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Career Kickoff Guide



contents



Click to Read



4

5 Things You Didn't Learn in School



9

Résumés: Putting Your Best Foot Forward



15

Interviewing: Stand Out Among the Crowd



21

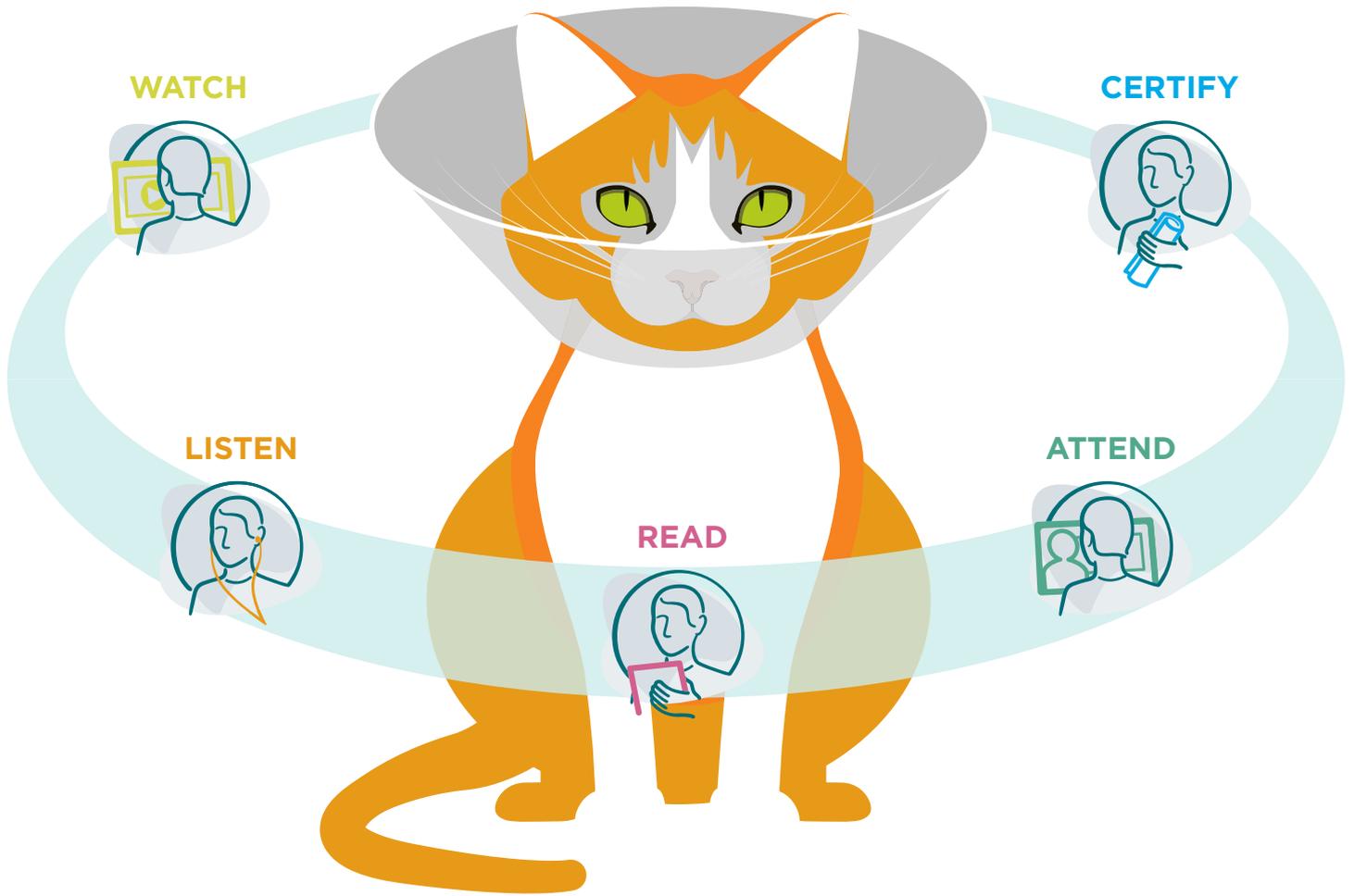
Networking and Mentorship: Building Your Support Structure



27

How to Ask for a Raise or Negotiate Pay

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Editor in Chief, *Today's
Veterinary Nurse*

The Start of a Wonderful Journey

As we enter or begin to settle into our career as a veterinary nurse/technician, the excitement is palpable. We have learned the technical skills to fulfill our lifelong dream of providing top notch nursing care to veterinary patients. We are working on sharpening our skills to truly be the best we can. But, do we have everything we need to make this a reality?

Today's Veterinary Nurse is focused on helping every veterinary nurse/technician in the profession. To that end, we would like to introduce the Career Kickoff Guide, aimed at helping our more recent graduates by providing resources to aid in their continued growth.

