

Practice Pulse



The Official Newsletter of the Veterinary Hospital Managers Association - January 2008 Issue

Serving the profession for 25 years!

Starting a Local Managers Group

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There are many opportunities for networking available to managers. Many of these opportunities are benefits of membership in the VHMA. With your membership you have access to a message board, list serv, and mentor program. In addition, the VHMA holds three continuing education meetings per year (Management Retreat in February, Summer Meeting in June, and Annual Meeting in October). These are fantastic venues to learn, participate, and network. But there is also another way to tap into the resources that managers can provide to one another on a more frequent basis - a local managers group.

Throughout the United States and Canada, there are many individuals who have been successful at starting and maintaining a group of local practice managers that meet on a regular basis. These groups sometimes have speakers who present on topics such as: human resources, accounting, marketing, OSHA compliance, team building, employee motivation, etc. In addition to speakers that are brought in to present, many local groups also use roundtable discussions to further shared learning and networking. Many groups have found that meeting on a regular basis, with a topic in mind each month, leads to lengthy discussions and shared advice. They have learned that tapping into the local resources and opportunities that are out there can be of great benefit.

Have you ever wondered how to get a group started? Here is general list of items that you will need to consider when starting a local managers' group.

1. Create a list of contacts:
 - a. Use your vendors to help get you started! They know which practices have a practice manager and are usually more than happy to make an introduction.
 - b. Look at the VHMA membership for other managers in your area. Their membership in VHMA shows their interest in self-improvement and continuing education.
 - c. Contact practices that are within a reasonable geographic area to find out if they have a manager. If they do, talk to this person. Let them know what you are trying to accomplish, what the goal is for starting this group. Don't forget to ask if they are willing to volunteer time and energy in helping to organize the group.

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Management

Management works in the system. Leadership works on the system.

Stephen R. Covey

Welcome to Our New CVPM Members

Debra Bahr, CVT (Rochester, MN)
Debbie Bazemore (Woodstock, GA)
Nichole Kelly, CVT (Fort Collins, CO)
Carolyn M. Lawrence (Las Vegas, NV)
Linda Littell, RN, MBA (Thurmont, MD)
Ann Rivers Moore, LVT (Woodbridge, VA)

Kandi L. Nelson (Glendale, AZ)
Cindy L. Remick (Edmonds, WA)
Julie J. Rodenberg (Holmen, WI)
Andria D. Saxon, CVT (Eugene, OR)
Kristine L. Smith (Huntsville, AL)
Cheryl A. Waterman (Overland Park, KS)

VHMA's certification program measures the knowledge and experience necessary to successfully manage the ever-changing business management of today's veterinary practices and requires a continued commitment to further improvement through continuing education. For more information visit the [CVPM page](#) of the VHMA Web site.

Upcoming Events

Management Retreat

February 1-3 - St. Augustine, FL

Summer Meeting

June 6-8 - Toronto, ON

Annual Meeting & Conference

October 3-5, 2008 - TBA

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www.vhma.org.

President's Message

Stutly Moase



Happy New Year to all of you! I hope everyone enjoyed the holidays with friends and family. In last month's message I talked about the importance of a budget, now I would like to shift focus to the importance of the mission statement. Your mission statement should serve as your measuring stick against which all of your business decisions should be measured. The mission statement should always be the foundation of your budget, your purchases, policies, procedure, culture, and the reason that you and your staff come to work. It does not need to be long, just functional and specific to your practice. If you do not have one it should be a priority for this year.

Your mission statement should include the standards that you and your staff wish to reflect and it should challenge you to meet them. For example, part of your mission statement may include your commitment to always placing the well being of the pet above all else or make a statement about your commitment to quality. It may also include a statement about your commitment to being progressive in ideas, procedures, and products.

In 2007 my practice purchased a laser for surgery. In addition to meeting the financial conditions of our budget, the purchase was consistent with our mission statement because the use of the laser prevents pets from bleeding and reduces their pain. I have always been the first to say that doctors "like their toys" and don't consider the cost, the return, or how it affects the budget. What I have learned to understand is that sometimes, while it may not be evident at first glance, their first priority IS the "pet" which follows our commitment to placing the well being of the pet above all else.

Your mission statement should include the standards that you and your staff wish to reflect and it should challenge you to meet them.

So how do you create a mission statement? One good way to start is to ask all your staff members to bring one or two words that best describe your hospital and the care it provides to the next staff meeting. Then ask them to write down a few words or lines that explain why they love coming to work at your practice. Brainstorm at the meeting to find two to six lines that everyone agrees best describe the hospital. Leave it for a while and get together again at a later date to summarize the information into a mission statement.

Another good source, especially if you are small clinic is to search the Web. You can quickly find 40-50 mission statements that other hospitals are using from around the world. I would not suggest simply cutting and pasting another hospital's mission statement onto your letterhead, but you can get great ideas this way.

