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“Coaching to Excellence”

ENHANCING TEAM PERFORMANCE

And

ACHIEVING PRACTICE SUCCESS WITH EFFECTIVE MARKETING

Presented by

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CREATE A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

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Is lack of employee motivation or staff turnover a problem in your practice? Do some of your employees have an inconsistent job performance? After holding staff meetings to discuss hospital issues, do you find that positive change does not happen or is short-lived? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then lack of accountability may be a problem in your practice. Accountability refers to being responsible for one’s actions. Employees that are accountable meet or exceed job standards and job expectations set by management. It is important to differentiate between job responsibilities and accountability. An employee may *know* their job responsibilities and still not be accountable.

LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

There are variable degrees of lack of accountability. Employees with an inferior job performance in multiple areas lack accountability and may need to be terminated. Other employees may have lapses in accountability but have an average or above-average job performance most of the time. This is a typical scenario in veterinary practices. Veterinarians and managers often complain that job tasks are not completed consistently, lapses in client service occur, employees don’t always complete assignments on time or they forget to do certain tasks. Lack of accountability is also evident when staff members are chronically tardy or make excuses for their inconsistent job performance.

CAUSES OF LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Lack of accountability can be a result of several underlying causes so it is important to ascertain why individual employees are unaccountable.

Lack of Integrity

Dishonest or immoral employees are not accountable due to lack of integrity. A receptionist who steals money from the cash drawer may have an excellent job performance with respect to client service but is certainly not accountable to the veterinary practice owner. Likewise, a technician that fails to inform the veterinarian after inadvertently administering the wrong drug or dose of a drug is not being accountable. Employees who are chronically tardy or steal drugs because of a substance abuse problem are other examples of lack of accountability that is a result of lack of integrity.

Poor Attitude

Staff members with poor attitudes tend to demonstrate lack of accountability on a regular basis. These employees may have been hired unknowingly by managers or owners lacking good interview skills. They may also be long-term employees that have developed a poor attitude over a period of time. Staff members with bad attitudes tend to have an attitude of “what’s in it for me” and are quick to find the demands of clients

annoying. These staff members are easy to identify because they are cynical, constantly complaining and disruptive to the work environment.

Lack of Training

For employees with an inconsistent job performance, be sure to determine if lack of training is a problem rather than assuming the employee is unaccountable. Bear in mind that some staff require more training and supervision to perform their job than other team members. For example, if a receptionist doesn't consistently collect deposits or offer clients third-party payment plans, it may be because they haven't been adequately trained to talk to clients about fees. In addition, this employee may not fully understand the value of the services and may not be comfortable reacting to clients that express anger about treatment plan fees.

Lack of Leadership

It isn't reasonable to expect employees to be accountable unless the leadership team demonstrates accountability and sets a positive example for employees to follow. Without effective leadership, staff may be confused about the direction of the practice or unclear regarding the importance of their role in the business. These employees don't feel their job performance makes much difference in the daily operations or the overall success of the practice.

WHAT ABOUT DISCIPLINE?

Most veterinary hospitals have a disciplinary policy and yet lack of accountability is still often a problem. Disciplinary policies work well to address major employee performance issues such as excessive absenteeism, co-worker conflict, insubordination and incompetence. Discipline does not work well for inconsistent job performance related to lack of accountability. Most managers would agree that firing employees for occasional tardiness, forgetting to complete certain tasks, or minor lapses in client service is not the answer. Practice owners and managers find lack of accountability in these instances to be frustrating but do not know how to solve the problem.

ESTABLISHING ACCOUNTABILITY

Efforts to establish accountability in your practice begins with a thoughtful assessment of your entire healthcare team. Start with a list of specific examples of items that are not getting done consistently and areas in which job performance is inconsistent. The list might look something like this:

- Several clients have complained that your receptionist was abrupt or rude to them
- Leashes and toys are not consistently sent home with boarders when they are discharged
- Your practice manager has a habit of not always paying the bills on time resulting in late fees
- One of your technicians has been late three times this month
- Treatments for hospitalized patients are sometimes missed or not done on time
- Clients are not called consistently to remind them of their appointments
- Daily cleaning tasks are not always completed
- Reminders are not sent out on time
- Compliance with dentistry recommendations is declining

Once you compile this list, think about which employees are involved with the execution of the tasks on the list and what the underlying cause is for the inconsistent job performance. For example, you may determine that your receptionist has a poor attitude and you plan to terminate this individual if they do not demonstrate significant improvement in client service. On the other hand, you may realize that the rest of your staff has a good attitude and most of the time does a good job but have a problem with inconsistent job performance. In this case, it is best to address accountability as an important issue for the entire healthcare team rather than singling out individual employees. The following steps will assist in efforts to establish accountability in your practice.

