

Assessment of Employees

There are many types of veterinary practices, those that are handled by a single vet or big veterinary groups with several branches and various veterinary surgeons in each of them. Regardless of the type, a good team assessment, for vets, nurses and receptionists is essential to provide a good client care, as it will be key in the improvement of the client service.

The biggest mistake made by the average clinical manager is base the appraisal just in economical parameters. It is an easy way to know how a vet is doing, mainly because mostly of the veterinary programs would give you the figures straight away. Values as number of visits, average spent per visit... will be easily calculated. There are veterinary clinics in which the veterinary surgeon is required to sell certain number of worming or flea treatments per period, otherwise the performance is considered as poor.

An appraisal can be defined as a "A two way discussion of past and present experiences and achievements at work and using this as the basis for agreeing future development to the benefit of the organisation and the employee". The aim of any appraisal is to facilitate development, motivate and improve performance.

An appraisal needs to cover all areas of the veterinary, nurse and receptionist job, from medical and surgical abilities in some cases to client satisfaction. This has to be more than a five minutes job at the end of the month to tell the vet that is not selling enough food as it quite often the case.

The results obtained during the appraisal should not be used to punish the appraisee but to help the personal development. This means that if during the appraisal we found that certain vet is not confident in the use of the endoscope, our proactive action should be to send him or her on a training course and not stop the usage of the material to prevent breakdowns.

The performance review should not cover matters like salary related issues, discipline, promotions or staff induction because they should have their own protocols. Salary related problems should have their own agenda and explained at the time of offering the job. Discipline procedures should be in the job contract and explained during the induction period as explained in previous article.

Once we have seen some of the reasons to have this appraisal done to every member of the team, let's talk the procedure itself. The document has to be standardized and applicable to all the members of the staff, regardless of their role. The questions need to be general about performance. "Are you confident in your surgical skills?" it is a better question than " Are you confident when performing surgery" as it can be used for both vets and nurses.

Once the document has been developed by the management team, a person or couple of them needs to be assigned to perform the review of all the members of staff. These people need to be senior in the team. It is also important that they are objective and do not have any personal issues in the team.

Prior to the appraisal, the blank document needs to be forward to the employee that is

going to be appraised so he or she can fill it up, so at the time of the meeting with the person in charge of appraising will be able to defend his or her points. At the time of the meeting, both parties need to exchange what they have in their notes and have a proactive approach to achieve an improvement.

A good way to prepare the document would be dividing the questions into blocks. I do think that the following 5 blocks can cover reasonable well all the areas in the veterinary work. On the other hand we can add as many blocks and questions as we want, but we want a document that can be used and not an interrogatory.

1. Personal appearance and punctuality

In here we would have questions as uniform cleanliness, personal hygiene, arriving on time, leaving on time (it is very common to punish employees for arriving late, but we do not appreciate those 5 minutes they do stay after leaving time when consults do run late)

2. Knowledge of the subject required (veterinary, nurse, receptionist...)

This area would cover the knowledge of the different protocols in the practice (health and safety, standardised procedures...). The questions would need to be of the type : "Do you know what to do in case of a fire?" "Do you know who is the person responsible for the first aid?". It will also cover aspects regarding the specific role of each person. These questions needs to be presented in a positive way and always make clear the constructive intention of them. A good example could be: "How do you value your knowlegde of the duties given to you on your job description?".

3. Abilities

This group of questions is based on the abilities needed for each specific role (from answering the phone for the receptionist, to changing IV fluids bags for a nurse, to performing routine surgery for a vet). This a tricky group as the employee needs to be supervised while performing the duties, which involves a shadowing by the ther person performing the appraisal or interviewing colleagues in direct contact with the employee. We could divide the abilitis into medical or surgical, depending on the roles of each member of staf..

4. Team work

This set of questions is aimed to measure how well integrated a person is in the team and how well interacts with other members of staff. It is key for a healthy enviroment to find disturbances in the dynamics of a team as soon as they happen (if two members collide or anybody is isolated); and we, as leaders, we cannot rely on gossiping as source of information, but we need to provide v tools to find this out.

5. Formation and personal development

On this final group, questions are designed to find out if the courses attended are money well invested. Questions like; "How happy are you with your CPD hours?" or "How much do you use the topics learnt at your CPD in your everyday work?", are essential to find if we are investing in people or just attending courses because it is compulsory.

The questions would be evaluated and give points from 1 to 5. 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest points. Then the average is calculated per blocks and in total. There would be also a blank space for notes, to be filled by both persons involved the process. On this way, it allows to have a more active process.

It is key to find the areas with discrepancies and find solutions for them; as well it is vital to work in those in which the grades happen to be lower. This means to set up a meeting between both parties, with plenty of time to discuss about it. It has to be a constructive meeting and not an exchange of accusations. The appraisal is an active process, which means that it is not just a meeting to talk, shake hands and see you next year, but it is essential to have an action plan at the end of it.

During the appraisal discussion, a lot of information will be shared. The action plan is a working document, which enables both parties to capture what the appraisee will do (in the form of courses, practical sessions...) over the coming 12 months. The action plan is the formal record of the appraisal. As the discussion progresses and actions are discussed, the person under review should make a note of the objectives and actions. He or she has to agree that those actions are needed. As always, it is easier to do what you want to do than something imposed from the outside. Agreement should also be reached on realistic time-scales for their completion. It may be a good idea to agree and record dates for follow-up review meetings.

The actions should fall into the following categories:

- Job specific - these relate to the way that the individual carries out their current job and should build on success, or address specific current development needs.
- Quality Improvement, the aim has to be always the excellence in every aspect of the job, so everybody can improve.
- Developmental - these look beyond the job that the individual is currently doing. The goal is to grow into the company and have more responsibility.

At the end of the appraisal, the appraiser should write up the action plan, take a copy and give the original to the appraisee. The record should be agreed within a few days and finally both parties should sign and date the document.

The appraisal system still needs to be developed in many places, as many employees fail to value the cost-benefit of setting up a good appraisal system. The benefits would include improvement of the client care and medical service, increasing the retain of employees, increasing of job satisfaction...