application systems. Clearly communicate the steps involved in the hiring process and ensure timely communication with candidates. A transparent and efficient process reflects well on your practice and creates a positive candidate experience.

In addition to assessing technical skills, incorporate behavioral interviews to evaluate a candidate's soft skills, communication style and cultural fit within your practice. Develop a set of standardized questions that delve into scenarios veterinarians might encounter in their daily work. This approach provides valuable insights into how candidates handle challenges and collaborate with colleagues.

Invest in onboarding programs to provide a great experience

The recruitment process extends beyond the offer letter; successful onboarding is critical for the integration and retention of new veterinarians. Develop a comprehensive onboarding program that introduces new hires to your practice culture, policies and procedures. Assign mentors to provide guidance and support during the initial weeks. A well-designed onboarding program ensures a smooth transition for new veterinarians and enhances their overall job satisfaction.

Foster a positive workplace culture

A positive work culture is a magnet for top veterinary professionals. Create an environment that values collaboration, open communication and work-life balance. Recognize and celebrate achievements, both big and small. Foster a sense of community within your practice, encouraging team-building activities and initiatives. And once again, a positive work culture not only attracts veterinarians but also contributes to long-term employee satisfaction and retention.

Encourage continuous learning and development

Veterinarians are dedicated to lifelong learning, and practices that prioritize professional development attract and retain top talent. With this in mind, offer opportunities for continuing education, attend conferences as a team, and provide

financial support for advanced certifications. Demonstrating a commitment to the growth and development of your veterinarians fosters loyalty and enhances the overall skill set of your team.

You have probably heard this phrase before: "If you do what you've always done, then you'll get what you've always got." Or perhaps this one: "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." If you were unsatisfied with your organization's recruiting and hiring efforts in 2023, doing exactly the same things in 2024 will probably not yield better results.

The first step in achieving those better results is auditing your organization's efforts in terms of the above list. How would you grade your organization in relation to these items? Would it receive a passing grade? A failing one? In which areas are you doing well and in which areas do you need improvement? Your answers to these questions—as well as what you do about the answers—can serve as the starting point and catalyst for your organization's improved recruiting and hiring efforts in the new year.



Stacy Pursell is a leading executive recruiter and search consultant for the animal health industry and veterinary profession. She's considered a go-to

expert providing the most effective talent-centric solutions and is a thought leader in animal health and nutrition, pet technology and veterinary medicine. She's the founder of The VET Recruiter and Therio Partners and hosts "The People of Animal Health" podcast.