This is an important time in the life of a veterinary nurse/technician. Our team has gathered a number of resources to ensure our teammates succeed in navigating some early challenges in the profession.

Welcome to this wonderful profession—I hope the resources provided aid in your growth and development!

5 Things You Didn't Learn in School

MORE ARTICLES

- **Résumés: Putting Your Best Foot Forward**
- **Interviewing: Stand Out Among the Crowd**
- **Networking and Mentorship: Building Your Support Structure**
- **How to Ask for a Raise and Negotiate Salary**

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Veterinary nurses/technicians enroll in credentialing programs for many reasons—a love of animals, a love of science, or the desire to make a difference in the lives of pets, to name just a few. Inside the classroom and in clinic rotations, there is so much to learn, from chemistry, anatomy, and radiology to pharmacology, anesthesiology, and dentistry. The primary focus during school is on teaching the background and practical skills necessary in veterinary medicine, but veterinary nurses have so much more to learn that isn't part of the standard curriculum. It's not just about taking care of animals. Here's what I know now that I wish I had known then.

YOU HAVE TO LIKE PEOPLE

Communication with clients and coworkers is fundamental to success in any position within a veterinary practice. The mindset “I like animals, not people” will get you nowhere. Pets do not drive themselves to the practice and do not pay for the services received. They do not help you get through a busy day by working alongside you to get the work done. People do that. As a veterinary nurse, you need to communicate effectively with a wide variety of clients and veterinary professionals.

Client service is a critical component of a successful practice. Much of your time will be spent communicating with and educating clients. From sharing a treatment plan to providing patient care updates to scheduling appointments, the communication opportunities are continual. Veterinary nurses have to be skilled at conveying information in a way that clients understand. This skill needs to be honed to ensure proficiency.

Communicating with the team that surrounds you—doctors, client service representatives, and veterinary assistants—is just as important to learn. You will not be successful as a veterinary nurse if you can’t communicate with your team effectively throughout the day. The entire team provides the level of care that will lead your practice to success. You have to learn to talk to, listen to, and communicate with each other all the time.

VETERINARY MEDICINE IS A TEAM SPORT

We depend on our team to get the job done every day. Many tasks and duties can be done solo, but without a cohesive team’s support, there is no way

MYTHBUSTERS

MYTH

“Only the doctor can do that.” This is frequently said about many different tasks that can and should be performed by veterinary nurses.

REALITY

Only doctors can generally diagnose, prognose, prescribe, and perform surgery. However, veterinary nurses should do their research and understand the extent of their state’s scope of practice.

— Erin Spencer, MEd,
CVT, VTS (ECC)

In this article

A Team Sport

After Graduation

Medicine as a Business

to complete and attend to everything we are faced with daily.

Teamwork is required on all levels and isn't just about supporting the veterinarians. All team members must work together to get the job done in the most effective and efficient manner possible. Your patients, clients, and coworkers depend on it.

Being competent in your skill set isn't enough. Team members need to share their knowledge and guide their coworkers to a higher level. Don't be the one who withholds important information or training tips and thinks doing so elevates your importance and job security. The best employees help others achieve the same level of knowledge and hands-on technical skills that they possess.

EDUCATION DOESN'T END WITH GRADUATION

To succeed long term in the veterinary profession, pursuing lifelong learning is important. You need to keep current in the field by seeking regular continuing education. In fact, most state licensing boards require a defined number of CE hours to maintain licensure.

Always focus on enhancing your knowledge, whether it means attending conferences, joining webinars, enrolling in computer-based distance learning, or reading every journal you can get your hands on. If your plan is for career advancement within the profession, then seek advanced training or veterinary management CE that will lead to additional credentials. Continued learning will open doors you might not have anticipated when you first became a veterinary nurse.

In this article

A Team Sport

After Graduation

Medicine as a Business

VETERINARY MEDICINE IS A BUSINESS

Regardless of the type of practice where you work, remember that it's a business. What you do or neglect to do reflects on the business. Understand your practice's fee structure and how prices are determined for services and products, and realize that there is a method to the madness. When proper pricing structures are in place, the actual cost of providing the service or product is factored into the equation.

Profit is part of the equation, too, and is essential to the practice's success. Practice owners cannot invest in updated equipment and fair wages and benefits if profits are absent. Every employee has a role in helping the practice achieve financial success.

Here are 4 ways you can help:

- Establish patient care models to ensure consistent recommendations from the team.
- Don't judge clients' wallets or what they are willing to spend on veterinary care. Offer the best medical option for the patient and work within the client's financial means.
- Charge for what you do. Fee capture is a problem in most practices, so help establish procedures that ensure all services and products are properly charged.
- Curb discounting. Intentional discounting should be a marketing strategy and clearly defined and tracked. It should not be random or impulsive.