Provide Effective Leadership

Management teams must model the behavior they desire from the staff. Examine your leadership skills and management style to make sure you aren't inadvertently sabotaging accountability in the practice. Accountability is best established with a democratic or participative management style. This style of management encourages employee input and empowerment. When management is overly autocratic and authoritative, employee accountability may suffer because employees tend to feel resentful and morale suffers. Conversely, when the management style is too hands-off, employees lack direction and supervision which often results in lack of accountability. If the practice has multiple owners, all owners as well as the practice manager need to present a united front to employees and convey the same message regarding core values and policies. Otherwise, staff becomes confused and don't know which owner or manager to listen to.

Establish a Clear Vision and Core Values

Providing staff with a vision and core values gives them a focus and direction. The leadership team needs to ensure that employees know and understand the vision and their role in achieving practice goals. Core values represent *how* the veterinary practice will conduct business and as such, are integrally important to establishing accountability. Core values serve as a foundation for talking to staff about accountability. For example, when addressing tardiness, managers can discuss that "respect" is a core value of the practice. When employees are tardy, they demonstrate a lack of respect for their co-workers. If "exceptional client service" is a core value for the practice then this should be emphasized when discussing lapses in client service. Employees are much more receptive to dialogue that is focused on core values. A discussion of inconsistent job performance no longer sounds like nagging but instead is focused on how important it is to live up to the core values of the practice.

Give Employees the Tools to do Their Job

Employees must have all the tools they need to do their jobs well in order to be accountable. This starts with written job descriptions that outline roles and responsibilities. Staff should also be given job expectations which outline how an individual is supposed to do their job and how they are to act while at work. In addition, employees need adequate equipment that functions properly to do their job. Staff can become stressed and may adopt an attitude of negativity if they have to struggle with poor quality equipment or equipment that is constantly breaking down.

Develop Effective Communication Skills

Sometimes lack of accountability occurs because supervisors aren't clear when communicating with team members. One of the best ways to increase accountability is to communicate with employees in a direct, straightforward manner and always give deadlines for completion of tasks. Additionally, assess the effectiveness of staff meetings, particularly if meetings become gripe sessions and positive change does not occur after the meetings. Effective staff meetings are characterized by the following: an agenda is set prior to the meeting, meetings start and end on time, employees do 80% of the talking, management listens to employee feedback and facilitates interactive dialogue, action plans are developed to address issues, and deadlines for completion of action items are set along with assignments for which employees will complete assignments.

Foster Teamwork

By encouraging your veterinary staff to work together as a team to accomplish practice goals, you will attain a higher level of patient care and client service. Teams increase accountability in a practice when they are focused on goals because they learn to work together to achieve efficiency and to meet standards. Accountability also increases with teamwork because team members put pressure on each other to perform their jobs at a higher level and to behave in a manner that is consistent with the practice's core values.

Be Willing to Fire Employees For Lack of Accountability

The last step to establish accountability in your practice is to be willing to terminate those employees who demonstrate a lack of accountability in spite of all your efforts. Once effective leadership exists, core values have been established, employees have been given the necessary tools to do their jobs and effective communication and teamwork are in place, there is no longer room for excuses from employees regarding accountability. To create a positive culture characterized by adherence to core values and accountability, management must be willing to fire employees that do not measure up. Otherwise, accountability efforts falter because employees realize there is no consequence for failing to be accountable.

CONCLUSION

Establishing accountability takes time and patience. It is not always easy changing patterns of behavior. There simply is not a quick fix to establish accountability and efforts to ensure accountability is part of your culture are an ongoing process.

COACH YOUR STAFF TO PROBLEM-SOLVE

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Do you have days where it seems like every time you turn around an employee tells you about an issue or problem that needs to be resolved? As a result, your to-do list becomes longer and longer. As if the demands of the job aren't hard enough with respect to patient care and client service, now you have more problems to solve and job tasks to complete. Sound familiar? If so, then you may be taking on responsibility to handle problems that could be resolved by your team. Wouldn't it be less stressful and a more enjoyable, productive work environment if the entire healthcare team was empowered to problem-solve and take action to handle the vast majority of issues that arise on a daily basis? If you answered "yes" to this question, then read on and take steps to begin the process of coaching your staff to problem-solve.

