Morale Matters

How to uplift and unite your veterinary team for improved efficiency, performance, and job satisfaction

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Veterinary team morale is suffering.

The surging demand for veterinary care, coupled with high turnover rates and an ongoing talent drought, have put modern veterinary teams in a unique and difficult position. While your practice's bottom line may be robust and healthy, the rising and continuous need for care is taking a heavy—and potentially irreversible—toll on your hard-working team. Modern veterinary professionals are straining under the weight of endless shifts, frustrated clients, staffing shortages, and inefficient or completely outdated workflows. And with no clear end in sight, your team's morale may be at an all-time low.

> Half of veterinary practices reported a 25% or more increase in overall business activity and client numbers.
>
> **AVMA Covid-19 Veterinary Survey**

Sadly, concerns about team member well-being and overall morale are nothing new. These issues have been a rising concern for practice owners and managers for many years—long before the COVID-19 pandemic. Veterinarians and support staff deal with depression, burnout, and suicide at alarming rates. According to the 2020 Merck Veterinarian Wellbeing Study, almost half of veterinarians reported low well-being, and less than half would recommend a career in veterinary medicine[1].

As a leader, you want to do everything possible to safeguard your team's mental health. Although trying days can seem to outnumber the good, you can take proactive steps to ensure better days ahead. This guide will help by providing practical tips you can institute today to help improve your team's well-being and morale.

Low team morale can impact your business.

Low morale is more than negative energy or bad attitudes in the workplace—it can negatively impact your business in many powerful ways:

Decreased productivity

When your team members lack passion and drive, it affects their job performance. Gallup research concluded that highly engaged teams are 14% more productive than teams with low engagement, and disengaged team members cost their company approximately 18% of their annual salary.

Poor workplace culture

Unfortunately, bad vibes spread more easily than good. When one team member is feeling low, their unhappiness can pervade your entire team.

Serious mental health issues

Poor well-being and low morale can progress to more serious mental health issues, such as burnout and depression, that can lead to veterinary professionals leaving the field, or worse, committing suicide.

Increased absenteeism

Team members with low morale are more likely to repeatedly miss work, which brings down the entire team. Other team members are left to cover their duties, which increases stress, anxiety, and negative feelings.

Decreased client satisfaction

Unhappy team members are less likely to smile, speak politely, and go out of their way to satisfy your clients. Interactions with an unhappy technician or client service representative can negate the good medicine your team provides.

> "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success." — **Henry Ford**

Individual well-being contributes to team morale.

Your team members have vastly different personalities. Some can naturally take chaos and unpredictability in stride, while others struggle with the slightest change. Your team's overall morale depends heavily on each individual's personal well-being, and one unhappy veterinarian or technician can bring your entire team down.

Use this well-being checklist to regularly check in with each team member to see how they are doing, and identify ways to head off potential problems.

Check each statement that applies:

☐ I feel overwhelmed by the amount of work I have to do every day

☐ I take regular breaks during my work day

☐ I take time off from work to rest and recharge

☐ I feel that team morale has decreased compared to this time last year

☐ I am depressed or burned out

☐ I get adequate sleep each night

☐ I exercise regularly

☐ I eat healthy meals

☐ I regularly use relaxation techniques, such as yoga or meditation

☐ I regularly participate in activities I enjoy

Use the checked items to help your team members identify ways they can better care for themselves, and ways you can provide help.

If team members are feeling burned out or overwhelmed, it's important to help them identify strategies both within and outside of work to manage.

8 ways to boost your team's morale.

Going the extra mile to boost your team's morale is important every day—but it's crucial during challenging times. Use these tips to keep your team happy and engaged.

#1 Give specific praise

Your team needs to know how valuable and appreciated they are, and a simple "Good job today" doesn't always cut it. Share sincere, specific praise with each team member as often as possible. Instead of sharing generic praise, say "I saw how much time you spent teaching Fluffy's owner how to give insulin injections. She was really nervous about it, but she seemed much calmer when she left. You made such a difference." Or, "Fido is much more comfortable after you noticed he was in pain and advocated for his welfare. Helping him walk outside for a potty break and ensuring he received pain medications significantly improved his demeanor." Your genuine and specific praise can turn around a bad day, and leave your team members beaming with pride.

