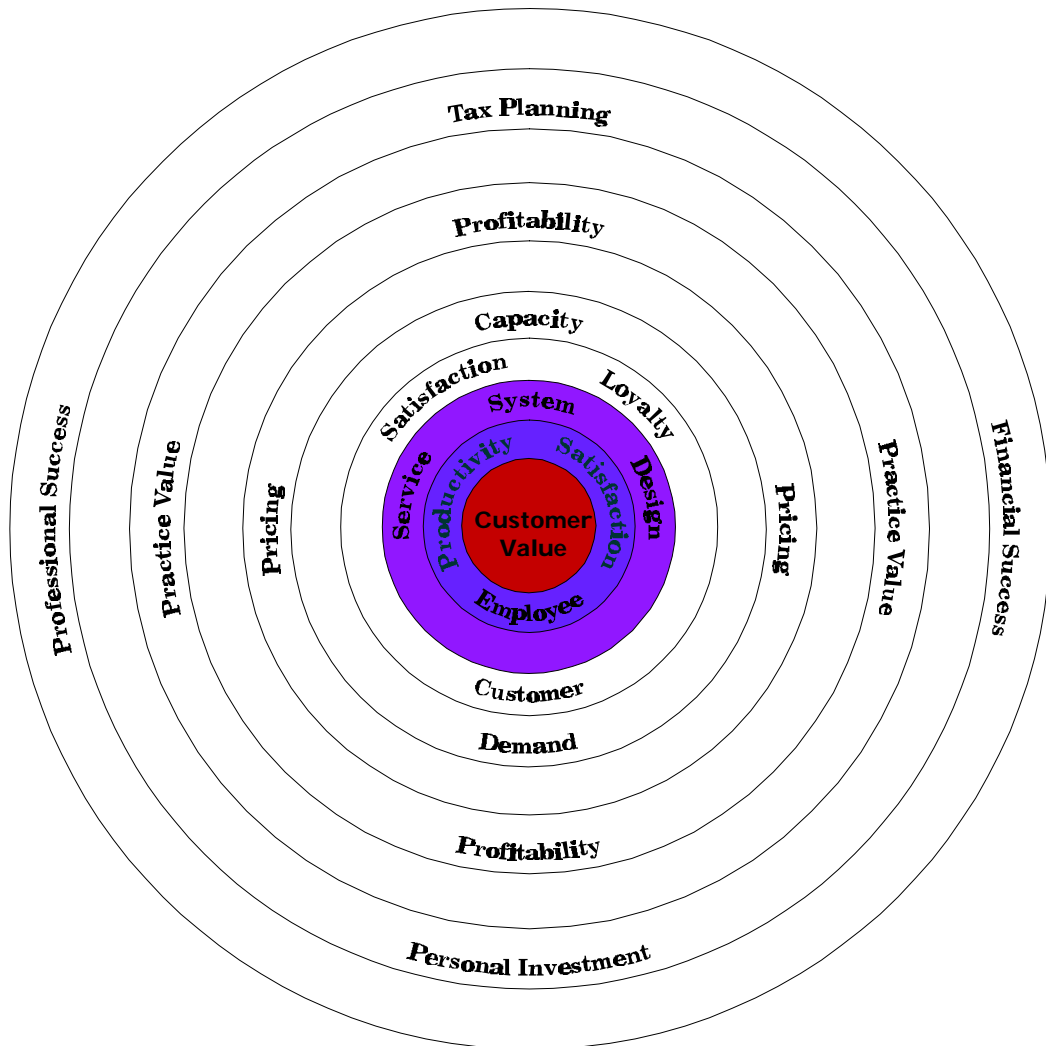
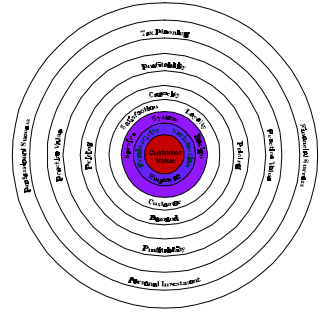


Service System Design





Service System Design

Satisfied and productive employees become loyal employees who develop excellent skills at delivering quality service which in turn generates highly satisfied and loyal clients. It is a poor carpenter that blames his tools, but, realistically, any carpenter can work better with superior tools. One might think of the service system as the staff's tool for delivering service. A better design allows better service delivery.

Quality service is not grounded in exceptional and unusual efforts made for a client on a sporadic basis. Rather, quality service is the delivery of efficient and personable service to all clients all the time. A veterinary practice needs a service system design to deliver good service repeatedly.

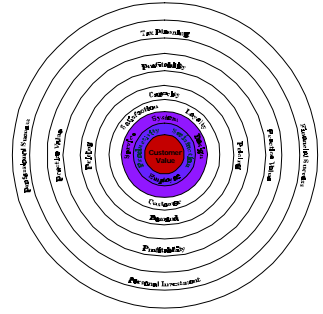
There are many components to an appropriate service system. Some components will not be feasible for given hospitals; other components should be part of the weekly routine.

