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COMMUNICATION IN PRACTICE

THE VET'S MANUAL ON CLIENTHUSIASM



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

A communication manual especially for vets? Come on! I became a vet to make sick animals better, not to communicate with people?! Chances are, this is what's going through your mind as you read the title of this book. But put that thought aside for the moment. This book is not suggesting that you move into another profession. This book helps you become a more well-rounded vet. A vet who is excellent with animals, and even better with people. The result? Client enthusiasm! In addition to healthy animals, you have delighted clients, contented co-workers and a practice prepared for the challenges of the future. That is all part of the fun of being a vet!



COMMUNICATION IN PRACTICE



WHY THIS BOOK?

In today's society, the status of animals is rapidly changing, and with it the position of the vet. In the past, the household pet was a guard dog living in a shed outside. Today it is a full-fledged family member. We've run the gauntlet from the old-fashioned farming homestead to the modern factory farm – and in some places, we may be on our way back again. Whether you are a small animal vet, a horse specialist or a livestock vet, your daily work involves many challenges, large and small. But the same is true of opportunities too. The profession of vet is unmatched in the prospects it offers to grow alongside animals' increasing status in society.

Dog trainers, cat therapists, horse whisperers, feed advisors and breeding experts are already following this trend. So let's get started, because the hunt for delighted clients begins now!



STICKY NOTES AND TO-DO REMINDERS

Sticky notes in this book are meant as an example. As you read, there will be moments when you think, "Great idea! We really should be doing that!" To make sure it doesn't stop there, we challenge you to use sticky notes to write down your intention the minute "Great idea!" pops into your mind. Then, once you've finished the book, you have a simple way to line up the actions that you would like to take. Talk about them with your co-workers and post them on a communal notice board. After you've taken each action, tick it off and discard the sticky note. One step closer to success!



SECOND SCREEN

This book has moving pictures. In the margins, we've included a number of QR codes, taking you directly to a relevant feature on the Internet. Scan the QR code using your smartphone or tablet to jump to a background article, website or video selected by us as offering valuable supplementary material. To do that, you will need to install a QR scanner App on your mobile device. But that should be a piece of cake, you are a vet after all! Otherwise, ask your (grand)child for help ;-)



SCANNING A QR CODE

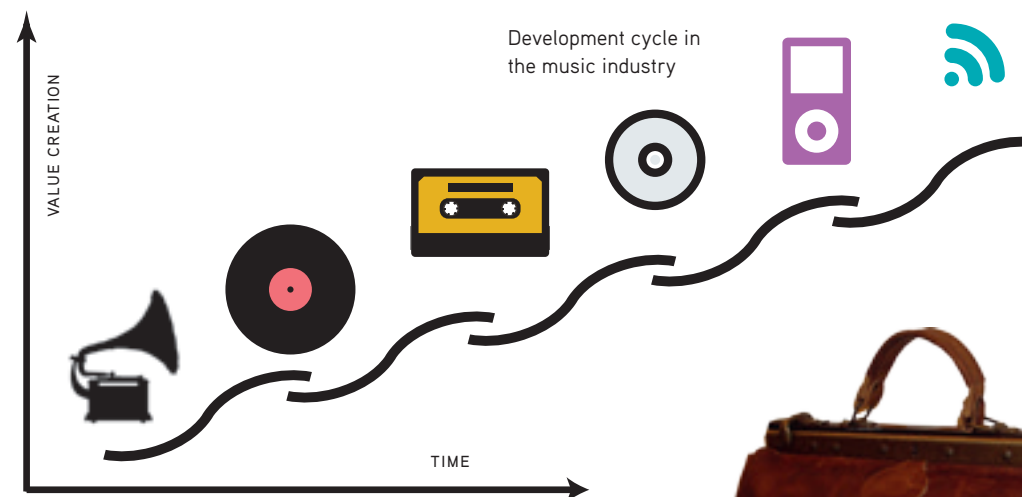
Scan the code with your smartphone or tablet to view this book's website.

THE SMALL PRINT

A couple of things before we begin. Just to be clear, this book is primarily about communication between people, and not about communication between people and animals. We use "vet" rather than "veterinary surgeon" throughout, as this makes it easier to read, and reflects how our clients refer to us. This book often speaks of the vet practitioner in the male form, but of course we also mean female vets and vice versa. Also, this book is not intended for vets only, though they are the primary target group. Others, such as practice managers, nurses and vets who are not part of a practice, will also benefit from this book. So keep reading. Obviously, styles of communication and unwritten rules vary from country to country, between regions, and perhaps even from town to town. Communication is, after all, a basic element of our culture. Nonetheless, we believe that the fundamental principles of communication, as described in this book, are applicable to every vet, whether you practise in the UK, US, Australia or Europe.

