Recipe for Happiness

The Definition of Happiness
What do you find when you Google the word *happiness*? The definition is: a mental or emotional state of well-being defined by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. Happy mental states may also reflect judgements by a person about their overall well-being.

If we think about it, we typically spend more hours at work than anywhere else, our happiness and positivity there can impact other areas of our life.

Why Should We Be Concerned About Our Happiness?
It should not be surprising to read or hear about veterinary practices investing significant time, attention, and resources into their team members’ well-being, because it positively correlates with individual and practice performance.

Keeping in mind that happiness can only be *partly* assessed based on career and job satisfaction studies (as job satisfaction is only a related construct to estimate workplace happiness), based on these studies, the following broad strokes may be forwarded. It appears, based on global questions of career and job satisfaction, that most (70% to 80%) veterinarians are happy. At the same time, it appears that happiness may be on the decline, as fewer veterinarians consider themselves “more happy,” and more consider themselves “less happy,” than 5 years ago; fewer veterinarians consider themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy compared with a decade ago; and fewer veterinarians seem to be recommending veterinary medicine as a career. Sources of dissatisfaction include on-the-job stress (with time management, clients’ inability to pay for services, and difficult client and coworker relationships), the amount of money earned, the chances for promotion, and the amount of recognition received. Sources of satisfaction include challenging work and keeping up with advances, good client and coworker relationships, and helping clients and animals. ¹

Cost vs. Rate of Return
Most in the veterinary field knew from a young age that they wanted to be in the field of veterinary medicine. As the demand for veterinary school admission grows, there is a squeeze facing veterinarians or those aspiring to be; when looking at the cost vs rate of return (salary) is causing many to stay get out or stay out of the field.

Aspiring veterinarians should also be mindful of the debt-to-income ratio they’ll face upon graduation – the total amount owed after completing a veterinary program versus their starting salary. Veterinarians face a high debt-to-income ratio, and often dig a deep hole in order to fund their education. According

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to a study featured in the Cornell Chronicle, the ratio for new veterinarians climbed above 160 percent in 2010 alone.  

Cost vs. Rate of Return

![Graph showing happiness and debt-free status for DVM graduates.]

What Makes You Happy?
Invite your team members to consider the following questions, and compare your responses with his or hers:

- What things (eg, people, activities) make me happy?
- When something makes me really happy, how long does the happiness last? (be specific)
- How would I define positivity in my life right now?
- Is it easy for me to maintain a positive outlook, especially after a setback?
- If I increased my overall happiness and positivity levels, what might be different?

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This is a way to learn more about yourself and your coworkers. Knowing this can help you make choices about how you want to lead your life and your team. It may also help you understand your coworkers better and how they react to stressors.

Making It a Better Day

Ever wonder what your technician’s or team members are thinking? Did you ever think to ask your technician for THEIR feedback on how the veterinary clinic workplace could be changed to help make a better day for staff, clients and patients?

You may find that your staff is struggling, striving very hard to do better, they may feel happiness but also anger. If you are leading a team as the Practice Manager you may find asking this question of feedback from your staff helpful.

Given the practice schedule from the morning being very busy admitting patients, then normal work begins and then seeing patients. You may find that your staff feels there is no down time to pull themselves together.

To make it a better day, you may consider the following:

- Change hospital policy to allow 1 10-minute break in the AM, 1 10-minute break in the afternoon, and at least 30 - 45 minutes for lunch
- Stop all unnecessary walk-in appointments! If a pet is very sick, of course tell clients to bring their pet in. But if the patient needs a vaccination, or to have a mass checked that’s been there for years and not growing, have the client make an appointment
- For emergency walk-in’s that happen within 30 minutes of closing, efforts should be made to stabilize the pet and recommend that the pet go to the nearest ER for further care; a follow-up appointment should be made
- If sending the pet to the nearest ER is not something you’d consider, then consider staffing an on-call team of LVT’s which can be provided by The Life Work Balance
- Have your Administrative staff ask non-emergency walk-ins what appointment time would work best for them
- Last appointments of the day should be scheduled 30 to 45 minutes prior to closing, with the exception of emergencies as these are understandable and unforeseen
- Management should be walking the floor throughout the day and helping staff where and when needed. That allows management to stay connected and also understand the challenges the staff is facing day-to-day. This also allows the staff to understand and feel that management is someone they can not only relate to but also trust to know what they are facing when they find themselves unhappy about the life around them.

Footnotes:
VETERINARY ECONOMICS
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- Consider a relief agency (The Life Work Balance) to assist your staff in reducing workload and providing duly needed time away from work
- Consider a consulting firm (The Life Work Balance) that will assist you and your staff in ending the repeat practices that cause confusion and stress within your clinic. The Life Work Balance will assist you in stopping the cycle of reinventing the wheel. Our goal is to help you discover a pathway to success. We invest time with you and your staff. We listen and brainstorm to ensure we construct a plan with realistic and adaptable solutions tailored to your specific needs

In Closing
At The Life Work Balance, we believe that adopting any or all of the above practices may help you revive and sustain happiness in your clinic. Happiness may be driven by personal events. But, if we spend most of our time in the workplace, we cannot underplay the importance of workplace happiness. The recipe for happiness depends on you!

Footnotes: