

# Can You Repeat That?

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## Using the “say it once” technique to reduce client frustrations.

In the veterinary field, repetition is often an unfortunate necessity. From the time a client first calls to make an appointment, to the time they’re finally seated in front of a veterinarian, they can be asked to repeat their name, their pet’s name and the reason for the visit numerous times. For your clients, that can be a major annoyance.

### What’s wrong with repetition?

When clients are asked to repeat themselves, they feel like the staff member wasn’t listening to them. It makes them feel unimportant, which ultimately may lead them to leave the practice entirely.

This happens in nearly all animal hospitals, large and small, rural and urban. While some of these repetitions are unavoidable, like stating identifying information on

the phone or presenting concerns once the client is at the veterinary office, taking a moment to slow down and speak with your clients with more intention can make your clients feel more valued. This is a subtle way to set your veterinary hospital apart from your competition and prevent those heavy sighs that you know mean the client has already been asked that very question—more than once. You can prioritize client interactions by implementing a “Say It Once” culture at your veterinary hospital.

### What is a “Say It Once” culture?

To start, discuss the issue with your team. Have them listen to a few client phone calls or walk them through how many times a client may have to discuss the reason they are at your hospital. Depending on the setup at your hospital, it’s likely at least three times: once when they check in, again when they meet with the veterinary assistant and again

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when the veterinarian begins the examination. Discuss ways to streamline the client intake process so you can get this number down to one. This can be done a few different ways. You could have the client wait to discuss their concerns with the doctor, or perhaps the receptionist can detail the concerns to the veterinary assistant, who will then follow up with the client before passing the information along to the veterinarian. It's all a matter of paying attention to minute details.

### How do I implement a "Say It Once" culture?

Implementing a "Say It Once" culture sounds simple, but without follow-up, it could all fall apart. If you want a culture initiative to be successful, responsibility for its success cannot just fall on the manager. Every team member must be diligent about holding each other accountable and celebrating successes. To encourage this, have your team gently remind each other when they ask a client for their information again and give staff options to celebrate when a client only has to "Say It Once." Assign specific team members to track success of the program, and then, as a group, you can set goals for the number of calls in which a client only has to explain something once.

At each meeting for the first six months after you've implemented the program, reserve five minutes to talk about how the initiative is working. Encourage your staff to talk through the times when they struggle to adhere to the concept and let them help each other with suggestions and encouragement. Once those six months are up, have a quick discussion about it at least quarterly at team meetings. Keeping the idea fresh in your staff members' minds is the best way to ensure they don't slip back into old habits.

And remember: this initiative is about more than avoiding client irritation. When a client is more comfortable at your practice, they're more likely to stick around.

iVET360's staff development managers help our hospitals implement this culture initiative with trainings and frequent check-ins. To learn more about how our staff development team works with veterinary hospitals, call 503.765.6360 or email [info@ivet360.com](mailto:info@ivet360.com).

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Heather Romano, managing director of staff development at iVET360, has over 20 years of veterinary hospital experience, including 14 years in veterinary management. She began her career as a kennel attendant in high school and, since then, she has held nearly every position found at veterinary practices. Just before she joined iVET360, she served as a regional multi-unit manager and private hospital management consultant. Her driving passion is helping practices create work environments that foster positive, patient-focused and service-oriented cultures. Heather has also become a sought-after speaker at veterinary groups for her unique perspective on leading and managing the many generations that are currently working at today's veterinary practices. Heather shares her home with Emily, the greatest (and laziest) cattle dog that has ever lived.

