

Rethinking the “Dreaded” Staff Meeting

By Nels Lindberg, DVM



As practice leaders, we all get in our daily grind. For us to have the time or take the time to sit down and come up with a meaningful meeting agenda is borderline life-sucking and not a top priority for our enjoyment. And we are simply tired—we just want the practice and its people to know what to do and to read our minds on what we want and expect of them. As we know and have likely learned, however, practice life doesn't work that way. In order to develop a well-oiled machine, we must start somewhere in the communication and over-sharing process, and dreaded staff meetings are where that begins!

By the time I was first out of vet school, I had worked for two farming operations, a college chemistry department and a feedyard—and with all of those organizations, not a single one had ever held a single significant staff meeting—ever. Then on to my first two veterinary practice jobs: The first one held up that same tradition, while the second practice did hold periodic staff meetings, but they were to mainly “chew rear” using the “sandwich” technique. This is

where a leader praises the team, then “stabs in the meat” telling them the problem(s) to fix, followed by more praise. This technique is overused and abused. And teams that have been abused by it know what is coming each time, and will often have the eye-rolling accomplished before the staff meeting begins.

Moving forward, I encourage veterinary practices to have a routine, attendance-required, well-planned-for monthly, if not weekly, whole company staff meeting no matter if you've occasionally met or not met before. If you already are meeting to work on that “well-oiled” machine, these several keys to a successful non-eye-rolling, actionable staff meeting still apply:

1. It starts with the leader, and his or her responsibility to be prepared and have a planned, valuable agenda. Otherwise, you accomplish nothing. Plus, your staff will be annoyed that you wasted their time to hear yourself talk and not accomplish anything. Your people

"It is our time to overcommunicate and overshare our vision, our mission, our purpose, goals, where we are headed, and help nurture and grow our people."

want value, they want your leadership, and they want to accomplish things. It is up to us practitioners to be effective to do so.

2. Attendance is required by the entire staff and this is non-negotiable. This one hour every month or every week is the most valuable hour of that time frame. It is the one hour dedicated to the staff and practice learning and improvement. This one hour is so important at our practice that it is part of our interview process—because, if an employee can't make our staff meetings, he or she can't be part of our team. This may seem extreme, but that is just how valuable our staff meetings are and the things we accomplish in that time. We are a championship-caliber team, and no one misses Nick Saban's team meetings or practice!
3. The meeting must be at a time when the practice is quiet, meaning closed and at a consistent time each month. We have ours the first Monday of each month at 7 a.m., so every member knows and can plan accordingly given other commitments and obligations with family or maybe other jobs. We all know that if we have a meeting during business hours, the phone rings, dogs walk in, and there are constant distractions to the meeting.
4. It is our time to overcommunicate and overshare our vision, our mission, our purpose, goals, where we are headed, and help nurture and grow our people. Depending on the research you read, people must hear things seven to 22 times before they actually "hear" and execute. We hold discussion on the normal parts of a staff meeting, for example, from inventory to the reception, treatment and tech areas, and seasonal challenges. But we take it a step further: we celebrate "highs and lows" for the month, we take prayer requests, we talk about life challenges and life goals—these things over and above daily logistics.

As the most valuable hour of the month or week, the staff meeting is a specific time set aside where we can convey to our team with not just our mind, but with our hearts, while sharing some emotion and extreme clarity for our plans. We can share where we're headed and seek input from our team members on how to get there.

This hour must be used wisely, however. At our practice, we figure staff meetings cost us \$24,000 per year—that's \$2,000 per meeting given the wages of everyone involved. But I'd encourage you to, more importantly, worry less about the money and more about wasting your staff's time. They don't want their time wasted, and their time is more important than our money!

Regardless of staff size, whether two to three or over 50, execute these suggested items to hold very successful, motivational and actionable staff meetings where true progress is made. Have some extreme clarity, use some emotion to make team members feel engaged and be engaged not only with their mind, but their heart—they are only 12 inches apart. Engaging both will get more useful, powerful results than one without the other!



Nels Lindberg, DVM, is a graduate of Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine and the owner of Animal Medical Center (AMC) in Great Bend, Kan., a predominately large animal practice. Dr. Nels is also owner of Progressive Beef Consulting Services and Research, and is a partner in Production Animal

Consultation, an independent consulting group serving the protein industries. A Kansas native, Dr. Nels has published several articles in peer-reviewed publications and is frequently requested to speak at veterinary conferences and training events. He shares his expertise with numerous industry, professional and community organizations, and was honored with the 2017 Distinguished Alumnus Award from the Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine and Veterinary Medical Alumni Association. Dr. Nels balances his busy veterinary practice with large animal consulting, public speaking, leadership training and business coaching. He and his wife Karen are parents to twins Nash and MacKenzie.

Follow Dr. Nels on Facebook, Twitter and at www.drnels.com, which features his "Leadership Thursday" blog post.