DEFINITIONS

Since efforts to coach team members how to problem-solve are really all about employee empowerment, let's begin by defining empowerment.

Empowerment

Empowerment involves providing employees with adequate training, information and tools, involving them in key decisions and rewarding them for contributions to organizational performance. There are levels or degrees of empowerment. The most highly empowered employees have knowledge of business performance, participate in decision-making processes of the business and are involved in reward systems such as profit sharing. All empowered employees are well-trained, effective at problem-solving and capable of making decisions without manager approval that are in the best interest of the business. Empowered employees are accountable for all aspects of their job performance and take the initiative to meet practice goals.

What Is Not Empowerment?

Note that empowerment is not simply the act of delegating tasks and responsibilities to the staff. Many employees are good at following instructions and completing assignments but this does not necessarily mean they are empowered. Empowerment is also not a complete lack of supervision or established boundaries.

WHY COACHING YOUR TEAM TO PROBLEM-SOLVE IS WORTH THE EFFORT

If you ever find yourself reluctant to spend the time and energy coaching your staff to problem-solve, consider the following benefits associated with having a team of empowered employees.

Enhanced Job Satisfaction and Employee Retention

Employee morale and job satisfaction is higher for empowered employees because they have more control over their job performance and find their work more rewarding. This occurs because management trusts staff members, values their work efforts and allows them to take action that is in the best interest of pets, clients and the practice. As a result, empowered employees tend to have higher self-esteem and a sense of ownership in the business. When team members feel they have a say in practice operations and can take action, they are more likely to want to stay in

their jobs and make continued contributions to the business. Enhanced employee retention creates a cost savings to the practice since it is expensive to recruit and train new employees.

Increased Efficiency and Productivity

Practice efficiency improves when employees are adequately trained and capable of making decisions without always having to seek approval. Employees that can quickly respond to a variety of situations and client demands are invaluable since every time an employee has to seek out a manager or veterinarian to make a decision, efficiency suffers. With increases in efficiency, practice productivity increases as well. Efficient, well-trained healthcare teams are capable of seeing more patients, performing more procedures and scheduling more surgeries.

Increased Client Satisfaction and Loyalty

Clients spend a considerable amount of time communicating with staff and the perception of value associated with their interactions is critical to practice success. Employees who have been coached to problem-solve and take action to please clients will help efforts to bond clients to the practice. Empowered employees engage clients with more warmth and enthusiasm and can provide clients the personalized, sophisticated service they desire. Empowered employees are more knowledgeable and can respond to client needs more quickly and efficiently. In addition, they can react more quickly to resolve client dissatisfaction if there is a breakdown in communication or a lapse in service.

HOW TO COACH YOUR TEAM TO PROBLEM-SOLVE

Empowering your team takes time and patience. The following 5-step approach will help guide efforts to coach your team to problem-solve and take action on a daily basis.

Assess Practice Culture and Level of Empowerment

Begin by assessing the problem-solving capabilities of your team. Do all your employees continually come to you with complaints, conflicts to be resolved and issues to be addressed by management? Or is it just a few team members that always come to you with problems? Next, determine what kind of issues or problems employees complain about or ask for assistance in resolving. Your list might include items like the following:

- The client service representatives (CSR) complain that the doctors and technicians always get mad at them about how they schedule surgeries or appointments.
- Several employees come to you saying they can't work their shifts next month or you always have to scramble to figure out whom to call in when someone is sick.
- Your technician tells you that the infusion pump is not working properly.
- Employees or associate doctors grumble that there isn't enough space for inventory items or that the treatment area/pharmacy/food room is disorganized.
- Your CSR reports that Mrs. Taylor is angry about her bill and wants you to call her.
- One technician reports that another technician "has made rude remarks to me."

After you compile your list, consider whether team members could have come up with solutions to address the issue or problem if they had the appropriate training and were empowered to take action. Making this list will also help you ascertain whether your employees are really empowered. Often managers feel they have an empowered staff when in reality this is not the case.

