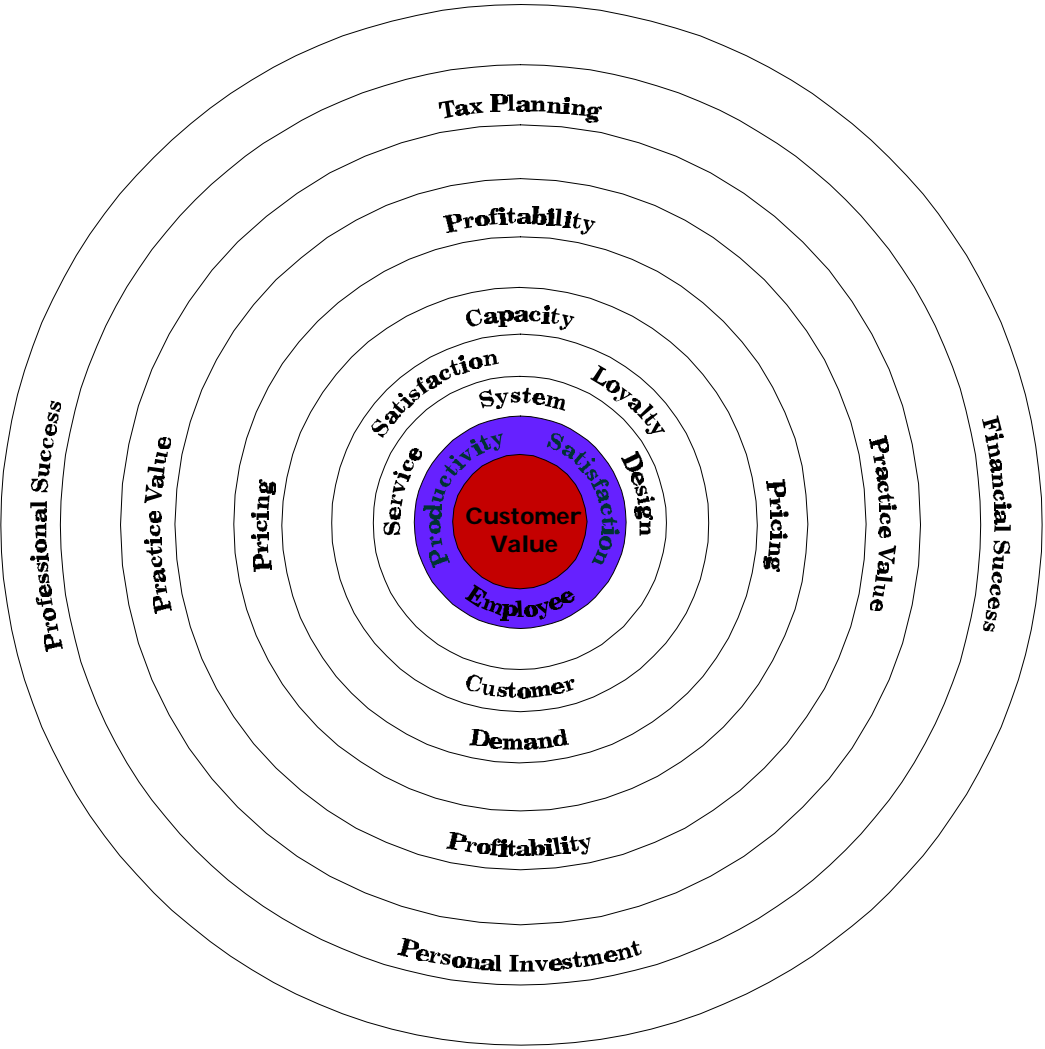
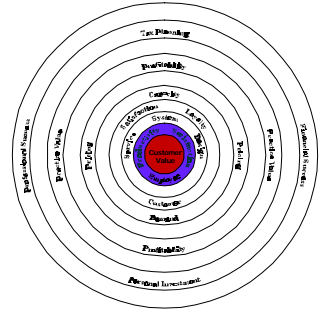


Employee Satisfaction & Productivity





Business Knowledge

Employees do not necessarily want to know about the finances of the business. On the other hand, they do want to know how the business works. This knowledge leads to employee satisfaction by enabling employees to better assist clients. Employee satisfaction is heightened by their ability to take on more responsibility and to perform their tasks more efficiently. Employees who are knowledgeable about the operation of the business become high performers, providing excellent customer service and performing their responsibilities efficiently, while functioning in a team where they know how and why their role is important.

Client Relations

Satisfied clients, as discussed above, increase the satisfaction of employees. Satisfied employees generate satisfied clients. This reciprocal relationship, once in motion, perpetuates itself.