Once you have finalized your mission statement you need to get the staff to put it into practice. Their participation in the creation process should make this an easy transition. Proudly display your mission statement throughout the hospital. Make your staff accountable to live the mission and be sure to read your mission statement regularly at staff meetings to ensure that discussions and decisions reflect your mission. Include your mission statement on your Web site, letterhead, and business cards. ***If your clients know your mission statement they will hold you accountable to it!***

- d. Obtain contact information and let them know when you will be back in touch.
2. Research potential meeting locations.
 3. Meet with the group of individuals who would like to help organize the group and come up with a game plan.
 - a. When do you want to schedule the first meeting? Remember, you will never find a time that suits everyone. Each manager will have to set his or her own priorities.
 - b. Where are you going to meet?
 - c. How often will the group meet? Monthly meetings work well for many groups, poll members frequently to find out when/where works best. Mix-it up...one idea from the managers' group in Indianapolis is to have lunch meetings monthly with a semi-annual evening dinner.
 - d. What will the first meeting be like? Will there be a speaker, roundtable discussion, or is the first meeting going to be informal to gauge interest in the area? If you are going to have a speaker, who will it be?
 - e. Will you be contacting sales representatives about sponsoring your local group meeting/dinner? What are the expectations for the sales reps? Will they have the opportunity to distribute material or discuss their company products and services?
 - f. Put some thought into a name for your network group. Create a name with a catchy acronym. You want to create brand identification with members, speakers, and sponsors.
 4. Create the meeting agenda:
 - a. Sign-in sheet with contact information (e-mail addresses are very useful).
 - b. Introductions of attendees.
 - c. Thank sponsor if applicable.
 - d. If you are going to have a roundtable discussion, it is a good idea to determine and announce the topic in advance and have a facilitator to keep discussions moving along.
 - e. Be sure to ask participants what they would like to see from future meetings.
 - f. End of the meeting:
 1. Thank everyone for coming.
 2. Request volunteers.
 3. Announce date and topics for the next meeting.

Common questions:

Should your local group collect membership dues? Many groups are loosely formed and do not charge membership fees. There are also established groups that have found dues collection to be beneficial. These groups feel that dues are necessary to promote the group and grow. Do what works best for your group.

How do you get the word out about the meetings? Most local management groups send out meeting announcements via fax and/or e-mail. Word of mouth from participants, awareness by sales representatives, and contacting practices individually are all successful ways to grow the contact list.

What about a Web site? This is something that some groups have found successful. It is certainly not a requirement and not something that has to be done at the time of formation. The VHMA hosts a list of local managers groups on the Web site. Be sure to post your group's meeting and contact information there (the local manager group listings can be found under Links of Interest or under Quick Links on the home page).

Concerns some managers have expressed regarding local groups are that they worry about another practice 'stealing' their ideas. On the contrary, the goal should be for ALL managers to learn from one another so their practice grows and is successful. Membership in a local management group can help you create your own "peer support group." After all, as managers, we operate without a peer group in a workplace environment that can be stressful and demanding. Developing relationships with other managers gives you the ability to pick up the phone and discuss a problem or seek advice from a fellow manager. Remember, there are plenty of clients out there for all of us. You only have control over what happens within the walls of your own practice. If other practices improve, it elevates the entire profession and the industry benefits.

The best advice for a local group just forming is to start small... but know that your network group has the power to become as big as you decide you want it to be. There are many bridges that you will cross as the group matures. Whether or not the group officially registers as a non-profit organization (which some groups have successfully done) and operates with a Board of Directors, Officers, etc., is all up to you and your network. As a group, you decide how far you want to take it.

After reading this information it probably sounds like a local management group is a lot of hard work. It certainly can be, but by forming a good foundation with a core group of volunteers to help, you'll find it much easier. The networking opportunities that the group provides are invaluable and can help create a lifeline of support. Networking can help you improve your own performance, knowledge, and skills. Additionally, you will be able to meet new people, build mutually beneficial business relationships, and have a key source for information and support. This is definitely a scenario where the benefits gained far out way the time that must be dedicated.

As managers we can all benefit from helping one another. We all have experiences and skills that are unique to us and that others can learn from. In addition, why take the time to create something from scratch when there are others who can share what they did in a similar situation.

So, take the first step by calling a colleague to talk about starting a local managers group. You'll be surprised how many others share your interest!

Meeting Topic Ideas:

- Client reward programs
- Marketing your practice
- How to read financial statements
- Employee training
- Employee handbooks
- Legal issues in veterinary medicine
- Employee motivation ideas
- Effective staff meetings
- Hiring techniques
- OSHA compliance

Articles in the VHMA monthly newsletter and/or other professional magazines/journals provide great topic suggestions as well.



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Welcome New Members

Crystal Bentley (Edgewater, MD)
Julie Bradford (Worthington, OH)
Nancy Browall (Dunnellon, FL)
Rachel Burrell (Syracuse, NY)
Ellen Cantu (Chicago, IL)
Audrey Clendenning (Highlands Ranch, CO)
April Collins, RVT (Cincinnati, OH)
Joseph Dedeo (Latham, NY)
Traci A. Delos (Tigard, OR)
Stephen R. DeMay, MBA (Charlotte, NC)
Karen Dietrich (Indianapolis, IN)
Robin Downing, DVM (Windsor, CO)
Kelly J. Dunn (La Quinta, Ca)
Christine Erdmann, CVT (Wayzata, MN)
Billie Fisher (Waukesha, WI)
Kristy Folz (Carlsbad, CA)
Audrey H. Forth, LVT (Seattle, WA)
Sherry Ann Franz (Warren, MI)
Diane F. Grant (Bozeman, MT)

Joseph Hooker (Ocala, FL)
Eric Darnell Johnson, RVT (Dallas, TX)
Kathy Kent (San Rafael, CA)
Arvadia Diane Mason (Chapel Hill, NC)
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Robert Juan Olivas (Citrus Heights, CA)
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Trina M Particelli (Rowley, MA)
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Kathy Sylvester (Rutherford, NJ)
Tal Tenzer (New York, NY)
Alison Ward (Seminole, FL)
Rena Woods (Scottsdale, AZ)
Cat Hospital of Chicago (Chicago, IL)