YOU MUST TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

If you plan to make veterinary medicine your long-term career, you have to take care of yourself at work and home. A study conducted by the National

In this article

A Team Sport

After Graduation

Medicine as a Business

Association of Veterinary Technicians in America found that over 50% of veterinary nurses/technicians leave the profession within 5 years of graduation.

The national shortage of credentialed veterinary nurses/technicians can be blamed on many factors. It is a hard job physically and emotionally. Burnout is frequently brought on by long hours, short staffing, and practice chaos.

Flourish Veterinary Consulting found in a survey of veterinary nurses/technicians and assistants that over 50% of respondents were experiencing moderate to substantial burnout at work. What concrete things can we do to reverse the trend? Work with your team members, manager, and practice owner to address the hospital culture. A negative workplace culture contributes substantially to burnout. Negotiate benefits that support balance, such as mutually beneficial schedules, adequate time off, and fair compensation.

If you strive to keep a good balance at home and at work, you will find longtime success and happiness as a veterinary nurse. We love what we do. Let's love where we do it.

— *By Sandy Walsh, RVT, CVPM*

TAKE MY ADVICE

Keep a growth mindset beyond your schooling. Seeking new information, finding a comfortable agreement with change, and being eager to learn from others will propel you forward. Veterinary medicine is based on science—which is ever-changing—and every veterinary team member has a different perspective and learning history. See that as an opportunity rather than an opposition.

— *Sherrie Yuschak, RVT, VTS (Behavior), KPA-CTP*

In this article

A Team Sport

After Graduation

Medicine as a Business

Résumés: Putting Your Best Foot Forward



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Creating a résumé is your chance to present yourself as a valuable hospital team member. Hiring managers are looking for the best fit for their hospital culture. Good managers are only partially concerned with your technical skills and experience. They also assess your interpersonal skills, teamwork, and communication abilities.

Your résumé not only needs to highlight *what* you have done and *when* but it should also give the hiring manager a sense of *why* you would be a great addition to their team. What contributions do you bring? Specifically, how are you going to make a difference? Think of your résumé as a beautifully wrapped gift; the recipient should be eager to open it and look inside with interest.

MORE ARTICLES

- 5 Things You Didn't Learn In School
- Interviewing: Stand Out Among the Crowd
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- How to Ask for a Raise and Negotiate Salary

STAND TALL, YOU'RE A VETERINARY PROFESSIONAL

You've worked hard to become a veterinary nurse/technician. But you're more than an IVC-placing, anesthesia-monitoring, radiograph-obtaining, blood-drawing automaton. You're also a human being. You have unique traits, aptitudes, and talents that will enhance a hospital team. You have the ability to make a positive impact on patient care and client service. You have the capacity to learn and grow. You have your own dreams and goals, and you are seeking a hospital fit that not only fully utilizes your skills but also provides the opportunity to achieve your best.

Your résumé is the place to showcase your skills and accentuate your abilities. How best to portray the unique components that make up *you*, veterinary nurse extraordinaire, and set you apart from others?

Highlight the aspects of veterinary medicine that excite you the most. Why do you go to work each day? Is it the patient care? Helping clients through tough times? A sense of community with your coworkers? Portray the essence of you, beyond the veterinary nurse.

FORMATTING MATTERS

Yes, on the surface this appears basic; however, a surprising number of résumés are thrown out because they are hard to read or confusing. Create a résumé that looks clean and well organized so that the key information is easy to locate. Your résumé needs to appeal to a wide variety of managers—those who skim for specific qualifications and those who want all the intricate details. When formatting your résumé, consider the following guidelines.

MYTHBUSTERS

MYTH

It is best to start out as a general practice technician so you can use all of the skills you just learned.

REALITY

The scope is not limited! A veterinary nurse/technician's skills can be used in ANY type of job related to the industry and beyond.

— Jessica Bowditch, RVT, CCRP, VTS (Physical Rehabilitation)

In this article

Formatting Matters

Core Elements

Common Mistakes

Do:

- Use a simple, legible font, at least 11 points or larger. This is not the place for artistic style. If the hiring manager needs to squint, it goes in the trash.
- Be concise. Aim to keep your résumé at 2 pages max, but don't be overly concerned with cramming it all onto a single page.
- Leave at least 1-inch margins all around so the interviewer has room to make notes.
- Include a footer with your last name and page numbers (e.g., “Becker|1”).
- Print your résumé to check the formatting. There should not be large spaces or blank pages.
- Name your résumé document with your last name. “Becker.Resume” is more professional than “Very Best BEST Final Resume.”