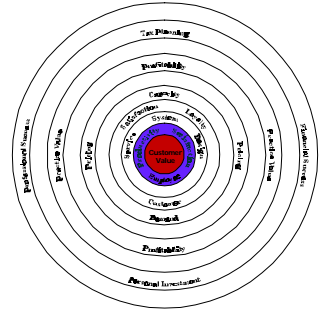
The following factors instill employee satisfaction.

- *Employee training*
- *Business knowledge*
- *Desire for responsibility*
- *Pride in serving clients*
- *Sense of belonging*
- *Mutual trust and respect*

It is clear that satisfied employees can provide clients with those attributes of the process component of service (*Responsiveness, Reliability, Assurance, and Empathy*) that clients value.

Responsiveness

Is it any wonder that a satisfied employee is willing and happy to provide friendly, prompt service or to return phone calls? Is it surprising that trained employees empowered with the freedom to make key decisions will not hesitate to resolve difficult situations or take on stressful and urgent requests, especially when they are recognized for their accomplishments?



Reliability

Employees who understand their roles within the operation of the business and what is needed to make the business work are not likely to disappoint either a customer or an employer. In fear of losing the respect and trust of their clients or employer, satisfied employees will go the extra mile to ensure that the clients receive the service that they depend on.

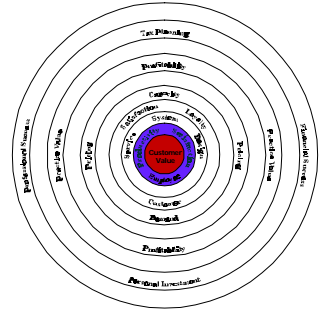
Assurance

Veterinary and technical staff have the benefit of professional training and have the appropriate degrees and accreditations. Clients depend on professionals to maintain competence in their respective fields. Reception staff may be formally or informally trained in their roles. Personal integrity, a high level of professional competence, and an extensive knowledge of the operation of the business allow employees to convey confidence and instill trust in clients. After this confidence and trust are established in a significant number of clients, the word of mouth in the community establishes the *reputation* of the hospital. Even before interacting with the practice, potential clients will trust the hospital that they have heard positive reports about from friends, family, neighbours and co-workers.

Empathy

Empathy is defined as the ability to be aware of, to understand, and to appreciate the feelings and thoughts of others. Empathy is “tuning in” (being sensitive) to what, how and why people feel and think the way they do. Empathetic people care about others and show concern for them.

Clients want to be understood. Understanding and expressing the fact that you understand another’s circumstances shows empathy and should not be confused with sympathy. It is highly probable that a clients’ circumstances cannot be altered. Clients wish to be understood, not pitied. Nor is empathy found in the act of cuddling pets or being obsequious to the owner. These superficial acts often replace the more difficult task of being empathetic.



Staff that are treated with respect and dignity and thus take pride in serving others will make the effort to understand clients' predicaments and assist in effective ways. This service is what clients expect of veterinary staff.

Service Recovery

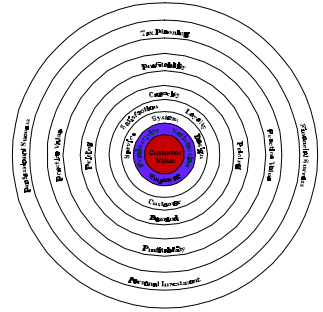
The attention to service detail and the development of optimal service systems will minimize service failures. Despite every effort to provide high-quality customer service, service failure is a fact of life. The diversity of services predisposes veterinary practices to some unavoidable level of service failure.

Experienced and trained staff can often see a service failure unfolding. If the staff are trusted by the employer and empowered to take steps when they sense a problem is developing, the service failure may be minimized or totally avoided.

In situations where failure does occur, recovery is still possible. The fundamentals of a successful recovery from a service failure are as follows:

- *Fast response*
- *Customized to the circumstances*
- *Explanation of the problem*
- *Personalized to the client*
- *Compensation*
- *Assurance*

Staff members who are armed with knowledge of the business operations and with employer-trust have the confidence to effectively recover from service failures. They have the competence to instill assurance in clients while explaining the problem and making the necessary arrangements to accommodate the clients' needs. Properly empowered, they can act quickly and offer compensation when appropriate.



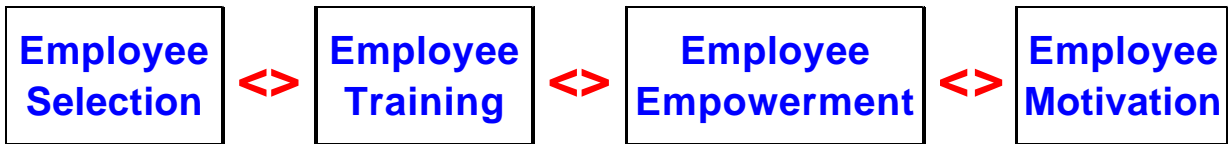
Measuring Employee Satisfaction

Surveys should be used to measure the degree of employee satisfaction. Used at intervals, such surveys can gauge changes in employee satisfaction.

