



MENTORING GOES BOTH WAYS

Good mentors recognize that learning is a two-way street between the mentor and mentee.



MEET THE AUTHOR

Tami Lind, BS, RVT, VTS (ECC)
Purdue University, West
Lafayette IN

Become a Mentor and Step Up Your Leadership Game

Leadership can be looked at many ways.

I personally believe that being a leader in veterinary medicine means that you also have to be a mentor. According to the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), *mentoring* is defined as “an ongoing relationship between two individuals who are committed to improving their professional relationship.”¹

Tami Lind is currently ICU and ER supervisor at Purdue University and has been working at the university for the last 7 years. She attended veterinary technology school at Purdue and graduated in 2010 with a bachelor's degree in Veterinary technology. Two years later Tami assumed the ICU and ER supervisor role at Purdue University. She received her VTS in Emergency/Critical Care in 2016. Her passion is teaching veterinary nurses and veterinary students in preparing them for their career ahead.

shutterstock.com/santypan

Mentoring in your veterinary clinic can improve productivity, boost morale, and help with staff retention, creating a strong support system for the veterinarians that work at the practice.

There are many opportunities to mentor within the veterinary field. You can be a mentor to a veterinary nurse student, a veterinary student, a new veterinarian, a new employee, an assistant, or a volunteer.

One year after becoming a veterinary nurse, I was promoted to supervisor, which was quite daunting at first. Going from a nurse student being mentored to a veterinary nurse that had to mentor other students was a major step. Eventually, I took on the role of mentoring employees, veterinary students, veterinary technology students, interns and residents. Mentoring is not a class in school or a subject learned. It is often something learned “on the job,” and this was no different for me. As veterinary nurses, we develop a plan regarding our patient and its care.

COME UP WITH A PLAN

A mentoring plan can look very different depending on who the mentor is and who is being mentored. That being said, there are published guidelines that can be followed as a resource. The American Animal Hospital Association has a great online resource called the “Mentoring Guidelines.”¹ The goal of these guidelines is to help a mentor devise their mentor plan and allow them to successfully provide mentorship.

LEARN THE JOB AT HAND

In order to be an effective mentor, I realized that a specific goal of mine had to be immersing myself in my own job and learning every aspect of it. I realized I could not appropriately mentor if I did not educate myself about every aspect of being an intensive care unit (ICU) technician. I made sure to read up on ICU skills and then put those skills into action, whether it was placing jugular catheters or arterial lines. I had to find a way to practice these skills myself without “stealing” the opportunity from my staff. I was always the first one to jump in and put myself out there, but I had to find a balance so that the other employees could learn as well.

LISTEN AND HAVE AN OPEN MIND

I also realized that I had to learn how to listen. In order

to get the most out of any job and any mentorship, employees have to feel like they are involved and that they are a vital part of the team. An atmosphere of trust and respect has to be created. Mentees have to feel like they can ask questions and be allowed to make mistakes. This is sometimes a hard atmosphere to create. You have to make sure that you set boundaries with your mentor about what can stay confidential and what can be mentioned to other staff members. I had to listen to what the students and new employees needed and then I would guide them to the answer. This increases their confidence level with themselves and helps them retain the material they just learned. Being a mentor also means listening to frustrations and creating an environment where those frustrations can appropriately be addressed.

As a mentor, having an open mind is key. People learn certain tasks or technical skills differently. Just because you show a new veterinary nurse how to place the catheter doesn't mean the person is going to be able to place the next one on the first try. In my experience, clinicians that I work with know that I can place jugular catheters well, but I had to find a balance between patient care and a mentee wanting to learn.

“DO” BUT BE PROFESSIONAL

In a high stress environment, such as the ICU, it can be difficult to give those learning from you time to learn and do rather than just doing yourself. Just because you know how to do the job doesn't mean you stop performing the job and have a mentee do it. A balance has to be discovered between the mentor and mentee, which allows important testing or treatments to be performed in a timely manner while allowing the mentee to learn how to efficiently perform these tasks. This helps keep your skills up and creates a sense of “buy in” from your mentee. It does not help the mentee's confidence if the mentor “takes over” the case that the mentee is handling. As the mentor, it can be difficult to learn that just because a doctor requests he or she perform a certain task, does not mean that the mentee should be excluded from performance of said task. This becomes one of the most difficult parts of mentoring, especially in veterinary medicine.

INSPIRE, MOTIVATE, COMMUNICATE AND ENCOURAGE

Effective mentors inspire their mentees. Find what motivates them and encourage them to reach their

goals. If employees learn something new, it will motivate them on the job. If something is not motivating them, they shouldn't just keep that to themselves, because it doesn't foster a good mentor/mentee relationship and communication.

Good communication is part of creating that safe environment with team members and can keep everyone on the same page. Set goals and communicate clear expectations of the mentor and mentee of when to accomplish those goals. Keep the lines of communication open. This creates and fosters respect between both parties. One can better mentor if the mentees feel open to voice their concerns, thoughts, and opinions.

PREPARE TO BE TAUGHT!

Good mentors should remember there are multiple ways of doing things and that perhaps in learning how their mentee does a certain skill they may learn a new way of doing things themselves. Like taping in a catheter, for example: it is only important that the catheter is secured appropriately so that it does not come out. Learn to adapt and learn that there may be a different approach.

FEEDBACK

Timely feedback is important for both the mentee and the mentor, which helps both parties improve themselves. Always remember that the feedback has to be constructive! Destructive feedback is demotivating and does not give the mentee a sense of how to effectively improve those skills or the desire to want to improve.

Being a mentor can be an extremely rewarding experience. I feel that every time I teach a new veterinary nurse student something and the "lightbulb" comes on, a part of me goes with that veterinary nurse to the field. It takes a lot of time and effort on the mentor and mentee's part to make the relationship work. As a leader in the veterinary field, being a mentor can increase satisfaction of a job and help new nurses stay in the field.

Reference:

1. Tait J, Carpenter T, Davidson S et al. The American Animal Hospital Association Mentoring Guidelines. *Trends Magazine* May/June 2008; 1-7.

Ad Index

Abaxis abaxis.com/flex4 Flex4 Rapid Test.....	13
Banfield Pet Hospital banfield.com/careers Careers.....	31
Boehringer Ingelheim NexGardForDogs.com NexGard.....	15, 26
Dechra dechra-us.com Vetoryl.....	3
EXELINT International Exelint.com Syringes.....	Inside front cover
Lafeber Company Emeraid.com Emeraid.....	53
Merial heartgard.com Heartgard.....	23, 26
Merial vaccinateyourpet.net RECOMBITEK.....	Back cover
Midmark midmarkanimalhealth.com Equipment.....	63
Penn Foster pennfoster.edu Practice Management Certificate.....	69
Terumo terumomedical.com Sur-Vet.....	45
Virbac us.virbac.com Iverhart Max Chews - SoundByte.....	33, 36
Zoetis alphatrakmeter.com AlphaTRAK - SoundByte.....	17
NAVC bookstore.navc.com Bookstore.....	68
NAVC navc.com/human-animal-bond-certification Human Animal Bond Certification.....	66
NAVC navc.com/spark Spark!.....	9
NAVC navc.com/VMX VMX.....	Inside back cover
NAVC vetfolio.com VetFolio.....	70