Don't:

- Don't rely solely on spell check (e.g., “costumer service” versus “customer service” won't be picked up). Ask someone to review for clarity, spelling, and grammatical errors.
- Don't include your picture or your pet's pictures. You are not being evaluated based on your appearance or the cuteness of your own companion animals.
- Don't send more than 1 attachment in an email. Type your cover letter within the body of the email. If the job posting specifically requests letters of recommendation or other requirements, then by all means include them, but otherwise, limit your attachment to just your résumé.

CORE ELEMENTS

A well-organized résumé makes your qualifications stand out. Hiring managers need to make early cuts

In this article

Formatting Matters

Core Elements

Common Mistakes

so they can focus on top candidates. Emphasize your competencies.

Avoid starting your résumé with an objective statement. “*To obtain a position as a veterinary nurse/ technician.*” Duh. Instead, below your contact info, include 3 to 4 sentences that speak to what intrigues you, how you contribute, and why you are aligned with their culture. Take your time—this is probably the most challenging section to write.

Following that, use **HEADINGS** that are bold, capitalized, and/or underlined so they stand out. This builds the framework for your résumé.

Key Accomplishments

Highlight your achievements, whether in school or at previous jobs. What projects have you completed or programs have you implemented? Small changes can have a big impact, so don't overlook accomplishments such as, “Implemented a new organizational tracking system for ICU patients.”

Career Summary

Organize your work history with the most recent job first. Include the company name, your position, and dates of employment. Bullet point your responsibilities and group by category (e.g., Surgical Duties, Nursing Care, Laboratory Functions).

Skills

Think beyond just technical skills to include triage abilities, customer service, inventory management, teaching experience, etc. If you are a recent graduate, include skills that inspired you during school. Be sure to include soft skills that illustrate your talents in communication, interpersonal relations, and collaboration.

MYTHBUSTERS

MYTH

The only way to get an increase in pay is to change jobs.

REALITY

You need to be your own advocate for yourself and your pay. Develop communication skills and know your worth to appropriately negotiate with your manager about your knowledge, skills, and what you contribute to the team.

— Courtney Waxman, MS, CVT, RVT, VTS (ECC)

In this article

Formatting Matters

Core Elements

Common Mistakes

Certifications and Education

List your CVT, LVT, or RVT credentials first. If you are not yet credentialed as a veterinary nurse/technician but are eligible to take the certification or licensure exam, say so. For example, “CVT eligible, pending VTNE, anticipated June 2022.” Include certifications that may bring value to other areas of the practice (such as a marketing certification).

List degrees and significant college programs. Did you take 1 anthropology class at your community college 10 years ago? Leave it off.

Volunteer Work

Only include volunteer work that is recent or with significant relevance (not the day you ran the bake sale 8 years ago). If you don't have recent animal care or service-related volunteer experience, omit this section.

References

List 3 to 4 professional references, with contact information and relation (e.g., former colleague). Be sure to let your references know so they aren't surprised by a call. If you're short on space then omit this section on the résumé, but be prepared with a separate list of references if asked to provide them.

COMMON MISTAKES VETERINARY NURSES MAKE

- **Saying you love animals.** Almost without exception, people in the veterinary profession have a passion for animals, so avoid taking up valuable space on a résumé stating this. Instead, speak to the aspects of being a veterinary nurse that excite

TAKE MY ADVICE

Be ready and eager to learn! School teaches you the bare-bones basics, but actively working will allow you to gain in-depth knowledge on disease processes, procedures and techniques, and other relevant skills. Never stop learning—keep that passion kindled!

— Brooke Quesnell, BS,
CVT, VTS (Oncology)

In this article

Formatting Matters

Core Elements

Common Mistakes

you. Is it the science behind the medicine? A fascination with emerging surgical procedures? A desire to utilize pain management techniques to aid faster recovery from traumatic injuries? Being a source of calm support for grieving pet owners?

- **Focusing exclusively on technical skills.** So much of being a veterinary nurse/technician is beyond the technical aspects. It's about comforting patients and clients. It's about supporting the members of your team. It's about learning and adapting as medicine changes. Build these strengths into your résumé.
- **Not believing in yourself.** Confidence goes a long way, especially if you are new to the profession. You don't have to know it all—you just have to show that you are willing to learn. Remember that you are a whole human being with much to offer.

WHY YOU?

In presenting your résumé, aim to intrigue the manager with the depiction of you, the person, and not just you, the veterinary nurse. And, as with any wonderful gift, leave them wanting for more. You might just get the interview.

— *By Carolyn Becker, CVPM, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, CVT*

In this article

Formatting Matters

Core Elements

Common Mistakes

Interviewing: Stand Out Among the Crowd

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You've made it past the initial hurdle. You sent your résumé out and now you've landed the interview. *Yikes, now what?* An interview is your opportunity to make a connection with the manager and set yourself apart from other candidates in a genuine way. Managers are looking for veterinary nurses/technicians who are a great fit with their hospital team, demonstrate high skill proficiency, and also possess superb interaction abilities. During an interview, you need to be able to concisely convey why the manager should hire you.

