

March CB editorial

SPRINGTIME IS THE TIME OF HOPE

It is also the time for another busy year for veterinarians and their staff. The weather is improving, The pets are spending more time outside and the flowers are getting close. Hope springs eternal.

So, are you ready for it, Did you spend the slower winter months lamenting the drop in daily client visits or did you work with your staff to prepare for the onslaught of work. Are your marketing programs ready to release? Has every member of your staff completed your customer service training modules?? HUH? Customer service what? What was that?? If you aren't already working on exceptional customer service you had better get on the bandwagon. Successful hospitals all have that in common. In this day and age, being a great doctor is important, but not enough. Your clients and more importantly, your prospective clients are all seeking exceptional customer service in addition to great medical care.

Providing exceptional service isn't that difficult but if your staff doesn't know that you demand it, there will be a very good chance they won't go out of their way to provide it. Hospitals that do not stress this important client service, will be seeing more and more of your "A" clients deserting you in the coming years.

It is easy to learn how to do this and they all revolve around common sense. Treat each client as a special individual, know their names, their pets name and gender, make eye contact, listen and answer their questions, address their concerns, offer the best medical care options all the time and be willing to work with them. If you do those things, you will have exceeded

what the majority of hospitals are providing these days. These actions are the barest minimum and yet are rarely being met across the country. If you wish to get to the second tier, you will need to work on your marketing skills to educate your clients (educated clients are more willing to say yes to your suggestions), do routine follow up calls regularly and learn to communicate well also.

Routine staff meeting would be a start (Typically weekly for 45 minutes or less over a hospital provided lunch works well). Getting your staff to really buy into this is the key. Trying to force feed anything to a staff rarely works. Allow them too open up and talk about their thoughts and ideas. The more they come up with, (rather than the boss saying do this and do that) the easier it will be to implement your programs.

Encourage client feedback with pre-stamped satisfaction surveys that you hand to your clients upon checkout. Pay attention to the complaints and find ways to react and improve your service all the time.

Obviously there are external means to improve upon your weak points if needed. The NAVC runs a fantastic practice management program every conference in January. If you weren't here this year, make it a point to get here next year. There is always lots of exciting lecturers and information for you to consider. If you wish to start sooner, consider bringing in a consultant to assist you in both providing better service and also to help you measure your success. Don't wait till your "A" clients are all in a competing practice. It is much more difficult to bring them back than to prevent them from leaving.

