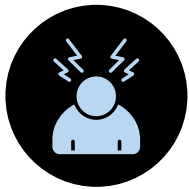


# HOW TO HANDLE IT WHEN PEOPLE IN YOUR PRACTICE DON'T GET ALONG



# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TEAM MEMBERS **DON'T** GET ALONG

Much of handling conflict is about having a happy, high-functioning practice that communicates well and keeps its focus on the patients and clients. When people are not getting along it directly affects performance and focus. We can't become a high performing team delivering excellent care and service if we can't resolve conflicts on our team.



## **Stress in Our Practice Increases**

Veterinary medicine is stressful work. The environment is unpredictable, there is lots of chaos, and it's necessary to maintain high levels of communication to be effective. The level at which teams get along is a significant contributing factor in workplace stress levels. When there is conflict, stress rises for everyone. Often, people describe conflict on the team as the **MOST** stressful part of the day.



## **Our Team Becomes Disengaged**

Conflict between two people affects the engagement of everyone on the team. Even if team members are not directly involved, it will ultimately cause you and the practice as a whole to become uncomfortable. Soon team members will ask questions like, "Is this a place I enjoy or really want to be?"

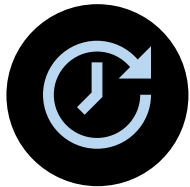


## **Communication Gets Complicated**

In a veterinary practice, communication is crucial. Information must flow throughout the practice; when it doesn't, the level of care we provide will ultimately suffer. When we are not getting along it gets in the way of our ability to communicate effectively and that means care and service suffer.

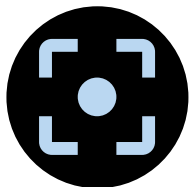
# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TEAM MEMBERS **DON'T** GET ALONG

When conflict arises in your practice it causes other, positive things to stop happening. If our job feels like we are constantly putting out fires and dealing with issues, then we aren't able to focus on the things that help the practice grow and provide the level of care our patients need and deserve.



## **It Takes Up Most of the Manager's Time**

The hours managers spend dealing with conflict and people who aren't getting along are taken from things we could be doing to help the practice grow, improve, and thrive. Time consumed by being a referee is time not spent coaching and helping team members develop.



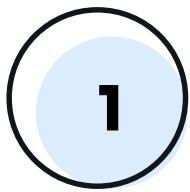
## **Takes Focus Away From Pets and Clients**

It's impossible to be thinking about conflict and also thinking about the next procedure, the next exam, the next client or whether we are prepared to have an amazing, productive shift as a pet care team.



# WHAT TO DO WHEN CONFLICT HAPPENS

There will be moments when people in your practice don't get along. We are all humans and that just happens sometimes. How we handle those conflicts is critical if we want to be a high performing practice.



## **Do Kill the Monster While it's Little** (before it grows up and eats the city)

We want to make sure we are dealing with conflict as it happens. When it grows into something larger, the culture of your practice can become damaged, team members will disengage, and the level of care your practice declines. Address conflict early before it has a life of its own.



## **Do Allow People to Participate in Their Own Rescue**

When people bring disagreements to our attention, we want to make sure that they participate in the solution. It's easy to think you, as manager, should "take care of" any conflict that arises. Instead, when a challenge comes to you, help people solve it, help them prepare, and show them that it's worth being involved in the solution.



## **Do Practice How to Help People Prepare**

This might start by asking the question, "How can you have a productive conversation with the person you're in a disagreement with and get some of this resolved?" Questions can help people engage without being as reactive or defensive. As managers, we want to make sure we are prepared to help a person who comes to us upset about a coworker, that we have thought about questions to ask and how to ask them.

# WHAT TO DO WHEN CONFLICT HAPPENS

## 3

### **Do Practice How to Help People Prepare** (Continued)

We also want to prepare them to go have a conversation with others that will help them resolve the conflict. They might initially feel like it's "too uncomfortable" or "won't help" or that they "have already tried to talk to the other person." Only when we arm them with some new tools will they be inclined to try again and work toward a different outcome.

Here are some thought starters when it comes to helping people begin an uncomfortable conversation.

