

Worth Their Weight in Gold – The “Priceless” Team Member Learning Objectives

By: Louise S. Dunn



Improve employee engagement through the use of OBM

- Monitor Human Resource & Production KPIs that will help you gauge team member engagement
- Gain the competitive edge in hiring and retention using specific Human Resource KPIs for team members

In the final article of the three-part series on priceless relationships, the team relationship is examined. We often forget about our team, paying more attention to those ‘priceless’ puppies or that ‘priceless’ Mrs. Smith (yes, sometimes said with sarcasm). Even though we have all been told how important the team is to the success of the practice have we really spent much time assessing, acquiring or developing our precious metals?

What is Gold Worth?

We all love having that invaluable team member. You know the one- irreplaceable, worth their weight in gold – if you could clone them you would have done so years ago. Does that priceless team member just show up at your door? Alternatively, is it possible to develop that type of team member? What if you could initiate some activities that would lead to engaged team members, innovative thinkers and strong leaders? Would you jump at the chance to have an entire team of “priceless gems” or do you just hope they will fall into your lap?

The last two articles delved into the techniques of monitoring your services and your client relationships. Much of the data is used as a technique called Open Book Management whereby your team is involved in gathering the data, hearing the results, and participating in developing improvement initiatives. While the focus of the previous articles has been on the services offered to the pets and the relationship with the pet owners, the fact that the employee or team members played an intricate role was never neglected, albeit slightly underscored by the business of running a practice. It is now time to look at the one vital aspect of your business – the primary asset for delivering medical care and bonding with the clients – your employees.

Diamond in the Rough

Your team members are gems just waiting to shine. For some, you knew their worth as soon as you hired them. For others, it was a process whereby they developed over the years. And yes, there are some that you almost consider a lump of clay that may never take shape. What tools and techniques are available to you to mold that clay or polish that gem? Do you even care to try?

Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, is quoted as saying, “In addition to trying to WOW our customers, we also try to WOW our employees... We believe that is creates a virtuous circle, and in our own way, we’re making the world a better place to live.” Wowing your clients is easy to understand – the previous articles mentioned ways to monitor the level of engagement of your clients and learn what their needs are so you may make changes to your practice to satisfy them and wow them. However, what about your team members? Can you wow them?

The opinions of your team members matter more than merely checking if they are happy. Disengaged employees hurt client satisfaction and productivity so all those efforts to SWOT your services and client relationships are a waste of time if the people in your business (those people on your bus) are the wrong people in the wrong seats.

To polish your “diamonds in the rough” it will be helpful to use three toolboxes: Train/develop tools, Networking tools, and How you contribute tools. Each of these toolboxes has specific tools in them to help with your gem polishing.

Train/develop toolbox contains tools to help develop your team members. Mapping a career path for each individual and even advancing into areas of credentialing and licensing team members. Some of these tools can be linked with outside sources such as the CVP (Certified Veterinary Practice Manager) and the VTS (Veterinary technician specialist). However, do not forget the power of on-the-job training and creating internal Subject Matter Experts based on your unique business and the services you want to offer.

Expanding an individual’s work duties means progressing through training and being more accountable to the business. Accessible training and being self-directed will allow your team member to progress at their own pace, while having a designated Learning Officer will ensure that strategic initiatives of the practice are made known for developing talent to carry out those initiatives.

Your networking toolbox is all about staying connected. Connecting the employee with each other and with the business via mobile access and certain social media tools. For example, consider time and attendance apps for your team where you make the schedule available online and the team has the ability to track changes in

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business scheduling needs, respond to any scheduling change requests, and monitor their own tier and attendance. Other tools, commonly seen in Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) may be utilized by your practice – such as tracking training modules completed by the team, acknowledging those who have completed a training series and have achieved a performance level based on completed skill and knowledge levels.

The third toolbox is the contribution toolbox. In this toolbox you have tools to help with work/life balance, stay interviews, how to connect with the strategic plan of the business, how to gauge client’s experiences and be empowered to handle client requests and complaints. This final toolbox brings together the business of a veterinary practice and the purpose of coming to work every day.

Many business publications talk about employee “engagement” or “satisfaction” as if they medications to give to your team members. In reality, it is about you (the practice owner and management team) working hard at polishing your talent into wonderful “gems”, you do not want to lose.

Platinum Level

If you are going to take the time to polish those old rocks into nice, shiny gemstones, then you need to monitor your progress. In the previous sessions it was duly noted how to perform a SWOT analysis of your services and client relationships so it should come as no surprise that a similar recommendation is going to made regarding your team members. Management must be informed about employee engagement, even trained on how to monitor employee engagement, since this influences all aspects of performance, dedication to the practice mission and client service.

Employee engagement is not just about their satisfaction with their employment. Consider the following items for an employee scorecard:

- Communication
- Physical environment
- Rewards and recognition
- Training and development
- Alignment with the practice’s mission
- Personal development and feedback

To consider moving beyond “gems” and to the “platinum level” one must look at developing people (not just being satisfied with a warm body, albeit a gem of a professional warm body). It really is about staffing and future staffing for your practice. It is about developing high-potential employees and succession planning for the future. It is about aligning with the mission of the practice and developing a team with the right capabilities for delivering exceptional medical care and excellent client service.

It is well known that many employees quit a job, not because the job is difficult or the work environment is problematic, but because there are issues with the manager that are not resolved. Given this fact, owners and managers must take responsibility and be held accountable for developing and engaging employees. The only way to do this is to develop some workforce analytics to monitor (SWOT) your team.

Review the attached form to aid you in performing an analysis of your workforce and developing your gems. Now for the role of Open Book Management – report your findings to the team and involve them in any corrective projects. Say, for instance, that a survey points to an unusually high number of employees not taking advantage of continuing education seminars. Involve the team, either with additional surveys or with brainstorming sessions to get to the root cause of the problem. Perhaps it is the lack of funding paid by the practice, maybe it is the practice culture not welcoming new ideas for change, or maybe it is confusion on what seminars are really beneficial to the perform the job. In any of these scenarios, management must take action through either policy changes or leadership initiatives.

In the end, monitoring the level of satisfaction and engagement of your team will effectively assist you with improving your productivity levels, enhancing your ability to recruit and retain top performers, help you to mitigate unnecessary turnover and enable you to increase client bonding and loyalty.

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