

Running successful meetings

Practice personnel often complain about poor communication or lack of communication and the negative impact it can have on themselves and their clients. Caroline Johnson BSc(Hons) explains why good practice meetings can motivate positive communication.

In my experience, poor communication is not a problem associated solely with the veterinary profession; communication difficulties exist in the majority of organisations, large and small, and they are the root cause of much frustration and stress within the workplace. Furthermore, internal divisions are often caused by a lack of understanding of one another's roles resulting from poor communication. So what can be done?

One answer is the establishment of regular practice meetings. Depending on the size and nature of the practice these can take place at departmental level, management level and/or involving the entire team. What matters most is that meetings must be motivational for those involved and actions have to result from decisions made – any other scenario and you may be accused of wasting time, producing lots of hot air and achieving very little! Furthermore, badly run meetings are worse than none at all and may contribute to declining morale.

With many meetings being relatively unproductive, what steps can be followed to ensure success?

1. Good planning

Schedule meetings well in advance and at times when they will be relatively free from interruptions (ideally, totally free). Frequency



should depend on need, so avoid the trap of having a weekly/monthly meeting just for the sake of it. When meeting frequency is geared to the requirements of the business, staff will place greater importance on attendance.

2. Stick to the agenda

Keep meetings brief and ensure that the agenda is adhered to. If you have four items listed then discuss only those four. Do not let anyone hijack the meeting by bringing up additional subjects - they may be noted and put on the agenda for the next meeting. This discipline will encourage staff to agenda items for discussion well in advance of each meeting and it means that you will stick to time, address the most important subjects and come prepared. Meetings will, therefore, be productive.

3. Keep it short and sweet

If a lot needs to be discussed then hold two meetings instead of one. A



meeting stretching on to infinity is mentally exhausting, particularly if held towards the end of a day's work!

4. Involve some variety

Plan the format and try to break activities up, for example, individual feedback, discussion, presentation and brainstorming. Where possible, involve as many different people as you can in each activity. This way the time passes quickly and the interest, concentration and participation of the attendees will be maintained at the highest possible level.

5. Remember to take minutes

Minutes must be taken. They need to be brief, to the point, and most importantly listing any agreed actions by whom and by when. Minutes should be circulated to those attending and others who are affected by any matters that have been discussed – this usually means keeping the whole practice team in the information loop!

6. Make sure meetings have a positive effect

Meetings are an excellent forum for spreading the 'feel good factor'. Include progress reports at the start showing who has achieved what since last time and publicly accolade their success. We all love a bit of peer recognition, so grasp the opportunity to recognise effort, boost morale and to give your meetings a positive buzz!