We take an informal tone in this book. Because that makes reading easier. Furthermore, though English is an international language, some of the terms we use might differ from those familiar to you in your daily practice. A veterinary assistant in one country, might be called a nurse in another, and a para-vet somewhere else. Where faced with such choices, we've opted for the simplest term, to keep the book readable.

Here and there we use practical examples that might seem familiar. Yet any resemblance to real persons or situations is purely coincidental. We demonstrate what can go wrong, where improvements can be made and why communication has become such a vital skill in the fantastic profession of veterinary medicine. Communication is a competence that your education probably paid little attention to. So, is this book really necessary? We think so.



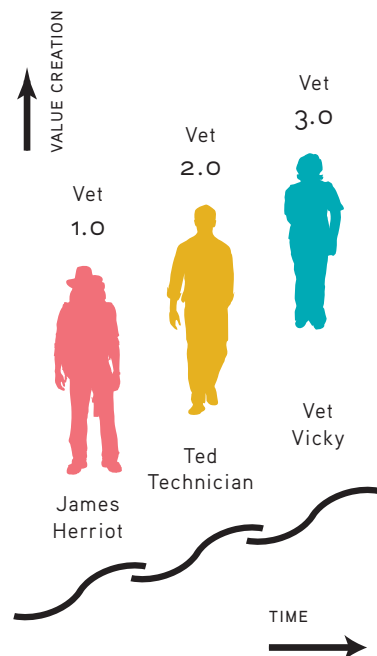
THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE VET

Every product comes with its own lifecycle. It starts with lots of effort and little gain. With some luck, the product catches on and becomes a success. Even then, however, if it does not evolve with the times, sales fall and it eventually dies a quiet death. Take the example of the music industry. The CD player of yesteryear has long been made obsolete by today's Spotify.