Think about your practice culture. Is morale low or high? Do employees always take initiative to get the job done or do they constantly have to be told what to do? Do your employees work as a team or do some staff members have an attitude of "I just work here"? If you are experiencing problems with employee motivation, lack of employee accountability and

inconsistent job performance this is evidence your staff may not be empowered. Bear in mind that employees may not ask to be empowered or if they ask and feel they are rejected, they will not typically persist in their efforts. Employees can quickly develop an attitude of “it doesn’t matter what I say or do.” When employees feel management doesn’t listen to their ideas and doesn’t trust them, they hesitate to speak up at staff meetings. Silence kills empowerment efforts. Practices that are successful with efforts to empower employees develop a culture of trust, positive relationships and open communication.

Develop an Effective Leadership and Management Style

For employees to be truly empowered, leadership needs to be more relationship-oriented, more participative and democratic as opposed to authoritarian in nature. Autocratic leadership tends to stifle employee initiative. Likewise, Laissez-faire, hands-off management is ineffective because employees are confused and have no direction.

With participative management, employee feedback is valued and productive dialogue occurs between staff members and the leadership team. This two-way communication is a critical element in efforts to empower employees. Sometimes practice owners and managers fall into the trap of just delegating job duties to employees and keeping them informed on a “need to know” basis. As a result, staff members aren’t accustomed to having to make decisions or think for themselves what is in the best interest of the pet, the client and the practice.

Empowerment efforts will be more successful if you share basic financial data such as gross monthly revenues, trends in revenues and profit centers, expenses and budgets with team members. Leadership teams that share relevant information allow employees to perform their job at the highest level. For example, technicians benefit from knowing that dentistry is a major profit center for the practice, the monthly totals for dentistry, the hospital cost of providing dental prophylaxis and scientific data regarding benefits of dental homecare products. Armed with this knowledge, they are more likely to make client recommendations for dentistry, perform dental prophylaxis more efficiently and communicate with clients more effectively regarding follow-up homecare.

Management must be willing to let employees make mistakes and learn from their experiences. Once they are adequately trained, employees must be trusted to make decisions that are in the best interest of the practice. Accordingly, staff should be allowed to complete job tasks in a manner they find most effective and should not be micro-managed.

Conduct an Employee Assessment and Identify Gaps in Training

It’s important to understand that not all employees want to be empowered to problem-solve. Some employees are more comfortable with managers who delegate job tasks but don’t require independent thinking or problem-solving. These employees may still be valuable team members but should not be in key positions in the practice.

Assess the current skill level and existing level of autonomy for each employee in the practice. Solicit employee feedback regarding their desire and willingness to participate in career development and contribute more to the practice. This step involves active listening on the part of management to evaluate the level of job satisfaction and perceived autonomy of each employee.

Next, identify gaps in training so that instructional programs can be initiated for employees that lack skills and expertise needed to be more empowered. Client relations personnel may need further client service or communication skills training in order to be empowered in their problem-solving efforts for clients. Technicians may need training in how to be more effective with client education. Office managers may need advanced training in management.

Provide Boundaries for Employees

To effectively empower employees, establish boundaries so that team members understand appropriate limits and expectations. Remember that empowered employees have the autonomy to take action and problem-solve when they are at work. For example, an empowered staff member understands that exceptional client service is a core value for the practice and will act to exceed client expectations and resolve any client dissatisfaction. But employees must know the limits and boundaries regarding what action should be taken. Clearly, management doesn't want client service representatives to credit any amount of money on an invoice just to satisfy an unhappy client. Instead, employees should be given boundaries to know what dollar amount would be acceptable to credit in the case of a disputed bill and should be trained in other ways to resolve client dissatisfaction.

Empowered employees are held accountable for their decisions. Boundaries established for employees need to be consistent with the practice's mission, core values and goals. This ensures that employees make decisions based on patient advocacy, excellent client service and sound business principles regarding profitability.

Provide On-going Coaching

Constructive feedback regarding their decisions and problem-solving capabilities is beneficial for employees. If you don't feel an employee made the best decision, discuss the employee's decision-making process and make suggestions for future actions. With mentoring and supportive feedback, employees will learn from their mistakes.

Coach team members to come to you with possible solutions, not just problems. In time, employees will learn to present one or more possible solutions when they report conflicts or problems to management. With proper coaching, many issues that previously had to be resolved by managers will be taken care of by the staff.

Promoting teamwork helps facilitate on-going efforts to coach the staff to problem-solve. Teams are results-oriented rather than just task-oriented which leads to greater organizational effectiveness. Empowered teams also generate new ideas and utilize conflict to create thoughtful discussion resulting in more effective decision-making.

