



# Veterinary Wisdom®

for practice teams

## Seven Secrets for Building Trust

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Trust is basic to any good relationship and especially necessary for effective communication. When trust between people, or between clients and professionals, is lost or damaged, it can be very difficult to repair.

According to Michael Annison and Dan Wilford, authors of Trust Matters: New Directions in Health Care Leadership, when trust is challenged, three main questions arise. These are:

- Can I trust these people?
- Can I trust this organization or business?
- Can I trust the field these people and this business represent?

These questions are important ones for veterinary professionals to consider.

Currently, veterinary medicine is one of the most trusted and respected professions in the country. Why? Because most veterinarians are wise enough to provide high quality medical care for pets AND skilled emotional support and understanding for pet owners, when it is required.

Providing skilled emotional support builds a 'culture of care' within a veterinary practice. When support is consistent, familiar, and as standardized as possible, high levels of trust are built between members of your practice staff and clients.

Annison and Wilford say the following elements comprise the basic nature of trust and trusting relationships. Trust may be damaged when one or more of these elements are missing from a relationship.

### Commitment

Commitment is shown by behaviors and actions that clearly and consistently demonstrate that a person, business, or organization is dedicated to something more than themselves or their own personal gain.

In a veterinary practice, this is evident when you make time to consult with clients about treatment decisions they are facing (at no additional charge) or when you follow up after a pet's discharge from your clinic.

### Familiarity

Familiar relationships and surroundings are those that are known and predictable. Familiarity usually develops over time and after many encounters.

In your practice, important elements of familiarity might be key members of your staff, greeting protocols when clients arrive, and waiting room furnishings or décor that meet client needs for comfort and convenience.

### Personal Responsibility

Personal responsibility is a willingness to 'own' one's words and behaviors, especially when mistakes are made.

In a veterinary practice, this is demonstrated when you apologize to a co-worker for an impatient outburst or when you admit to a client that you over-scheduled your day.

### Integrity

Integrity is that aspect of a person's character that brands him or her as honest and straightforward. The foundation of integrity is a high level of self-awareness and acceptance.

When a veterinary practice has integrity, the entire staff responds from the same set of values and principles, doing what's 'right' rather than what is more personally rewarding.

### Consistency

Consistency is the connection between what a person says and what they actually do. When words and behaviors match a person's beliefs, they are said to be congruent or consistent.

In a veterinary practice, people who are predictable or consistent over time are most likely to earn their clients' trust.

### Communication

Communication that is open, direct, and timely, especially when it concerns sensitive or difficult issues, is essential to developing trust.

This is especially important in veterinary medical settings where people often develop misconceptions or unrealistic expectations if a pet's condition and prognosis, along with a client's emotional state, are not openly discussed.

### Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Forgiveness means to stop feeling angry or resentful. Reconciliation means to make a relationship friendly again after a time of estrangement.

Restoring trust is difficult work. It requires people to acknowledge the problem they have with one another, gain empathy for each of their situations, and develop an openness to new ideas and ways of relating. Thoughtful discussions about 'what went wrong' and 'how it can be fixed' must occur. The goal of forgiveness and reconciliation is to make a relationship harmonious and compatible again. Once this occurs, both parties can work toward infusing the relationship with the seven elements that build trust.

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