But it's not only how you stand out that matters. This is also your chance to interview the practice to determine if it's the right fit for you and your career.

MORE ARTICLES

- 5 Things You Didn't Learn In School
- Résumés: Putting Your Best Foot Forward
- Networking and Mentorship: Building Your Support Structure
- How to Ask for a Raise and Negotiate Salary

You want to ensure that your values are reflected in the hospital culture and your skills will be fully utilized.

There is no magic formula for finding a solid fit. Be honest, be true to yourself, and let your light shine through.

PREPARING TO STAND OUT

Do your research. Look at the hospital website and social media, and learn about community involvement. Familiarize yourself with the practice, who owns it, how long they have been established, what procedures are offered, and to what type of clients they cater.

Prepare and rehearse answers to some common interview questions. What do you want the manager to know? Be ready with a quick synopsis of what you would bring to the team. Identify 3 key things you want to share. Consider these main areas:

- Where your skills shine
- What you would like to learn
- How your communication and teamwork abilities make an impact

HOW DO YOU SHOW UP?

Show up on time and ready. Beyond that, how do you present yourself? Visualize the impression that you would like to make and then align your actions to that vision. Focus on the great qualities that you have and present those with confidence.

Dress professionally; basic business casual is fine.

A tie or heels is unnecessary for interviews in most

TAKE MY ADVICE

You know more than you think you do. Be confident in what you know but never stop learning and asking questions because it is the little details that can really make a difference.

— Jessica Bowditch, RVT, CCRP, VTS (Physical Rehabilitation)

In this article

Preparing to Stand Out

Evaluating an Employer

After the Interview

Common Mistakes

practices and may actually give the impression that you do not understand the hands-on nature of the job. Don't wear blue jeans, any kind of athletic wear, sneakers, or sunglasses. Keep your cell phone off and out of sight.

Aim to arrive 10 to 15 minutes early to absorb the energy of the hospital. First impressions are important, and this might be your first chance to get a feel for how the hospital is run.

Take 3 deep breaths before walking in the door to center yourself. Bring out your best, and be humble with your weaknesses.

If you can't make the interview, have the courtesy to notify the manager. The veterinary community is tightly knit. Word travels fast, so if you don't communicate well, or at all, with one particular manager, it could hurt your chances at other practices. If you're no longer interested in pursuing the interview, that's fine. Just let them know.

EVALUATING A HOSPITAL AS A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER

Know what is important to you in a practice environment, employer, manager, and team. Be prepared to ask questions to help you determine if the fit is right. Observe the veterinary team members and their interactions. Chat with the team about why they like working there. Be kind and genuine. These are people you will potentially be working alongside.

Just because a hospital likes you and wants to hire you does not mean it's the fit that you need. Consider which factors are important to you.

In this article

Preparing to Stand Out

Evaluating an Employer

After the Interview

Common Mistakes

Understand where you can be flexible and what aspects are deal-breakers.

Know where you stand on the following topics so you can ask questions to learn how the hospital functions:

Hospital Culture

Ask the manager to explain the hospital culture. Does the culture match your own values? Do your observations of the hospital reflect what the manager is telling you? In other words, how well does the hospital live up to its own cultural definition?

Team Dynamics

Watch the interactions among the team, between team members and clients, and between team members and pets. Do the veterinary team members seem to genuinely care about each other, the patients, and the clients they serve? Are they respectful? Do they enjoy the work they do? Is this a group of people you would want to work with every day?

Veterinary Nurse Skill Utilization

Veterinary nurses/technicians are used very differently in each hospital, so ask about tasks and procedures they are allowed to perform and what is reserved for doctors. How much latitude do veterinary nurses have when answering questions for clients? What does training and mentorship look like? Are new hires expected to jump right in or will you shadow for a time before being allowed to perform anything on your own?

Growth Opportunities

Even if you're a recent graduate and everything

MYTHBUSTERS

MYTH

Veterinary medicine is great for people who don't want to work with (or even like) people.

REALITY

It's true that you don't have to physically, medically work on human beings. However, this is false because you will day in and day out be communicating, counseling, and working with pet parents.

— Brooke Quesnell, BS, CVT, VTS (Oncology)

In this article

Preparing to Stand Out

Evaluating an Employer

After the Interview

Common Mistakes

seems new, it is nice to know how the hospital views continued learning: not just the required continuing education but also opportunities to keep veterinary team members interested. How does the hospital support learning new skills? What types of projects do senior technicians take on? Is management open to new suggestions from team members?

Work-Life Balance

This balance can be hard to get right in veterinary medicine. For your own wellbeing, put some thought into what brings you fulfillment in your life and what you need to be able to offset the stress of work. Go into the interview with a solid understanding of how you envision work-life balance.