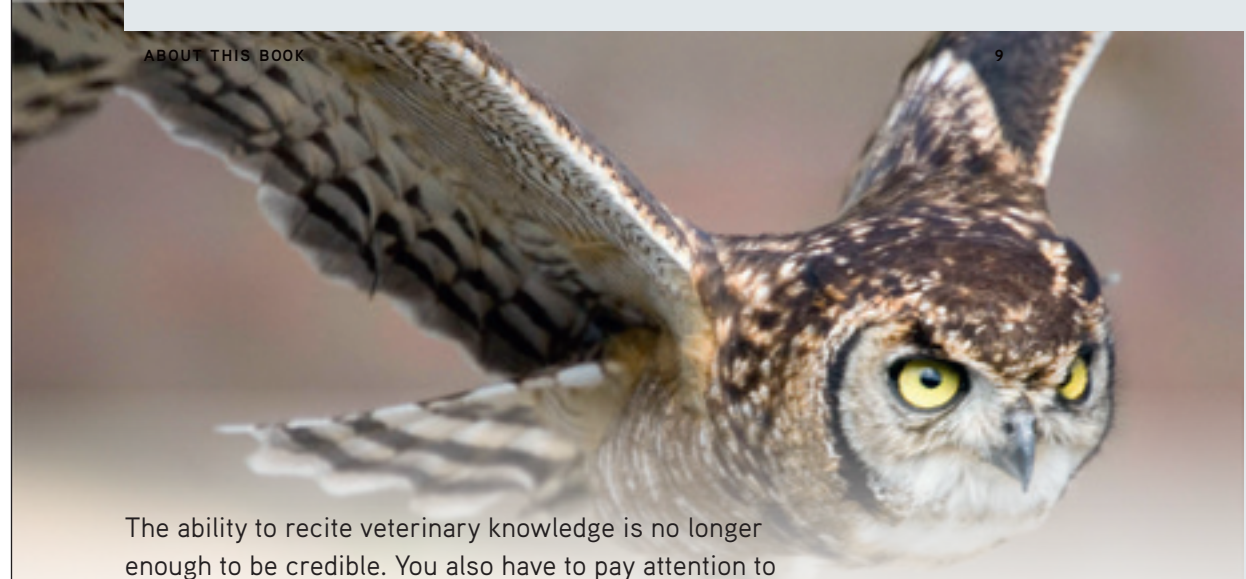


Development cycle of the veterinary medicine profession



The same can be said of professions. They lose their legitimacy if they don't evolve with the times. Nobody knows a tanner, a soap boiler or a telegraph operator anymore. The profession of veterinary medicine itself has changed markedly over a period of decades. Before World War II, the typical vet was a prominent member of the local community. Vet 1.0, we might say. The James Herriot type of vet. After the war, the vet evolved into "Ted Technician" who, as Vet 2.0, played a major role in the rise of large-scale farming and the expanding popularity of house pets. "Mass is cash", as the saying goes, and "effort pays off." Vet 2.0's ambitions were mainly clinical, and enough income seemed to flow in from that automatically. Making sick animals better and earning a living were the major objectives of vets in those days. But this scenario is now coming to an end. An evolution is again under way to a new societal role for modern vets. Vets are reinventing themselves. The technician is being replaced by the modern vet. In addition to clinical and commercial ambitions, she has idealistic goals. One of these is to do business in a socially responsible way. "Vet Vicky", or Vet 3.0, not only has professional and idealistic aspirations, she seeks an acceptable balance between work and private life. In short, fulfilment as an individual, as a professional and as a businessperson.

Communication has been a key component of this evolution. From Vet 1.0's "Do what I tell you!" via Vet 2.0's "What can I do for you?" to Vet 3.0's "What can we do together to find the best solution for your animal?" From dictates to dialogue, in other words. Today's clients want to be more closely involved and participate in shared decision making. They don't trust your judgment simply because of your education and position. Many clients will have already trawled the Internet for information, and diagnosed their pet's problem themselves. Or, a farmer might let you know that other advisors have contradicted your view.



The ability to recite veterinary knowledge is no longer enough to be credible. You also have to pay attention to your communication skills and methods. After all, you do want your advice to stick, don't you? You want it to be seen as useful and to be applied. That does not happen automatically...

LEARNING BY DOING

We can all communicate, right? Well, everybody certainly does it. But whether it turns out the way we intended is another matter. Communication is something that most of us learn through practice. Sometimes we fall flat on our face. It's a process of trial and error, sometimes with the help of well-intentioned tips from co-workers and our own experiences. But communication is a specialism, a science with certain fundamental rules and laws. University departments carry out state-of-the-art research on it. Communication can't be learned in a day, and certainly not by just reading this book. With this book, you will gain a better understanding of the processes involved. After all, wouldn't you like to know how you can finally get that dog owner to have their pet regularly dewormed? And, wouldn't it be great if that dairy farmer finally put your herd health advice into practice?

Ultimately, we all communicate with a goal in mind. We want to accomplish something with it. Your daily practice as a vet demands that you do so in an efficient way.



HOW IS THIS BOOK ORGANISED?

We start in **Part 1** with the basics: the building blocks and background. Good communication has a certain anatomy. Knowledge of that anatomy is the main precondition for using it effectively. The anatomy of communication is based on a number of principles. These are guidelines and models that provide you support in your communication endeavours – much like your knowledge of anatomy helps you neuter a cat. The first chapters cover these basic principles, as well as the practical rules that follow from them and the resources and tools available to you. Every tool has pros and cons, so choosing the right one can be a puzzle in itself. Should you sit down for a good talk with your client, or draft an article for the practice newsletter? Should you organise an equine first-aid course? Or would it be better to plan an informative outing for pig farmers? The so-called “new media” are also discussed in this part of the book. What is the real value of websites, email and social media?

Part 2 takes a closer look at practice: practically oriented approaches to communicating effectively with your clients. One-on-one interaction with the client is central. This interpersonal communication is perhaps the most important communication tool you have as a vet. Face-to-face exchanges are a major part of your daily work and a powerful tool for communication. Are you sufficiently aware of that? How can you fine-tune those exchanges so that both you and your clients are completely satisfied? How do you get that ‘click’ with your clients? Talking about money is an important part of that. Another is how to proceed when situations become charged and emotions run high, such as when delivering bad news or when confronted with anger or grief. We also look at how to organise and deliver a good presentation. Finally, we dot our ‘i’s by showing you ways to identify different types of clients, so that you can approach each in the most effective way.