SUMMARY

To empower employees to achieve your practice goals, they must first have a positive attitude. It's possible to provide training and increase an employee's skill level. It's difficult, if not impossible, to change a negative attitude. Always look for job candidates with a positive attitude who are motivated, willing to be accountable, and interested in career development.

The process of coaching your team to problem-solve is on-going, it requires patience and takes time to show results but your efforts will not go unrewarded. You will be less stressed, your practice will run smoother, your employees and clients will be happier and you'll enjoy greater financial success. What do you have to lose?!

ACHIEVING PRACTICE SUCCESS WITH EFFECTIVE MARKETING

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Veterinary practice owners and managers often find marketing to be a somewhat daunting challenge. They aren't sure where to spend money, they may not know which marketing expenditures are most effective and finding the resources to devote to marketing can be a significant barrier to execution of plans. Since effective marketing can affect profitability, it is wise to identify which marketing initiatives are most beneficial and then focus on the successful execution of specific marketing objectives.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

All too often, veterinary practices decide whether to spend money on marketing efforts based on a gut feeling as to whether the initiative seems like a good idea and/or based on whether the current cash flow exists to pay for the project. The problem with this decision-making process is that there is not sufficient consideration given to whether the marketing efforts will be effective in meeting the practice goals. This haphazard approach also ignores the importance of calculating whether the marketing initiatives will have a favorable return on investment for the practice.

Some practice owners establish an annual budget for marketing determined as a percentage of revenue or merely based on a figure they are comfortable spending. While it is wise to establish a budget for your marketing plan, this approach to spending is flawed. It doesn't take into consideration relevant factors such as the size or age of the practice, the competitive environment, and available resources. Is it fair to say that a large, multi-specialty practice should spend three times as much on marketing as a practice one-third its size? Maybe. Maybe not. Arbitrary marketing budgets do not factor in the need to look at establishing desired outcomes and the importance of marketing to your goals.

CALCULATING RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR MARKETING INITIATIVES

When deciding which marketing efforts are most beneficial for your practice, consider the financial return on investment for marketing expenditures. This process first involves calculating the total costs that will be incurred. Don't forget when calculating costs to include all dedicated staff time involved. Forecasting the outcome for all your marketing initiatives is a critically important next step that is often overlooked. Why spend money on marketing if you have not defined the outcome desired and forecast a favorable result? When assessing the return on investment for various marketing activities, consider the following:

- Some marketing efforts fall within the category of operating costs. For example, website maintenance and printing of brochures are periodic costs that are just the cost of doing business.
- Expenditures that are small may not be worth worrying about calculating a return on investment as long as they make sense and are easily affordable.
- Just because it is difficult to calculate an exact return on investment on a marketing initiative does not mean it won't be effective. For example, it may be harder to forecast an exact financial return on client service training but these costs are usually not exorbitant and it is reasonable to anticipate a favorable outcome.

DEVOTE TIME TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

To make the right marketing choices, management teams need to undertake an organized approach to marketing based on developing an effective strategy. Before writing a marketing plan, every practice should engage in strategic planning. Strategic planning starts with developing a clear vision, mission and goals for the practice. The mission statement usually defines the core purpose of the organization while the vision is

generally a loftier statement that creates a picture for where the practice wants to be- it is more long-term in focus. This process creates a foundation for marketing efforts and guides decisions made in marketing planning. Marketing initiatives need to be consistent with the mission, vision and goals of the business.

Strategic planning also includes a situational analysis and the formulation of strategies to achieve practice goals. The situational analysis or SWOT analysis refers to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the business. Strengths and weaknesses involve an internal assessment of the business while opportunities and threats involve an external focus on the competitive environment. A thorough SWOT analysis helps practices focus on developing appropriate and effective marketing objectives. For example, if the SWOT revealed that client service is a weakness due to some communication problems, then marketing efforts should center on improving service. Likewise, if a potential threat to the business is reduction in caseload due to competition, then marketing efforts should center on how to minimize or overcome this threat.

When formulating a business strategy and deciding on marketing initiatives, it's important to look at the current status and future goals of the practice. Is the practice a new or young practice that is still in the process of growing and branding itself in the community? Has the practice been in existence for 20 years but is now facing competition from several other practices that have opened? Do the practice owners want to accelerate growth and add more doctors or do they just want to maintain profitability without increasing the size of the practice? The strategy and marketing initiatives will differ depending on the goals of the owners, the competitive landscape, the availability of new associates, the practice revenue, the current branding for the practice, the ownership model and organization of the practice, demographics, and the size and age of the practice. It is imperative that practice owners and managers clearly communicate about the goals of the practice and work together to formulate sound strategies to achieve these goals.