Ask about expectations for the work schedule, specifically shift times, days, weekends, holidays, and on-call rotations. What type of paid time-off benefits are there? How does the hospital encourage team members to take time away to rejuvenate? Do team members readily cover or trade shifts with each other?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Send a personalized thank-you email to the manager. If you really enjoyed the hospital and can see yourself working there, tell the manager so in your message. Let them know specifically what you liked and the contributions you envision making. Tell them you look forward to hearing about next steps in the interview process. If it isn't the right place for you, thank them anyway for their time.

TAKE MY ADVICE

Don't be afraid of change. There are so many amazing opportunities in the field of veterinary nursing to explore: private practice, specialty practice, academia, industry, research, etc. Take some time to figure out what your passion is and what opportunities you have, and make the move to change if needed to meet your passion.

— Courtney Waxman, MS, CVT, RVT, VTS (ECC)

In this article

Preparing to Stand Out

Evaluating an Employer

After the Interview

Common Mistakes

COMMON MISTAKES IN INTERVIEWING

- **Not fully answering an interview question.** If you don't know the answer to an interview question, that's OK. However, don't simply leave it with that. Part of interviewing well is showing your ability to think on your feet. Share your thought process and how you would find out the information or resolve the situation.
- **Failing to share what you bring to the hospital.** A good interviewer will ask you how you will contribute to their team. However, if they don't, or if you have more to share than was elicited by the interview questions, then speak up.
- **Trying to be someone you're not.** Be true to yourself. It's important to be professional and courteous, but it is equally important to be genuine. If your true self is not the right fit for a practice, isn't it better to know now?

A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

When there is a good fit, both you and the hospital—and ultimately the patients—benefit. You want the manager to be just as excited about hiring you as you are about working there. Help them see why they can't live without you.

— *By Carolyn Becker, CVPM, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, CVT*

In this article

Preparing to Stand Out

Evaluating an Employer

After the Interview

Common Mistakes

Networking and Mentorship: Building Your Support Structure

MORE ARTICLES

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- How to Ask for a Raise and Negotiate Salary

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Networking goes beyond finding your next job. Yes, a network alerts you to new opportunities and can help you land a new position. But it is so much more. We all need a tribe. Humans are herd animals (well, mostly anyway). We each must create a group that envelops us in support and moves us forward. We need mentorship from those who are wiser and more experienced, to teach, protect, and keep us in check. We also crave the energy and enthusiasm of newer associations, to remind us to try new things and keep us refreshed.

Simply put: Your network connects you to others. This connection is powerful—it helps us feel that

we are not alone, that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. A solid network stimulates ideas, keeps things in perspective, helps shoulder the burden in hard times, and softens the blows of disappointment.

We, as veterinary nurses, both new and experienced, need to seek out members for their tribe who push us to grow, reach further than we thought possible, and catch us when we fall.

DIVERSIFY YOUR NETWORK

Take an active role in shaping your network. Add people into your circle from all walks of life. You want to develop a network of people who think differently than you do. Welcome alternate perspectives and learn from a variety of approaches. It is often beneficial to receive a range of different advice, and then you can choose the parts that resonate most. Your network should be well-rounded and include people from many backgrounds and levels of experience.

Consider including individuals such as:

- Coworkers
- Peers at other hospitals
- Classmates
- Teachers
- Coaches
- Family members (yes, sometimes they really do have good advice)
- Counselors and therapists
- Managers (your own or someone else's)

Also think about joining groups within the veterinary industry, such as:

- Professional organizations

MYTHBUSTERS

MYTH

Pet parents are the worst.

REALITY

They aren't! They love their pet and sometimes are just very scared about what could be wrong (depending on the situation). They may not have the communication tools to express what they really need, which is compassion and understanding.

— Heather Sidari, RVT, VTS
(Anesthesia and Analgesia)

In this article

Diversify Your Network

Look Outward

Surrounded With Support

Common Mistakes

- State associations
- Social media groups
- Continuing education seminars
- Support groups
- Committees

LOOK OUTWARD

Stretch your network beyond veterinary medicine. Seek mentors who can help you build skills in areas beyond just your technical skills. Think about people you know who excel in specific areas in which you would like to grow. These mentors may be within the veterinary profession, but there are many talented individuals outside veterinary medicine who can share valuable knowledge as well.

In this article

Diversify Your Network

Look Outward

Surrounded With Support

Common Mistakes

Approaching Mentors

Some mentors fall into step with us naturally. But other times, we have to actively seek them out. Mentorships do not need to be formal, they just need to get started. Asking someone to mentor you can be intimidating, but it doesn't have to be. Here are some pointers to get you started:

Initiate the conversation.

Keep it simple. Tell the person what you appreciate or admire about them, and ask if they would be willing to help you learn similar skills.

Be specific.

