

INTRODUCTION TO THE BRINGING OUT YOUR BEST PROGRAM

For many new or recent graduates from veterinary school, starting a new job is like being dropped in the deep end of the pool and told to swim to the side. Only the side keeps moving further and further away. Occasionally, there is a lifeguard to throw you a line.

I remember my first job. The day I was formally licensed, my boss found out before I did, I was given the keys to the practice, a pager (it was a while ago) and put on call. There were six exam rooms to cover. Emergency call every third night. Weekends. 45-minute cat spays. And although promised, not much in the way of guidance. What I learned is how NOT to treat a new graduate. I lasted 90 days.

This guide is created for both mentors and mentees. The expectation is to provide a road map to the start of a long term successful veterinary career. AND if the experience is what it is supposed to be, it will build confidence, trust, and skills that will last a lifetime. It is designed to cement a relationship between the practice and the young veterinarian that leads to more than a job, more than a career, but a commitment to the practice and the profession.

The term 'mentor' and 'mentoring' has been bantered about for many veterinary generations. In the veterinary field, the word has become almost meaningless because of its misuse and abuse. The word 'mentor' originated as the name of a friend of Odysseus entrusted with the education of Odysseus' son Telemachus in Homer's "The Odyssey". Over the years it has come to mean coach, tutor, counselor, guide, basically anyone who is a positive, guiding influence in another (usually younger) person's life.

In the case of a new or recent graduate, mentoring is universal for guidance. After years of didactic and clinical education, or even work experience in a different environment, the doctor is being introduced to a new situation. Often there is nothing in common to a prior world. How veterinary care is delivered; the team who helps to deliver that care; the physical plant (or truck) in which it is delivered; the culture that exists; and a plethora of other variables are unique to any prior knowledge.

It is the role of a mentor or mentors, really nurturer or nurturers, to help their new mentee to learn to crawl, to walk, to run, to sprint and eventually to be in shape to run the marathon that is being a veterinarian. I envision mentoring like Yoda and Luke in Star Wars or Master Po and "Grasshopper" in the classic TV show Kung Fu.

To be effective, this relationship should be synergistic. The mentor benefitting the mentee and the mentee also contributing to the mentor. The relationship must also include two-way respect and comfortable communication. Mentoring is not about threatening. Mentoring is about inspiring and trusting.

To be effective, there must be a commitment of time. While teaching on the clinical side, there must be dedicated focus on teaching. Think 'see one, do one, teach one'. On the personal side,

time must be shared and uninterrupted by work or digital devices. This is expected by all parties. The time committed NOW, may have short time costs (income) but will have long term benefits like compounding interest.

This program is designed to help bring young doctors up to speed clinically while concurrently being sensitive to their needs personally. This is a step-by-step program where each step feeds upon the next. Yes, it is possible to skip steps or go back. Yes, it is possible (and even likely) that some steps will need to be repeated.

The growth clinically is being overseen by a trio of people within the practice:

- Veterinarian
- Practice Manager
- Credentialed Technician
- Or another selected team member

The other role of the triad is to ensure the development of the mentee as a person. There is an abundance of stressors that new team members go through. Just by being a new team member their presence is disruptive to the team. Compound that with being a newly graduated (or recently graduated) veterinarian, there are extra stressors to monitor as a team fit and cultural assimilation take place. Performing a routine 'check up from the neck up' (CUFTNU) will let the mentee know you are concerned about them as a person not just as an income generator.

You will need to schedule routine meetings to review:

- The plan for the coming/next week
- The accomplishments from the prior week
- How things are going

All three of the mentors don't have to be there. HOWEVER, it is imperative that there is a means of communication between all mentors to ensure consistency in the messaging. There are places in the program for entering notes on communications between the mentors and mentee. These areas may also be used for any observations that the mentors make OR that any other members of the team make. Keep these up to date so that you avoid redundancy AND so that you can pick up any problems early in the process.

The ultimate goal: Create a highly functional, highly productive, and successful veterinarian who is also confident in themselves as a doctor, a teammate, and most importantly as a human being.

Reading this for the first time, you might think that progress will be excruciatingly slow. Probably because you have already been down this path. The person you are mentoring however has not. They were very good veterinary students. Now, you need to help them become very good veterinarians. This is a series of sprints to ultimately complete the marathon. Too many practices burnout young doctors because they don't give them tools and

support to be successful. Understanding that we want long term success and retention of the young doctor, be patient with the process---it is the outcome that is imperative.

This is also a work in progress and no two practices even owned by the same person or corporation do everything the same. Thus, there will be a need for some customization. Initial phone calls and discussions will enable early customization to a specific practice or even a specific clinician. As the program is completed, there will be ideas to add for future permutations. So, also keep track of what is working and what isn't. What is extraneous and what is missing.

GETTING STARTED

Review at least the first months' worth of mentoring. What don't you understand? What needs clarification? Look at dates for items to be accomplished. Look for line items that will need specific people to help. Look for line items that will require some very personalized attention and note by whom. Make assignments, deadlines, and monitoring dates and times ahead of time. You won't have time to do this once the program gets rolling.

Always be reading ahead so you can be prepared for the next weeks or months expectations. There are things you need to organize ahead of time, either as the mentor, mentee, or the team, to be able to accomplish some of the goals.

Share the list with trusted people who can help get the job done. This is all about the TEAMWORK really making the dreamwork.

Understand the importance of the CUFTNU. This may be the most significant part of mentoring. And this needs to be recognized by all parties.

FINALLY

To the mentors reading this: make it fun—for you and the mentee. You will find that the outline might help you identify areas within the practice that can use improvement. You will find that there are areas within YOU that can use improvement. Be patient. Be a good listener. Learn how to ask the tough questions. You are being given a seed—the best seed possible. A little dirt. A little water. A little (or maybe a lot of) fertilizer. And you, the sunshine, can help this seed become a mighty tree. Shine your light on the mentee. Unlock your mentees potential.

To the mentees reading this: make it fun for yourself as well. You are probably as stressed as you have ever been – new job, new career, new location, maybe even no family or friends nearby. As the seed, it is your job to take the nutrients provided and use them to the best of your ability to grow. Slowly at first and then more rapidly. The good news, the water is coming at you NOT like a firehose but via drip irrigation. You are NOT being dumped in the deep end and being asked to swim to a continuously moving wall. You are being provided a life preserver and lifeguard to ensure your safety as a veterinarian AND as a human being.

Bottom line, the ultimate success for all parties is based upon, one word: COMMUNICATION.
Feel free to communicate –listen, learn, ask questions, give answers.

Best of luck to all of you.

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