MARKETING PLANNING

Organization and planning is the foundation for successful marketing plans. The planning process includes analyzing the greatest opportunities to grow and promote the practice. The first step when engaging in marketing planning is to analyze financial data and trends which will help guide marketing decisions. For example, are revenues increasing, decreasing or stagnant? Which profit centers are stagnant or decreasing? Are new client numbers per month stagnant or declining? How does the practice measure up based on industry benchmarks?

Next, consider the information gathered from the SWOT analysis. Is client service mediocre or exceptional? Does the practice need to consider offering new services to be competitive? Does the staff need further training in client communication?

Answering these types of questions helps to focus marketing initiatives on those that are best for the practice. It is also beneficial to involve staff in the planning stages. Team members often have creative ideas for marketing and excellent feedback regarding how to execute marketing tactics.

Marketing planning also involves identifying target markets and decisions on how to balance internal and external marketing efforts.

Target Markets

Identifying specific target markets for marketing initiatives can be valuable to increase the effectiveness of marketing plans. Target markets are the group of clients the practice wishes to attract. Target markets may be further divided by market segmentation which refers to dividing markets into specific groups based on specific criteria. Examples of specific target markets include: cat owners, dog owners, potential new clients from specific neighborhoods, clients with senior pets, members of the Greyhound rescue club, clients who do not visit the practice annually, etc.

Internal Marketing

Internal marketing refers to efforts to increase utilization of services by *existing* clients. Internal marketing also refers to efforts by the practice to train and motivate staff to work together as a team to better meet client needs. Examples of internal marketing include improvements to client service, efforts to increase usage of a

particular service such as dentistry, offering new services to clients, staff training, and client education to enhance compliance. For referral practices internal marketing includes clinic visits to area practices, continuing education events for area veterinarians, newsletters and advertising targeted to referring veterinarians and brochures or other marketing tools distributed to referring veterinarians.

External Marketing

External marketing refers to the written or verbal communication aimed at attracting *new* clients. It also involves efforts to promote and increase awareness of the practice. Examples of external marketing include advertising, targeted mailings to pet owners, radio spots, newspaper or magazine articles, and participation in community events.

DEVELOP MARKETING OBJECTIVES

Once you have decided on the practice's goals and desired outcomes of marketing based on marketing planning, you can begin to write marketing objectives for the marketing plan. Marketing objectives may be drafted for internal or external marketing initiatives. They may be related to efforts to improve client service, increase client education on certain topics, increase utilization of specific services, gain new clients, or target goals for utilization of new services. Objectives may be program-based as well – e.g. developing a senior care program or obesity management program.

Marketing objectives need to be specific and measurable goals to ensure that efforts will be focused. This also enables the practice to assess the success of marketing plan initiatives. Examples of specific, measurable marketing objectives include:

- To increase dentistry revenues by 20% each month
- To increase senior diagnostic testing by 20% for the second half of the year
- To increase our client satisfaction survey results from a good to excellent rating
- To increase our new clients/month by 10%
- To increase utilization of our boarding facilities by 20%
- To increase compliance with our recommendations for dental homecare by 40%

Each marketing objective must have associated tactics which detail *how* the objective will be achieved and who will be responsible for assignments. Tactics are specific actions that must occur to ensure the execution of marketing objectives.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MARKETING PLAN

All veterinary practices should have a written marketing plan for a defined period of time which is typically a year. If the marketing plan is for the calendar year, then planning needs to occur well before the end of the year to ensure that you are ready to implement plans once the new calendar year begins. Be careful to set realistic marketing goals for the year. Consider the available resources and capacity of the practice when deciding how many goals to establish.

Effective leadership helps ensure the successful implementation of a marketing plan. Veterinary practice owners and managers need to communicate the marketing plan initiatives to the entire healthcare team and ensure that the staff stays focused on the plan.

Responsibility for all tasks should be outlined in tactics in the marketing plan and assignments with timelines need to be delegated to specific individuals. Staff members must be empowered to implement the marketing plan and be given specific deadlines for all activities.

MEASURE SUCCESS OF THE MARKETING PLAN

Progress of the plan should be followed with regular frequency, ideally monthly. Computer software should be able to facilitate tracking utilization of services. Practices can measure the success of marketing objectives in order to improve marketing efforts and to evaluate the return on investment.