Have a clear idea of what you would like to learn from this person, then

share it with them. This will help you use time efficiently. Your goals may change over time, so be sure to re-evaluate often.

Put some structure in place.

Talk with your new mentor about structuring discussions. Do conversa-

tions need to be scheduled? Do you set up a recurring time and place to talk? Do you connect on an as-needed basis? There's no one right answer, but it's a good idea to discuss what works best for both of you, as you certainly want to be respectful of their time.

Reflect on the competencies you would like to gain. Sometimes these become apparent when observing someone else in action. When you have that thought of, “I’d like to be able to do *that*,” then you’ve identified a goal!

Think about what you would like to learn, and someone you admire who does that thing really well. Would you like to be able to communicate more concisely? Cope better with disappointment? Attempt new things more willingly?

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Explain anesthesia to a reluctant client
- Clearly communicate concerns to your manager
- Efficiently triage emergency cases
- Calmly approach a coworker with a disagreement
- Readily accept changes in hospital protocols

Once you have a mentor in mind, talk with them to let them know specifically what you’d love to learn. Most people are more than willing to share their approach and give you pointers. Also talk with them about the mistakes they made along the way, so you can try to avoid the same pitfalls.

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH SUPPORT

Good mentors listen. They are an effective sounding board. They can help you work through uncertainty and frustration. Good mentors encourage you when things are rough, reignite your fire when motivation sags, and nudge you when you hesitate.

Good mentors challenge your thinking. They may not always tell you what you want to hear. After all,

In this article

Diversify Your Network

Look Outward

Surrounded With Support

Common Mistakes

this is not a fan club. You are looking to grow, and sometimes we need to hear the hard stuff. A good mentor will be able to tell you the things you didn't want to hear but needed to. They will be able to do so respectfully and with kindness. Out of this comes growth.

CREATE A NET THAT WORKS

We all need a safety net at times. Life has a funny way of going sideways, and sometimes we skid out of control. Once in a while we crash. Layer your network so that the support you need is available when you need it.

Find those people who create a safe space for you to vent, talk things through, and gain perspective. Sometimes we just need a shoulder to cry on. Other times we need someone to give us another viewpoint on a situation that went awry. We need people to coach us through the hard times and help us overcome obstacles.

COMMON MISTAKES

Letting fear get in your way. Don't be afraid to seek advice. It's OK to not know everything. Seek out mentors who are approachable and with whom you feel comfortable being candid.

Refusing to push your limits. The only way to expand your boundaries is to reach beyond your comfort level. Good mentors should challenge you to stretch and will support you as you do.

Failing to adapt your network over time. Some mentors will remain in your network for life. As you grow as a veterinary nurse and as a person, the

TAKE MY ADVICE

Always stay humble.

— Heather Sidari, RVT, VTS
(Anesthesia and Analgesia)

In this article

Diversify Your Network

Look Outward

Surrounded With Support

Common Mistakes

types of mentorship you require will change. Be cognizant of your adapting needs and continuously be on the lookout for people to add to your inner circle.

It's your network. Select members who give you the support and encouragement you need to be the best veterinary nurse and person you can be.

— *By Carolyn Becker, CVPM, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, CVT*

In this article

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Most people don't enjoy money conversations. Most of us also don't feel comfortable selling ourselves. Yet, we all want to be fairly compensated for the work we do. This requires working through that discomfort and initiating a conversation to advocate on your own behalf. Just like any tough discussion, spend some time getting all your ducks in a row. Know the details and be ready to clearly communicate what you are asking for and why.

CONVEY YOUR VALUE

Be ready to tell your story. Share a summary of your contributions to the hospital. Include specialized skills that you have. This can extend beyond

technical skills to include nursing care, client communication, the ability to rally the team, and more.

Have you helped reorganize an area of the hospital? Implemented an idea that resulted in more efficient workflow? Are you always the first to volunteer to cover less desirable shifts? These types of contributions are extremely valuable.

We all grow and learn over time, but sometimes that growth is steeper than other times. Has there been a significant change in your role? Consider the following:

- New skills you've recently learned
- Increase in workload due to a new service the hospital has implemented
- More responsibility or extra projects—either assigned or voluntarily taken on

Your manager is hopefully already aware of what you do, but having a concise list will help you convey your value.

COMPARISON RESEARCH

Do your market research. Check job postings for nearby hospitals to see if you can determine their starting pay ranges. Is your pay rate low for your geographic area or for your position in the hospital?

Keep in mind that hourly pay rates do not tell the whole story. There are other factors that influence job satisfaction and total compensation. Total compensation includes not just your hourly pay but also bonuses, incentive pay, paid time off, healthcare benefits, employer contributions to a retirement plan, paid continuing education, pet

In this article

Convey Your Value

Comparison Research

Plan Your Approach

You and Your Manager

Negotiating Pay

care discounts, and more. There are also often intangible benefits, such as work schedule, skill utilization, and growth opportunities. These are difficult to quantify but should definitely be considered.

