

Who is the Rainmaker in Your Practice

By: Louise S. Dunn

SNOWGOOSE **RAIN NEEDS OF THE GARDEN**

I am sitting in my lawn chair with a magazine but I am not reading it. I am looking at my garden and wondering if it rained enough this week for the plants in my garden. Concerned, yet confused, I wonder just how much rain my garden needs so I head indoors and Google my query. I get sites that tell me to dig and hole and fill it with water and time the draining, to sites that tell me to order a moisture meter to monitor the soil moisture. I watch the weather reports for future rain dates, I scan the weather site for rain totals from previous days. I decide to go back outside and make it "rain" via the gardenhose.

In the process of looking about the rain or "watering needs" I came across "rainmaking." One involves the American Indian ritual that seeks to cause rain, then there was the scientific technique of seeding clouds with silver iodide crystals, but it was the third definition that got me thinking about the veterinary industry. The slang term for rainmaking- when an executive or lawyer attracts clients and increases profits. Is it possible to do rainmaking in the veterinary practice?

RAINMAKING IN YOUR VETERINARY PRACTICE

Rainmaking in the veterinary practice is equivalent to watering your veterinary practice so it can grow. Rainmaking means attracting new clients, increasing profits, keeping customers and achieving results. Sounds like all the things the Bayer Study reported on and what veterinary practice owners are interested in seeing in their own practice.

How can one "seed the clouds" of the practice to get the rain started? For starters, it is not about your brand or corporate image. It is about face-to-face interactions, addressing client needs and enabling clients to access your services as easily as possible. Once again, isn't this what every veterinary practice owner talks about? Rainmaking does apply to the veterinary industry. So where are the rainmakers in your practice? Truth be told, every member of your team can be a rainmaker - all you need to do is look.

DEVELOPING RAINMAKERS

An article titled, "5 ways to turn every employee into a rainmaker" gives a nice, concise, easy to implement a program to apply to your practice. Take some time to examine your own practice and see if you can develop some rainmakers using the following steps:

1. Technology versus Face-to-face

Does your team listen to your clients and make an effort to accommodate the client? Or do you hear the statements such as: "our policy states that....," "that's not how we do things here....," "you can only drop off between the hours of....," "do you give heartworm preventives? flea preventive? blah, blah, blah." Are you relying too much on Web site and Facebook interactions to gain client loyalty?

Chances are, if you regularly hear a team member saying those phrases, that person probably isn't taking the time to listen to the needs of the client and is risking the loss of a client. Client loyalty develops when a client feels they are being heard and their needs are being met. I am not saying to let chaos take over, but we all know there are ways to help out a client while still maintaining control of the appointment book and your sanity. Perhaps it is time to see if bureaucracy (scripts, handbooks and checksheets), or technology (automated machines or posting on the Web site) has gotten in the way of listening to your clients.

2. Understand the selling process

Does your team know where most of your new clients come from? Is it word-of-mouth, Facebook, Yellowpages or Web site searches? How can your team be a rainmaker if they have no clue where to perform the rain dance?

Of all the metrics you can monitor, one should be where your new clients are hearing about you and which of your current clients are promoting you. In most cases, we value the word-of-mouth over all other methods of attracting a new client. To achieve rainmaking from word-of-mouth you will want your team to deliver exceptional client service so that it is talked about around town.

Monitoring your promoters is done through a process called the Net Promoter Score. By asking the question, "Would you recommend us to a friend or colleague?" you can begin to identify how many of your clients are doing some rainmaking for you and then reward them for their efforts.

Additionally, how easy is it to navigate your Web site? Set up an appointment? Get a refill on medications? These daily activities seem routine to your team but may be fraught with hurdles for a client who contacts you a few times a year. Take some time to look at the processes and see if you are turning clients into detractors just because they can't get their needs taken care of when they try to contact you.

3. Share Information

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Does your team understand their role in promoting the services and products in your practice? Do they know how the business is doing? Which services are being requested and which are not? Do they see how their efforts affect the business?

There is something to be said for Open Book Management and educating the team on business metrics. One of the best ways to encourage employee engagement is to involve them in some management tasks regarding the performance of the business side of veterinary medicine. Get a rainmaking team together to track new clients, return on advertising efforts and other important services offered by your practice. Having this team give a monthly report will let the team see what efforts are active and successful, then they can build on this success to tackle other areas.

4. Reward

Do you encourage ideas and problem solving from every member of the team? Or do you feel that only owners and managers are capable of generating ideas or solving problems?

People who work directly with clients have an opportunity to hear first-hand what the needs are and if the needs are being met. Encourage suggestions, set up a suggestion team to review and respond to suggestions in a timely manner (not having just a manager do this function opens the lines of communication). Reward ideas by giving prizes. You can easily develop rainmakers if they see that you are looking for their input and implementing ideas.

5. Hire Right or Fire

Do you have team members who are rude to clients? Are they the ones who get the client complaints lodged against them? Are you unable to correct these issues with education and training? It may be time to release these people from the team.

You can't have team members choking out progress and growth. Rainmakers are not people who are rude or lack the responsibility to see that clients are cared for and happy (these individuals are more like weeds zapping the energy of others and choking client loyalty). There will be a time to release those members who are not able to grow your business. It may be possible that some of your rainmakers have talked about the business and know people who want to be part of a great team - check it out.

HOW TO MEASURE YOUR RAIN LEVELS

Once you begin to realize that anyone and everyone on your team can be a rainmaker, and you put forth the effort to establish a rainmaking program, how do you know if it is working? What "soil testing meter" do you need to have in order to assess how much rain your practice is getting?

- Client surveys - Net Promoter questions, Online surveys
- Client contacts - how many email and text contacts are you getting from your clients
- Profit center metrics - Wellness visits / Fecal exams, Medical exams / Progress Check Exams, etc.
- Suggestion activity from the team

Set your rainmaking team to task to monitor the rainfall in your practice and report to the team. Work with them to set goals for the practice and establish metrics to track to keep everyone aware of the "soil moisture."

Rainmakers are not fake in their efforts, they have a passion and energy in their work. They generate business by using their knowledge and passion to communicate to clients and other people in your community. The ultimate key ingredient for Rainmaking is this - developing relationships with people and gaining their trust. Rainmakers will help your practice grow and allow you to achieve your goals.

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Resources:

Pofeldt, E. March 3, 2011. Open Forum. 5 Ways to Turn Every Employee into a Rainmaker. Online. <http://www.openforum.com/idea-hub/topics/managing/article/5-ways-to-turn-every-employee-into-a-rainmaker-elaine-pofeldt>

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