

## Career Challenges



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Jennifer grew up on a dairy farm in Western New York, where she quickly learned that she loved to take care of animals. In SUNY Delhi's Veterinary Science Technology program, she discovered that she not only enjoyed being part of a nursing team, but also had a knack for leading one. Since that time, she has taken on many leadership roles in veterinary medicine.

Jennifer and her husband are owned by an Australian shepherd, Roo; a Boston terrier, Zoom; two cats, Stinger and Chewy; and a "very boisterous" guinea pig, Miss Piggy. They are both active in the Larimer County 4H program, especially with meat quality assurance and dairy cattle projects, and attend numerous continuing education meetings for veterinary medicine.

# Keeping It Fresh: How to Rejuvenate Your Career

**W**ould you like to be more appreciated for, challenged by, and rewarded for the way you take care of your patients, educate clients, assist your teammates, and build your current practice? What about growing in a new position within your practice? Do you take advantage of continuing education (CE) opportunities from multiple sources? This article reviews options to assist you in expanding your veterinary medical knowledge by using continued learning and education to become more invested in your career and embracing change.

### BE OPEN TO CHANGE

All too often, we as veterinary technicians become complacent with our day-to-day routines and end up resisting change because we fear the unknown. When this happens, it does not take us long to begin to feel stagnant in our careers. We forget what made us want to become a part of this amazing profession in the first place, and going to work every day becomes "just a job." If you feel this way, you are not alone! Fear of change is a huge factor inhibiting our ability to grow in our careers and our personal lives. One of my favorite books is *Who Moved My Cheese?*, by Spencer Johnson, MD.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Johnson discusses change and fear as we grow in our lives and adapt to new situations. Although the story is



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**TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS** Webinars, teleconferences, and self-paced programs are excellent ways to get CE when you can't take the time away from the practice to go in person.

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simple, the message is powerful: change is inevitable, and how we deal with it shapes our future path. Are you ready for change?

When I look back on my career, I realize how important change was in leading me to develop new skills, follow new career paths, and foster new interests. In each practice where I have worked, I was fortunate to have owners who provided compensation for my continued education. According to Blackwell's 2014 *Five-Minute Veterinary Practice Management Consult*, 64% of responding practices pay a CE allowance to their full-time veterinary technicians. The median allowance value in 2014 was \$300.<sup>2</sup> We need to use the allowances our practice owners have allotted for our education and growth and take advantage of every opportunity. Does your current employer offer a CE allowance? Your success in your career and in the practice hinges on it.

For me, each new challenge in my career presented me with an opportunity to step out of my comfort zone and explore new horizons. Change may be something personal, such as developing new ways to communicate with peers and clients, or professional, such as learning how to care for a species you are unfamiliar with. Regardless, there are many resources available to make your learning experiences and transitions smooth and successful.

### PLAN TO GROW

Does your practice evaluate your skills, abilities, and knowledge on a regular basis? Have you identified your personal areas for growth and improvement? Performance evaluations can be intimidating if you are worried about what your employer may identify as areas of needed improvement. However, evaluations can also be empowering. Hold yourself accountable for your actions, take feedback to heart, make an honest effort to realize where you can improve, and then take action. Although many of the practices I worked in provided financial compensation for CE, I was the one who was most responsible for my own personal development. Blackwell's suggests creating your own "individual development plan."

These plans outline a 70/20/10 model of development, in which 70% of learning is acquired through on-the-job training, 20% from mentoring, and 10% from CE.<sup>2</sup> Having a plan of action can help you decide which CE options will help you maximize your growth potential.

Many states require CE and personal development for credentialed veterinary technicians. To find out what your state requirements are, you can contact the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (navta.net) or your state professional licensing department.<sup>3</sup>

### CONTINUE TO LEARN

The challenges we face in practice every day are real. They range from burnout to compassion fatigue, difficult and dangerous work, bullying, underappreciation, long hours, and low wages. However, we also experience inspiration, satisfaction, and miracles on a regular basis. This is what keeps us going through the difficult times and reminds us why we got into this field in the first place. Sometimes we need something more, though. Setting goals and working toward achieving them can provide you with the motivation you need to feel useful, accomplished, and fresh in your career. My grandfather taught me to strive to learn something new every day. This mantra has served me well throughout my life and has always challenged me to reach new heights. CE has afforded me the opportunity to make this a reality.

There are many options for CE events that you can attend in person. National conferences like the North American Veterinary Conference (NAVVC), CVC, Western Veterinary Conference (WVC), and American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Annual Convention take place throughout the year. Local and state conferences and symposia held at larger practices are also great opportunities. Attending conferences in person has advantages. In addition to some well-deserved time away from your normal routine, you have the opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals and share insights, ideas, and experiences. You also have the opportunity to visit with the many vendors who attend these events. Exhibit halls are a great place to network and learn about new products, current trends in technology, and advancements to make your patients' lives happy and healthy.

If you have difficulty getting to CE events in person, there are several other ways to participate in learning opportunities. Technology is an increasingly pervasive force in our society. Do you take advantage of the online options available to you? Webinars, teleconferences, and self-paced programs are excellent ways to get CE when you can't take the time away from the practice to go in person.

In addition to online programs, mobile apps are becoming quite popular. They include formularies, dosage calculators, study aids, and more, and are designed to assist you in improving efficiency and contributing to your knowledge base. Taking the time to explore some of these options and bringing them to your practice will benefit you and your team.

What if you can't go to a conference in person, or technology is not your thing? You can seek out in-practice education opportunities. Lunch-and-learns are a great option. Whether provided by the doctors in your practice or by preferred vendors, these brief sessions allow you to fit education opportunities and lunch into your busy schedule. Multitasking at its best!

### SHARE YOUR PROGRESS

Regardless of how you take advantage of technology and learning opportunities, it is important to share what you learn. Bring the information back to your team. Write a brief summary or prepare a presentation and share your knowledge. This is the best way not only to digest what you have learned and integrate new ideas, skills, and procedures into your current practice but also to demonstrate the value you bring to the practice. Your practice owners will appreciate your efforts and will be more likely to invest in your CE and that of the whole team. To realize the full reward of sharing and implementing what you've learned, think like your practice owner. This may help you understand how you can improve practice profitability and communicate the value and importance of what you've learned.

The end result of continued learning is continual growth, leading to improved patient care, client care, and success for the practice.

What keeps you motivated in your current position as a veterinary technician? What are you most passionate about? When you consider your CE and the areas of change that you would like to see within your practice, concentrate on the aspects you are most interested in. Pursuing these goals will bring personal fulfillment and serve as the catalyst to stimulate furthering your education and that of your teammates. Your fellow team members will be motivated to pursue further education in the areas they are passionate about and will bring that knowledge back to the practice. The end result of continued learning is continual growth, leading to improved patient care, client care, and success for the practice. Everybody wins. ■

#### References

1. Johnson S. *Who Moved My Cheese?* New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons; 1998.
2. Ackerman L. *Blackwell's Five-Minute Veterinary Practice Management Consult*. 2nd ed. Ames, IA: Wiley-Blackwell; 2014: 300, 301, 532, 533.
3. National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America website. [www.navta.net](http://www.navta.net).



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