Architectural Structure and Technological Support

Many veterinary hospitals would benefit from structural alterations in order to optimize traffic flow. Often, the structural layout of clinics was planned when the clinic revenue was much less or was planned prior to computerization. Sometimes, a simple change in work structure, such as incorporating exam-room technicians, is not suitable to an existing structure.

If the financial resources permit restructuring, significant planning should precede consultation with architects. Consideration must be made as to how the clinic presently functions and how it may function in the future. Veterinarians often have idiosyncrasies that need to be accommodated. A service system blueprint is invaluable to the planning process. Following the in-house planning, an architect that is experienced with or even specializing in veterinary facilities should be consulted. Sharing the in-house planning with the architect will be of great assistance in the development of a customized hospital design.

Supportive technology such as computer systems and phone systems that simplify employees' tasks are becoming increasingly affordable. Those technologies that will assist staff in enhancing service quality, or clients' perception of service quality will prove to be very cost effective.



Service System Blueprint

Services must be viewed as interdependent elements in an interactive system. Blueprinting is a holistic method of seeing, in snapshot form, what is essentially a dynamic phenomenon.

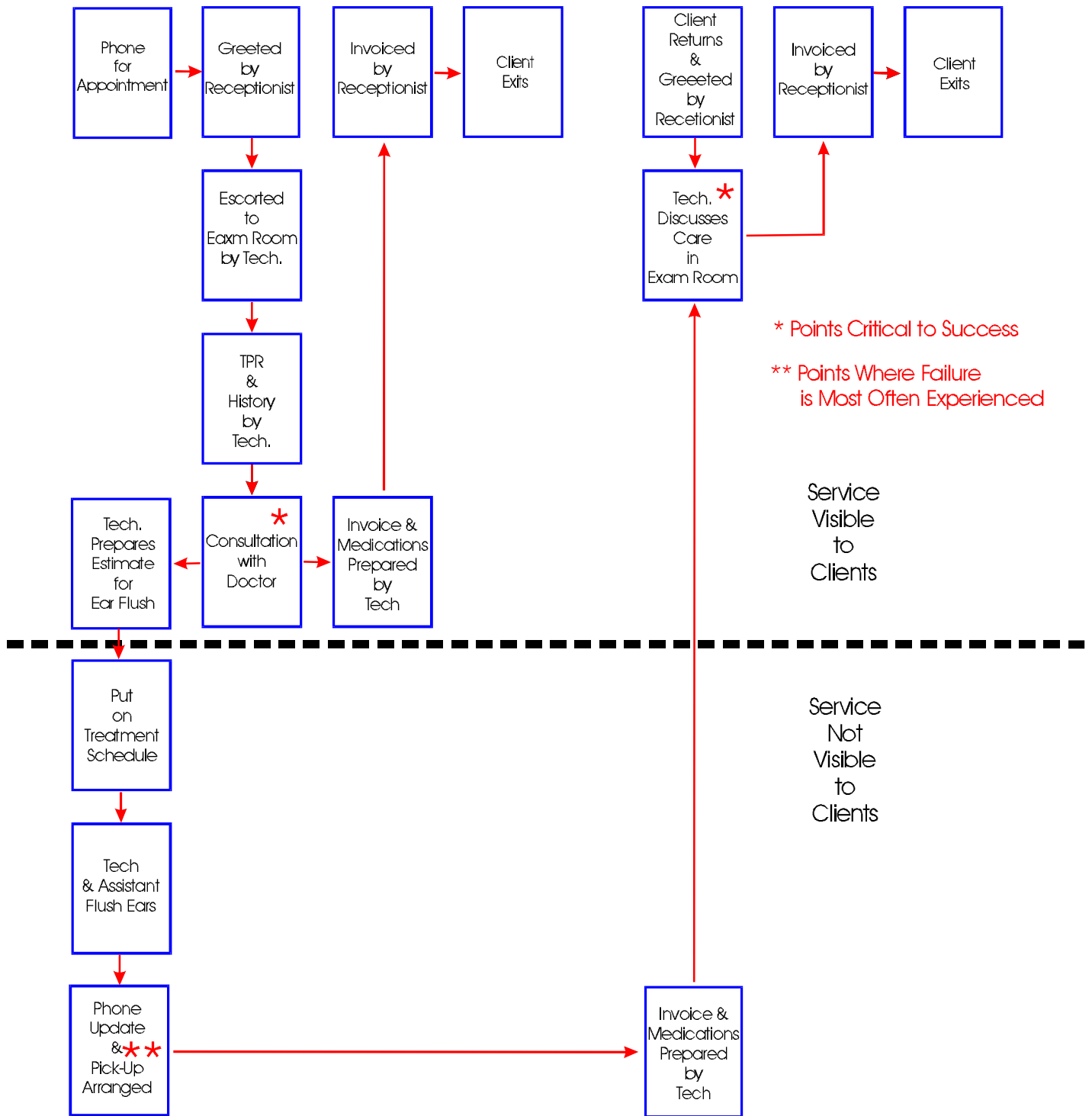
A blueprint graphically displays each step of the service. The blueprint allows better planning of traffic flow through the facility. Those staff members associated with the service provided are identified, and areas of interdependency of staff members are highlighted. The graphical display makes it easy to identify points critical to the success of the service and points where service failure is more probable.