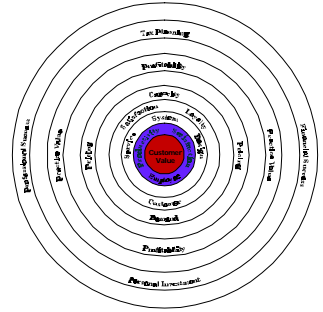
Between surveys, employee satisfaction can be estimated by observing secondary elements such as employee turnover and customer satisfaction. In ideal circumstances, the work environment will have a service culture in which there is little need to question the degree of employee satisfaction and loyalty.

How to Get There

The key to developing satisfied and loyal employees lies in employee selection, training, motivation, and empowerment.



Three of these topics have been covered adequately in the above narrative. However, the task of employee selection remains to be examined. In brief, successful businesses hire people on the basis of attitude rather than on the basis of skills. An individual must have some base level of skill to perform a given job. However, this base level is easily raised to levels that exceed the need for the position considered. In contrast, a person’s attitude cannot easily be altered, if it can be altered at all. The emotional stability of prospective employees is more important than their skill levels beyond a base requirement.



In the book *The EQ Edge*, Steven J. Stein and Howard E. Book suggest that the emotional skills most important to customer service representatives are as follows:¹

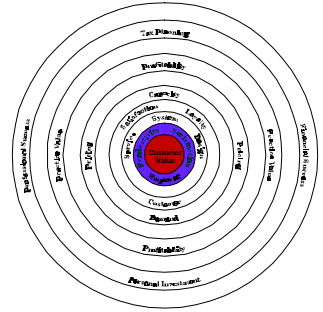
- *Stress Tolerance*
- *Assertiveness*
- *Happiness*
- *Interpersonal Relationships*
- *Self-Actualization*

Emotional intelligence (measured by EQ, Emotional Quotient) is defined as an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures. In everyday language, emotional intelligence is what is commonly referred to as “street smarts” or “common sense”. In contrast, IQ is a measure of an individual’s intellectual, analytical, logical and rational abilities.

Studies have shown that IQ serves to predict between 1 to 10 percent (the average is 6 percent) of success in a given job. EQ, on the other hand, has been found to be directly responsible for between 27 and 45 percent of job success, depending on which field was studied.

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to expand further on emotional intelligence, Stein’s text is a very interesting and enlightening read.

1 Steven J. Stein and Howard E. Book, *The EQ Edge*, New York: Stoddart Publishing Company Limited, 2000.



In general, employees wish to be treated well and wish to experience the same gratification as does the practice owner. Approaching staff in a manner that allows them to grow personally and professionally and to enjoy success is morally correct. This approach requires sincerity and empathy on the part of the practice owners. An insincere pat on the back and empty “good job” rhetoric will not suffice. Many practitioners fail to deliver value through their staff because they do not hold the personal beliefs that are necessary to relate to their staff in the appropriate manner.

What Is the Pay-Off

Included in the key findings of the 1998 Brakke study of management and behavior in the US veterinary profession is that; “Veterinarians who scored higher in financial acumen, and who owned or worked in clinics applying a larger number of standard business and service practices, had higher average incomes than those who do not”.²

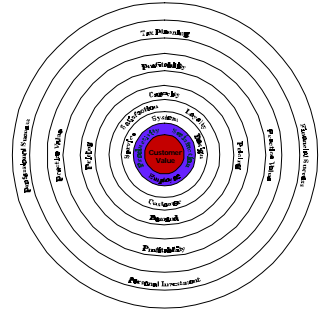
The Brakke study noted that veterinarians utilizing management practices normally associated with successful service businesses experienced a net income approximately 15% higher than those veterinarians who did not.

Of the 19 standard business practices associated with well-managed companies, the three business practices that had the most positive influence on veterinary incomes were:

- Promoting employee longevity
- Measuring employee satisfaction
- Tying rewards to client satisfaction

On average, veterinarians using these business practices experienced net incomes 16% higher than those veterinarians who did not.

2 Cron William L., Slocum John V. Jr., Goodnight David B., and Volk John O., *Brakke Management and Behavior Study*, American Veterinary Medical Association, 1999.



Attention paid to developing a satisfied and loyal staff creates a work environment that will attract the best qualified and suited employees. These employees will attract satisfied and loyal clients. Beyond market share, quality of market share is an important component of profit generation. Less desirable employees and clients can be left to those practices that fail to provide the equivalent work environment and the equivalent client value.