- "I would like to talk with you about something, and it might not be easy for us and I might not even do it well, but I would like to try, is that okay?"
- "I feel like we aren't working very well together and I would like to help that improve so we both enjoy our work more, do you think we could talk about that?"
- I would like to learn more about your thoughts on how we might work better together, I think it would help us work through some of the challenges we are facing with each other. Would you be okay sharing those with me?

## 4

### **Do Say Something if You See Something**

As a manager, if you see something that looks like a disagreement it's a good idea to have a conversation early. Speaking up when you see something means you don't lead with, "This was brought to my attention (which only makes them wonder who "brought" it) ...." So, saying something is an opportunity to start the resolution process more quickly.



# WHAT NOT TO DO WHEN CONFLICT HAPPENS

It's easy as a leader to actually increase the conflict on your team if we take the wrong steps in how we deal with it. Build a set of habits that help you avoid these four things and keep your hospital's culture moving in the right direction.

1

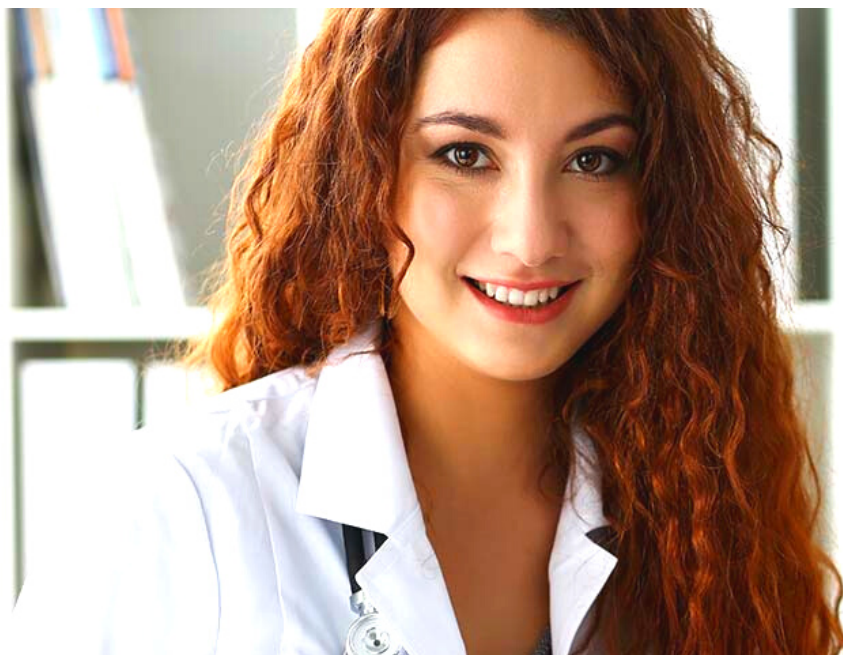
## Do Not Let Them "Just Vent"

If someone is venting to you, it doesn't help. In fact, it can make things worse because it draws others into the conflict. However, if there is venting, we can change direction by asking questions like, "Okay, how do you think we can work on this?" or "what would you like to do to make this better?"

2

## Do Not Take Ownership of the Problem

We as managers cannot solve conflicts that other people are involved in without their participation so do not allow people to hand their issues off to you and run. It will only mean that we don't actually make any progress on solving the problem.



# WHAT NOT TO DO WHEN CONFLICT HAPPENS

3

## Do **Not** Act on Hearsay or Gossip

If we cannot get people to be part of the solution as they notice or are involved in conflict, then we can't address it in any sort of a solution oriented way. Telling someone we "heard" they were doing things incorrectly or "someone" has been frustrated or offended by them only leads to more conflict. We are asking someone to be different, but not able to give them any real clarity on the issue that we didn't observe. They will likely have a very different perspective than what we "heard" and now we are just choosing sides rather than creating solutions. That never ends well.

4

## Do **Not** Abandon People

We've talked about the importance of people on your team taking ownership, but at the same time we need to support them as they do. It's not enough to simply point out a problem and ask someone to "let you know" when it's resolved. Instead, help them be proactive and support them as they work through challenges. People will often try if we are working with them to support them as they do.



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