

Stacy Pursell

Communication That Connects

In every veterinary practice, communication is the backbone of success. Yet even the most skilled veterinarians can struggle with internal communication. Between back-to-back appointments, emergencies and client calls, messages can get lost, assumptions form and morale suffers.

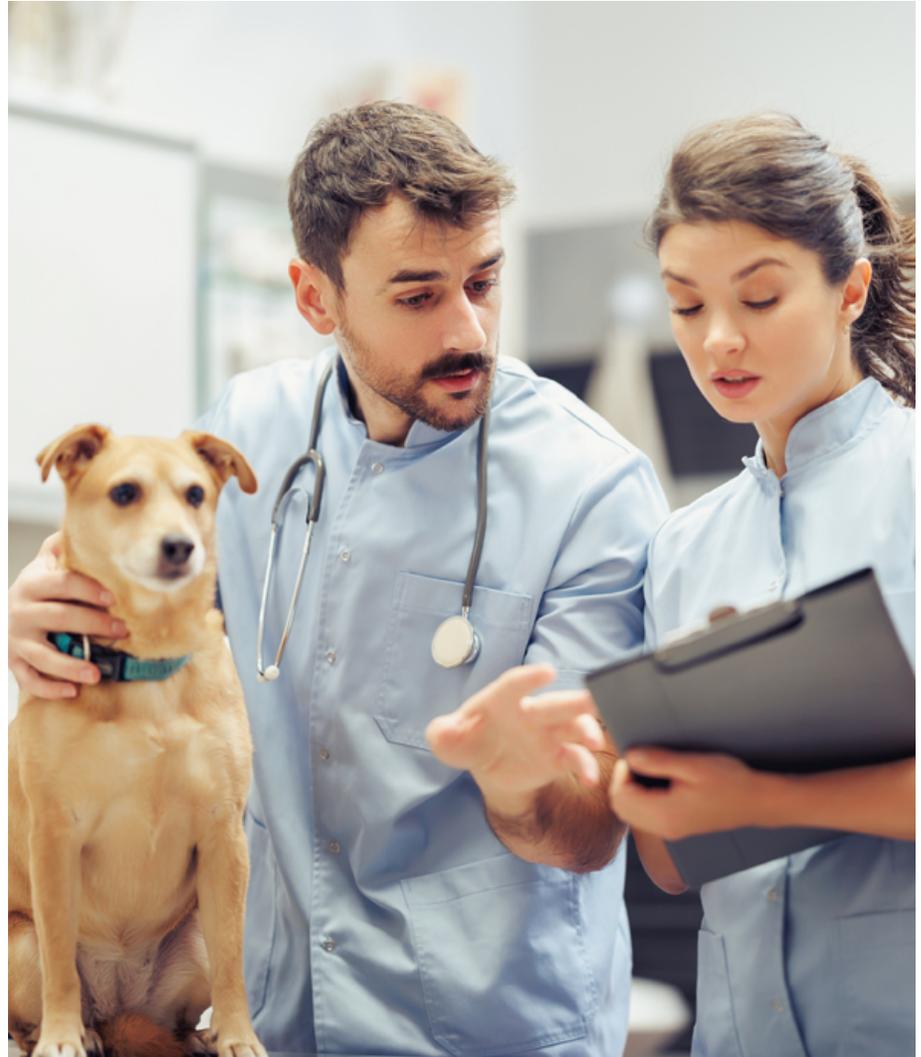
Effective communication doesn't happen by accident; it happens by design. When communication connects, teams collaborate, problems get solved and trust deepens in every level of the organization. Here' are eight ways to build a culture where open dialogue and transparency aren't just encouraged – *they're expected*.

1. Create a foundation of psychological safety

Healthy communication begins with psychological safety, that is, the confidence that one can speak up without fear of embarrassment or punishment. Leaders play the most important role. The tone they set determines whether people share concerns or stay silent. Start with small actions that build trust.

- › Admit when you don't know something.
- › Thank people for bringing up tough issues.
- › Address errors as learning opportunities, not personal failures.

A simple *"Thank you for telling me that"* can be more powerful than you think. When people see



vulnerability modeled from the top, they're more likely to communicate openly and honestly.

2. Be intentional about information flow

In fast-paced veterinary settings, it's easy for critical details to fall through the cracks. Miscommunication about a handoff, missed updates about

policy changes or unclear scheduling expectations can create stress. Combat this by designing consistent communication systems, such as:

- › Morning huddles for daily priorities and updates.
- › Weekly team meetings focused on improvement, not just logistics.
- › Shared communication platforms for real-time collaboration.

Information should be timely, relevant and accessible. When people know where to find accurate information, rumors and misunderstandings disappear.

3. Listen to understand, not just respond

The most effective leaders don't dominate the conversation, they facilitate it. Active listening builds credibility, empathy and understanding. In veterinary medicine, listening well can be challenging, especially during busy times. But even brief moments of genuine listening can change the tone of a conversation.

- Maintain eye contact and minimize distractions.
- Paraphrase what you heard. (*"So you're saying you felt rushed during that appointment . . . did I get that right?"*).
- Ask open-ended questions to dig deeper.

4. Promote upward communication

Create channels where employees can express ideas, frustrations or suggestions without fear of repercussions. Consider adding:

- Monthly feedback check-ins led by a neutral leader or manager.
- Anonymous suggestion boxes (digital or physical) with follow-up.
- Post-project debriefs to identify what worked and what didn't.

5. Communicate with consistency and clarity

Ambiguity erodes trust quickly. As a leader, clarity should be one of your top priorities. If you're implementing a new policy or making a decision, explain why.



Consistency matters too. If you hold one employee accountable for a behavior but ignore it in another, communication loses credibility.

6. Address conflict proactively

Every team faces conflict. What separates thriving teams from struggling ones is how it is handled. Avoidance lets resentment grow. Instead, approach conflict early and with empathy.

- Focus on the issue, not the individual.
- Use neutral language and stay solution-oriented.
- Encourage both parties to share perspectives before drawing conclusions.

Handled well, conflict can strengthen relationships and clarify expectations.

7. Communicate recognition as openly as correction

Too often, leaders communicate clearly when things go wrong, but vaguely when things go right. Balanced communication means celebrating success as

intentionally as addressing mistakes. Publicly acknowledge effort, teamwork and innovation. A quick shout-out in rounds, a thank-you card or a shared win in your team meeting builds morale and reinforces a culture of appreciation.

8. Lead by example

Communication that connects reflects leadership. People mirror what they experience. If leaders communicate transparently, respectfully and consistently, the team will follow suit. Every interaction is a chance to model the culture you want to see.



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