#2 Avoid overworking your team

When work becomes chaotic, life often follows suit. Long hours and workplace tension mean that your team members are home less often, and are likely tired and stressed out when they are. They can't keep up with housework and family obligations, and the stress becomes a vicious cycle. Although maintaining a full team amid the current veterinary professional shortages can be challenging, try to schedule enough employees that you don't have to repeatedly lean on your core team to bear the extra load. They may happily pitch in to help, but the extra work will eventually take its toll.

Additionally, review your workflows to ensure they are efficient and don't take extra time out of your team's day. Eliminating inefficient practice management software, slow processes, and redundant tasks can help your team find more time in the day, and relieve stress.

> Overworked team members are often tired and stressed out at home, which leads to a vicious cycle. Ensure your team has ample time off, and offer flexible scheduling.

#3   Be flexible

When you ask more of your team, you have to be prepared to also give more. If a team member needs an occasional day off to care for a sick child or attend to a personal matter, approve their request, provided they will not take advantage of your generosity. If necessary, back up your scheduled team with on-call employees who can cover at a moment's notice.

#4   Cater to your team's likes

Instead of cold pizza in the break room again, find unique ways to show your team how much you appreciate their hard work. Food is always a powerful motivator, but fun activities and unique gifts can be more meaningful, especially if they play double duty and help decrease stress. Try a trip to a nearby park, complete with hospital branded water bottles, or an afternoon yoga session with team T-shirts. Having fun together can melt away stress and do wonders for your team's morale.

#5   Emphasize your core values and goals

Do your team members understand how their role fits into the practice's values and business goals? Although you may discuss key performance indicators (KPIs) with the executive team only, every team member should understand how they contribute to your practice's overall success. Your team will be more motivated, and may find renewed purpose, if they know you are working toward AAHA accreditation, or equipment that will allow you to offer expanded services. Even if you share only basic financial and growth goals, your team members will have the satisfaction of knowing how they contribute to your accomplishments.

> Every team member should understand how their role fits into your practice's business goals and success. Knowing how they contribute can motivate your team and help raise morale.

#6   Provide incentives

Once you share practice goals, incentivize your team members to help. For example, if you want to accumulate enough capital to purchase a new therapeutic laser, show your team how they can contribute by encouraging clients to purchase parasite prevention, or scheduling more dental cleaning, grooming, or boarding appointments. Offer a gift card for the team member who contributes the most each month. Or, let your team know that you will take them on a fun trip if you meet a larger, loftier goal, such as adding 10% to last year's net profits.

#7 **Celebrate together**

It can be easy to forget about, or put off, birthdays and work anniversaries when business is chaotic, but your team desperately needs a fun break during stressful times. No matter how busy you are, carve out an hour to celebrate important milestones with your team, complete with catered food, cake, and gifts.

#8 **Check in with your team regularly**

Scheduling one-on-one time with each team member lets them know you truly value their mental health and are invested in their long-term well-being. Knowing you care will lift your team's morale, and help them look ahead to better times. Use the included well-being checklist to assess each team member's mental outlook, and pinpoint areas that could lead to future well-being and morale issues.

When times are chaotic, it can seem like there is no end in sight. But, brighter days are always ahead. The pandemic is easing up, and things are slowly returning to a new normal.

Well-being and morale are always important—in tough times, and good. Use this practical guide to help improve team morale and keep motivation high during the pandemic, and beyond. With your guidance, your team can stay strong during tough times, and flourish when things improve.

"Tough times don't last. Tough teams do." — **Unknown**

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Veterinary Software

Does your practice management software improve team morale?

Inefficient workflows can quickly damage your team's morale, especially during chaotic times. Cloud-based veterinary practice management software can help streamline processes, allowing your team to complete common tasks faster and with improved accuracy. Built-in, stress-free training allows your team to quickly master new software independently, but with the confidence of knowing that support is always available to help. With its intuitive design and ease, cloud-based veterinary software can significantly decrease your team's stress, and raise morale.

Learn more about IDEXX Veterinary Software

"The training was excellent, and within 12 hours our team was using Neo Software with no problems."

Dr. Gina Finney, Valet Vet Mobile Veterinary Services

"Anything you need to do, the system will walk you through doing it. When I saw how easy it was to use compared to [our previous system], it really became a no-brainer for me."

David Anderson, Practice Manager at Companion Animal Hospital

"ezyVet gives us the information we need to make better decisions. I do think ezyVet has helped us improve our care tremendously, I absolutely do."

Ginger Reagan, Owner and Veterinarian at Reagan Equine

"The built-in training saves me time and ensures that everyone on my team feels confident and comfortable using Neo."

Candice Barber, Office Manager at Acadian Animal Hospital