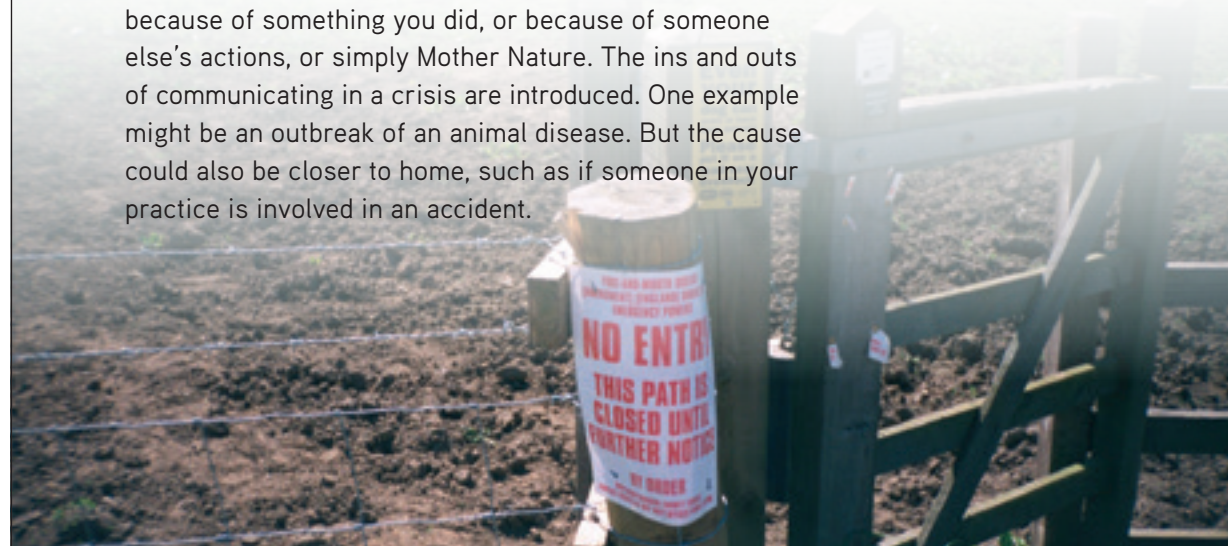


WHY VETS ARE BETTER DOCTORS



In addition to communication with clients, internal communication within the practice is an area of key importance. **Part 3** of this book focuses on this aspect. One cohesive veterinary team, strong together... For a successful practice and a pleasurable workplace, the right organisational structure and culture need to be in place, as well as an engaged collaborative spirit within the team. “Outside wins begin within.” We discuss issues such as, “How can you instil a sense of team spirit?” “How do you bring the right people on board?” “How do you get good employees to stay?” Have you ever wondered how other practices approach such matters, and whether you might learn from their experiences? Or, do you see them solely as competitors? Furthermore, how do you deal with all of those other advisors active in “your” market? All these questions are addressed in this part of the book.

In **Part 4**, finally, we talk about the “outside world”. You and the society you operate in. It is not enough to have mastered effective communication with your clients; society has its own mind. The time has passed when you didn’t have to worry about such things as long as your client was happy. Media has a tremendous influence in today’s society. Whether you like it or not, your image is largely determined by them. The final chapter focuses on crisis communication. What if things get out of hand? “When the s*** hits the fan”, so to say. It might be because of something you did, or because of someone else’s actions, or simply Mother Nature. The ins and outs of communicating in a crisis are introduced. One example might be an outbreak of an animal disease. But the cause could also be closer to home, such as if someone in your practice is involved in an accident.





REACTIVE CREATIVE

ONE LAST THING

We now return to the starting point of this introduction, “I became a vet to make sick animals better – not to communicate with people?!” For Vet 3.0, however, better communication means that you can help animals even more. And you do that in such a way that the animal owner appreciates you even more. Healthy animals, enthusiastic clients, happy you. That’s as good as it gets.

Better communication requires effort, the will to change and, perhaps most importantly, perseverance. You cannot sit around complacently thinking, “Things were so much better in the old days”. Instead, be creative. Seek out opportunities in every problem. Create your own opportunities and be positive. You will soon find that others notice this, and pick up on it. Enthusiasm is contagious. When reading this book, try to get past the initial cynical, “yes, but” reaction when it comes to the changing role of vets or better ways to manage your practice. Try “what if...?” instead. You will see that every problem has a solution, and that solution often starts with you. Be **Creative** instead of **reaCtive**. Only the C changes position, but it’s a huge difference. Interestingly, the C of Communication.

FINALLY

This book is not a scientific publication, nor does it profess to be a cure-all for your every communication need. It’s not a bible, but rather, a simple travel guide through the thorny territory of effective communication. This book will help you improve your knowledge of communication, and hopefully, your communication skills too. Vet 3.0, or maybe even higher.

TODAY’S MENU

CREATIVE REACTIVE

Cheerful	Muted
Happy	Negative
Pleasant	Glum
Funny	Subdued
Optimistic	Hostile
Smiling	Sarcastic
Friendly	Antagonistic
Animated	Dissatisfied
Playful	Apathetic
Involved	Defensive
Stimulated	Impatient
Outgoing	Reserved
Attentive	Aloof
Ambitious	Lethargic

Make your choice consciously!