The service system blueprint is invaluable in training new staff. It is useful in identifying the service roles of various staff members and explaining the interdependent nature of the service activity and the need for team work.

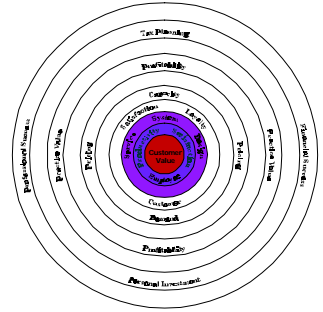
Typically, the blueprint identifies service steps that are visible to clients and those that are not visible to clients. Visible steps must be arranged to maximize the service process through which clients derive value. Those steps not visible to clients can be arranged in a much more mechanical and efficient manner. In a veterinary practice, visible steps are those that occur in the “front” and non-visible steps are those that occur in the “back”.

Understanding the Nature of the Service

Each service has attributes of complexity and divergence. A complex service involves many steps in the service delivery. For example, a hamburger made and sold at McDonald’s involves many steps and can be characterized as complex. A divergent service is one where there is a great degree of freedom inherent in the delivery of the service. A highly divergent service would be one in which virtually every performance is unique. The service of making and selling the hamburger at McDonald’s would be characterized as having minimal divergence.



Example of a Service System Blueprint



Every service can be characterized according to its complexity and divergence. A veterinarian's care for an ill patient is a highly complex and divergent service. As the service is being performed, the veterinarian must alter and shape it by assimilating new data, weighing possibilities, reaching conclusions, and ultimately taking action. A spay operation is complex in that it involves many steps, but is minimally divergent as there are few alternatives to consider. One may argue that the administration of vaccines is minimally complex and divergent.

If the staff understand the nature of the services, the practice can maximize efficiency for those services that are minimally divergent, encourage teamwork for those that are significantly complex, and conserve resources for those services that are highly divergent and cannot be rushed.

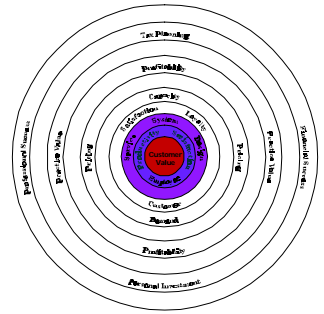
The Task of Constant Improvement

The industrial world learned two decades ago that improving efficiency and quality is a task of constant improvement. Now the service industry is learning the same thing. Staff that have the desire to produce quality service and that are well-trained in the workings of a veterinary practice can provide valuable input regarding the improvement of service delivery.

Staff must feel comfortable and safe if management wish them to bring service problems to the forefront. Service failures, large or small, should be recorded and discussed at weekly staff meetings. Collectively, the staff can make those changes to the service delivery system that will minimize the likelihood of such failures in the future.

It is common for management to have reception staff ask exiting clients, during the process of billing, how their visit went. This is an excellent opportunity to subjectively assess the satisfaction of the service. A well-trained, informed, and perceptive receptionist can assess the level of satisfaction without having to ask the question.

Although subjective in nature, this assessment of satisfaction is very timely and most useful for the process of constant improvement. Exploring the details of service that left clients less satisfied will often identify those aspects of the service experience that are detracting from the attributes that were admirably delivered.



Client complaints must be taken seriously. For each client that complains, there are five more with identical, unvoiced complaints. Every effort should be made to satisfy the complainant. Most importantly, the service delivery system must be altered to minimize the chance of similar service failures in the future.

Extensive knowledge can be gained from clients who have left the practice to obtain services from a competitor. Skillful communication with exiting clients will identify those aspects of service that were unsatisfactory and those attributes of the competitor's service that are judged to be superior. Initially, clients often give the easiest response, "price", as the reason for exiting a practice. However, there is almost always an alternate reason that they will divulge if questioned appropriately. Even if price is the truthful reason, inadequate service quality failed to enhance value to a point where the client was happy with the price.

Attention to Detail

Most service failures occur because of the lack of attention to detail. It requires a dedicated and diligent individual to make certain that each service is performed in accordance with the service system. Rules and regulations are developed so that consistently high-quality service can be delivered. However, there will be exceptions when service delivery will not fit the system. As previously mentioned, employees derive great satisfaction when empowered to alter the system as necessary, to customize the service, and to please the client. Moreover, clients respond positively to such employee confidence. Empowered staff members must alter the service system and break policy only with great discretion and must make absolutely certain that they have taken care of every possible detail to ensure that this deviation from the system will result in a favourable service experience for the client.