PLAN YOUR APPROACH

Be sure you are approaching the right person. Skipping over your technician supervisor and the practice manager and going straight to the owner is not the best way to go. If you are unsure whom to approach with your request, ask. Start with your immediate supervisor. If they are not the right person, they will tell you.

Consider the best time of day to talk with your manager. The moment they walk in the door or at the very end of the day before they leave on vacation are probably not your best bets. If you are uncertain, let them know you would like some of their time for a conversation, and ask when would be best.

Anticipate questions your manager may ask, such as:

- Specifically, what have you done that justifies a pay raise? Be ready with some recent examples of your successes, things that you have been responsible for that have gone well, or compliments you've received from colleagues or clients.
- When was your last performance review, and what were the results? If there were areas needing improvement, what strides have you made in that direction?
- When was your last pay increase, and how much was it?

In this article

Convey Your Value

Comparison Research

Plan Your Approach

You and Your Manager

Negotiating Pay

Your manager can look this information up, of course, but it demonstrates that you have given a lot of thought and consideration to the discussion, and have come prepared.

WHAT MATTERS TO YOU MAY BE IRRELEVANT TO YOUR MANAGER

While there may be other factors influencing your request, recognize them and decide if they are truly worth communicating to your manager. Your personal finances are a huge contributing factor in your mind, but this is not your manager's concern.

Your manager is going to look at what you bring to the team and hospital. The fact that your rent has gone up, or your car needs repairs, or gas prices have increased is not necessarily justification for a raise. (Remember that your manager is probably facing the same challenges, so as painful as these things can be, they are not unique.)

Managers have a tough balance to maintain. They want to pay staff appropriately, and they also have to look out for the financial health of the hospital. Ultimately, the hospital must remain profitable in order for everyone to be successful. Striking this balance is tough. There are often other outside pressures on managers, and there may be decisions that are beyond your manager's control.

Practice managers and owners have factors to weigh that they cannot share with you. Acknowledging this in your conversation goes a long way. Simply saying that you know you do not see all the pieces of the puzzle and offering empathy for those who must make tough business decisions can give you a good connection.

In this article

Convey Your Value

Comparison Research

Plan Your Approach

You and Your Manager

Negotiating Pay

PREP FOR THE CONVERSATION

It's OK to verbalize that this is a hard topic to discuss. Set the tone for the conversation by stating what you are asking for at the beginning. Be ready to discuss details and share your "why":

- Summary of your contributions and accomplishments
- New skills learned or increased responsibilities
- How your pay compares to a similar position in other hospitals
- Information on your last pay increase and results of last performance review

Above all, be respectful. Give them time to consider—don't expect an answer in the moment. Thank them for their time and for hearing out your request.

NEGOTIATING PAY FOR A NEW JOB

When you receive a job offer, ask for a couple of days to consider. If you are interviewing at multiple practices, this gives you a chance to review all offers and make the best choice. A hospital that is a good fit will wait for your decision for a reasonable amount of time. As mentioned above, it is important to do research and understand what the going rate is for your position at veterinary clinics in your area. This will help you understand if you are receiving a fair offer or if it might be better to continue your job search.

WHAT TO DO IF THE ANSWER IS NO

Accept the answer with grace. It takes courage to ask for a raise, and the way you handle rejection speaks volumes. Feeling disappointed is natural. Be sure to conduct yourself professionally and thank

TAKE MY ADVICE

Find the area(s) of veterinary medicine you are passionate about and focus on that. If there isn't a role already created in that space, create it yourself.

— Erin Spencer, MEd,
CVT, VTS (ECC)

In this article

Convey Your Value

Comparison Research

Plan Your Approach

You and Your Manager

Negotiating Pay

your manager for their consideration. Try not to feel too discouraged if you didn't get your desired answer. This initial attempt can open the door to future discussions, and you never know where they may lead.

Find out what you can do differently. Inquire as to other skills you need to learn, continuing education you can take, or cross-training into other areas of the hospital. Ask if there are improvements you need to make. Be ready to listen to and accept the feedback willingly. Commit to learning, improvements, or anything else that you need to do differently. Hold yourself accountable for your own growth.

Learn the timeframe for reconsideration. Ask your manager how soon your request can be reconsidered. They will likely be more than willing to give you a timeframe, but if they do not, offer to check back 6 months down the line.

Your pay is compensation for what you do, but remember that it is not a measure of your self-worth. Don't be afraid to advocate for yourself. You are your own best champion.

— *By Carolyn Becker, CVPM, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, CVT*

In this article

Convey Your Value

Comparison Research

Plan Your Approach

You and Your Manager

Negotiating Pay

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