Practice managers wear many hats. Just like no 2 veterinary hospitals are alike, no 2 managers have exactly the same responsibilities. In fact, the role of a practice manager varies wildly between hospitals, and even from day to day.
MANAGERIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The No. 1 job of a practice manager is to ensure the hospital runs smoothly. This may sound straightforward, but this is a daunting task that is often not well defined. Balancing the needs of the clients, patients, and veterinary team is a difficult challenge fraught with pitfalls.

Practice managers are often responsible (either directly or indirectly) for:

- **People and relationships:** Employee relations; human resources; staffing; hiring; scheduling; employee benefits; staff meetings; employee advocacy; performance management; mediating disputes, conflict resolution, and resolving escalated client complaints; serving as liaison with external professional resources (such as vendors), consultants, marketing firms, attorneys, animal control, sheriff, and other service providers
- **Organization of workflow:** Appointment and surgery scheduling, patient and client flow, staffing levels, hospital protocols, task delegation, assignment of staff roles
- **Finances:** Budgeting, accounts payable and accounts receivable, payroll, purchasing, client account management, payment plans, collections, cashflow management
- **Training:** Providing tools and resources for staff, job-specific training, cross training, continuing education programs
- **Safety:** Providing a safe environment for staff, clients, and patients; responding to concerns or injuries; addressing safety violations
- **Equipment and supplies:** Maintenance; inventory; purchasing; ordering; testing new equipment; maintaining stock levels for supplies, pharmaceuticals, cleaning agents, uniforms, and more
- **Technology:** Research; information technology; implementing and maintaining software programs, practice management systems, phone systems, online inventory and ordering systems, and client and staff communication systems
- **Building maintenance:** Facility upkeep, repairs, remodeling and expansion projects, janitorial services, building inspections, parking lot repair, landscaping
- **Record keeping, confidentiality, and compliance:** Patient medical records; client records; employee records; storage and destruction of records; purchasing history; maintenance logs; Occupational Safety and Health Administration logs; controlled substance logs and compliance; safety, labor, and employment laws
- **Marketing:** Social media campaigns, advertising, website maintenance, community involvement

In addition, any task that does not clearly fall to someone else usually lands on the practice manager’s shoulders (think clogged toilets, replacing furnace filters, ordering food for staff meetings, calling irate clients, and obtaining bids for a new roof).

DOERS AND SOLVERS

Arguably, the top 2 traits in a successful practice manager are solid communication skills and resourcefulness. When no one knows how to solve an issue or concern, it is left to the practice manager to figure out. All problems, concerns, and issues are thrown at their feet. A good manager is a master at juggling many things simultaneously, prioritizing, delegating, and extinguishing fires.

LEADERSHIP

A leader is different than a manager. Management is about organization of a process or task, while leadership is the ability to influence and empower others to achieve their best.

Bestowing the title of manager on someone does not automatically instill leadership. Leadership can occur from any position. Some people have more natural leadership tendencies, but leadership can be learned, practiced, and honed.

Managers have a wide range of skills and background. More often than not, veterinary practice managers once held a different position in the hospital. Some are officially promoted to practice manager while others end up as managers by default. Veterinary practices are notorious for taking a good veterinary nurse or customer service representative and moving them into a managerial role, often with very little training.

Veterinary practice managers usually learn on the fly, by doing, making mistakes, and figuring things out 1 day at a time. Much like being a parent, there is no manual for becoming a practice manager, and while there are many resources available to them, managers may be unaware, overwhelmed, or just trying to breathe from 1 moment to the next.
INTERACTIONS WITH YOUR PRACTICE MANAGER
So, then, how can you best interact with your practice manager? Practice managers are humans first and managers second. Invest time and energy into developing a good rapport with your practice manager. Work on open communication. Ask what they need help with. Be flexible and anticipate their needs.

Even great practice managers need help on occasion. The most effective managers welcome support and create an environment that invites feedback and discussion. You can make yourself invaluable to your practice manager by sharing your ideas and concerns and offering to help.

Consider your timing. Try not to bombard your practice manager with 20 questions the moment they come through the door. Give them time to settle into their day and encourage coworkers to do the same.

Above all, be honest, transparent, and respectful in your interactions.

BEYOND THEIR CONTROL
Realize that some decisions are not within your practice manager’s control. The practice owners, and sometimes even labor or safety laws, have the final say. Your practice manager likely didn’t write the laws, but they are charged with ensuring the practice follows them. There are also often budget and time constraints and your practice manager may not be able to disclose all the reasoning behind the decisions they implement.

A practice manager’s job is not to make everyone happy. Your manager needs to set you up for success, but it is up to you to take on the opportunities and find your path.

INTERESTED IN A MANAGERIAL ROLE?
Remember that you can be a leader from wherever you are. If you think you may want to step into a managerial role someday, start now by practicing behaviors of a great leader.

Immerse yourself in building solid relationships with your team and continually work to establish trust. Don’t be afraid to be vulnerable. Make yourself open to suggestions and ask for feedback frequently—not just from your manager but from coworkers too.

Volunteer to take on more responsibilities. If you see something that needs to get done, do it without being asked—even the less desirable tasks. If you don’t know something, ask and be willing to learn.

Develop your network of mentors that can act as a sounding board, give guidance, and help you grow.

When the time comes, advocate for yourself and communicate your desires to grow into a managerial role. You may find it is the next natural step in your career.