

Excelling as a relief veterinarian

We all have our reasons for entering the realm of being considered by some a second class veterinarian, aka a “relief veterinarian.” From my limited experience compared to many of you, I’ll rank it right up there with receptionist as far as being one of the toughest jobs in a vet clinic! Not only do we need to be able to lead team members we don’t know and not get on their bad side, but we also need to make quick connections with clients when they’d really prefer to see “Dr. Smith,” who’s been their vet for the past 20 years.

In some ways it isn’t too different from working as an emergency vet, but with an added challenge. Besides needing to make a positive connection with the clients because their pets are ill, in order to educate them on their options and have them trust you (or even making that positive connection for Fido’s yearly exam), you also have to lead a team you know nothing about! You have no idea of the skill level or work ethic of the technical staff you’ll be working with that day. When you start to truly think of the scope of what just one day of being an amazing relief veterinarian means, it can be daunting. Not only do you want to do well because you take pride in your work, but this is only Dr. Smith’s second vacation in the past 10 years. She deserves the break and to come back to a clinic that did well while she was gone.

Do you really understand what makes you a first class relief veterinarian? Do you know what your needs are from the technical staff? Can you very specifically tell them what they need to provide for you to get the best performance out of you for the day? What they should avoid that will drive you nuts and make you cranky? Even if you know all of the answers to those questions, can you relay this information without coming off as cocky and unlikeable? Quite literally, can you tell them how to get the best out of you?

The reality is **most of us don’t truly understand how we got to where we are today.** We aren’t able to clearly state why we are naturally good at certain things and not at others. If you aren’t aware of the why and what your needs are, how can you effectively communicate it to your team? That’s where the Clifton StrengthFinder (CSF) science comes in.

The CSF is an online measure of personal talent that identifies where an individual’s greatest potential for building strengths exists. To date, almost 13 million people have taken the assessment. The assessment is just the beginning, the true magic lies in where you get with coaching, then application of Strengths science!

Initially, the self-awareness aspect can be quite profound, even for us veterinarians who have already achieved so much in our lives! When we can start to see these things in ourselves, how we’ve either been using them appropriately, or sometimes letting something we are good at get in our way, then we can productively apply them in our work and in our personal lives.

For example, maybe one of your Strengths is Arranger.

“People exceptionally talented in the Arranger theme can organize, but they also have a flexibility that complements this ability. They like to determine how all of the pieces and resources can be arranged for maximum productivity.”

Imagine you've taken the CSF and had a few coaching sessions. You now understand who you are, exactly why you are good at the things you are good at, and how you got here. One of the things you understand better about yourself is that you really need the technical staff to inform you of everything that needs to get done for the day so you can mentally arrange in your head the most efficient way of doing things. If something changes, you need them to give you this information so you can re-arrange for continued productivity. This is a pretty general example, but to an Arranger, being given all the pieces of the puzzle so you can make them fit together the best way and being given updates that allow you to rearrange on the fly is a very important step in making your day a success.

You are now able to see how to use your Strengths to your advantage, to meet your stated goals, to keep engaged in your life, to provide excellent service as a relief veterinarian. Think of how that will reflect outwardly. As an Arranger what do you need from your support staff? It will bring you a new sense of confidence without coming across as conceited. You can very clearly and specifically communicate to the technical staff things you need from them to make the day go smoothly both in the technical and soft management senses. After you become more familiar with the different CSF themes, even if you are working with people who have never taken the assessment, you'll be able to make some educated guesses as to how to best communicate with them to bring out their best.

You will have a heightened awareness of your clients' needs, something a relief veterinarian really needs to be able to make those quick connections with clients and to provide them with the best experience possible.

Jenn Van Noy, DVM, Gallup Certified Strengths Coach
Achieve Excellence Veterinary Practice Consultants
<http://veterinarypracticeconsultants.com>