



WUTCHIETT TUMBLIN AND ASSOCIATES

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Better Management is Better MedicineSM

Harmony vs. Chaos – 2007

Eddie, my adorable 3-year old cat, is full of sunshine and charm at home, but trips to the doctor transform him into his alternate personality, Edward Hyde – all fangs, claws, and unholy terror. My veterinarian, Dr. Tami Shearer isn't sure exactly what sets him off – perhaps confinement in the carrier, the ride in the car, the strange smells and noises, or the people he doesn't see often - but Eddie and I both appreciate the practice's efforts to maintain a safe, calm environment. This includes keeping Dr. Shearer and her staff safe. If Mr. Hyde isn't cooperating, we go home.

In our frenetic, 24/7 society, we're on the go, tuned in, plugged in, constantly trying to do more in less time, and often we're just plain maxed out. The environment that surrounds us affects how well we do (or don't!) handle everything that we're trying to accomplish. And our pets feel the effects too. Anything in the sensory realm can upset them – strange smells, changes in routine, exposure to new things, and noise.

In Benchmarks 2007 – A Study of Well-Managed PracticesSM conducted by Wutchiett Tumblin and Associates and *Veterinary Economics*, we set out to identify how top practices ensure a harmonious, healing environment for pets and people – and how those efforts translate into financial success. We found these practices begin by defining and communicating their core values – the foundation that allows them to thrive and prosper. Key elements are respect, compassion, professionalism, integrity, and accountability. Once you commit to these foundational values, you can build a successful practice, the components of which include:

- A high medical standard of care for your patients
- A high financial standard of care for your business
- A commitment to the people who help you accomplish your goals for your practice.

Furthermore, Well-Managed Practices view their client and patient relationships as a partnership for life – both for a high quality of life and for a lifetime. To nurture this partnership, they focus on creating a positive experience – that harmonious, healing environment again – that keeps clients coming back, visit after visit. This commitment impacts their fees, revenue and expenses.

Jeanine Larson is the founder and director of Still Point Centre, a business that is dedicated to helping people “wake up” and intentionally create a life of choice rather than surviving as victims of circumstance – in other words, choosing to take charge of their lives.

“A veterinary practice's environment is an outward reflection of the inner state of its leadership,” says Larson. “Chaos in the environment indicates lack of leadership – inner and outer.” Symptoms of this leadership vacuum can be inertial or mismanaged time and resources. Harmony, Larson says, indicates a more balanced state of consciousness.



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“It is vital for veterinarians’ to take the lead in managing their patients’ environment,” Larson continues. “As authorities on animal care, they’re responsible for educating pet owners and care givers about the importance of a harmonious environment. A good place to start is to be an example of what this means.”

Larson offers some basic elements to focus on in progression toward a well-balanced, harmonious life. These include:

1. Your vision - Maybe you’ve lost your focus along the path, or you were never quite clear about our direction in the first place. To establish a practice identity and reflect that identity in the practice environment, you must first be clear about what you want to project. You must begin with a vision.

2. Your plan – It’s not enough just to possess a vision; you must know how to implement it. This requires contemplation, research, and, often, expert advice to lay out a systematic process for making your vision a reality. If you jump into action without thought or organization, you could experience costly consequences that lead to disharmony – both financially and in terms of your relationships with team members and clients. On the other hand, a good solid plan can have far-reaching positive effects.

3. Your action – Once a vision and plan are in place, you’re ready to build your dream. Here’s how the leaders at two veterinary practices followed these steps to achieve success and harmony in their own hospitals.

Minnetonka Animal Hospital in Wayzata, MN thrives on harmony. The owners, Drs. Kaaren Howe and Leilani Hotaling, say their commitment to high ethical standards includes lifelong learning, sound business principals, environmental stewardship, and excellent standards of care for patients, clients, and staff. They say these factors got them where they are today.

The environment at Minnetonka is enhanced by the doctors’ passionate commitment to recycling, using earth-friendly cleaning products, and maintaining a “green” building. In addition, they offer integrative care such as acupuncture, chiropractic, herbal medicine, and physical rehabilitation.” These modalities all require balance and calm,” says Howe. “With integrative medicine, it’s essential that every patient and client be present in the moment.”

Dr. Bethaney Fryer has owned Petlovers Animal Hospital in Reynoldsburg, Ohio for 10 years. “Veterinary schools offer a defined road map for what’s required to graduate,” Dr. Fryer says. “While purchasing and running a practice may seem to require many of the same qualities, the road map to success is not so clear.”



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At first Dr. Fryer thought she could practice state of the art veterinary medicine and treat people the way she wanted to be treated, and the rest would take care of itself. “Eventually, she says, “I discovered that not everyone wants to be treated the way I do and that failing to define my practice philosophy led to misconceptions and poor performance. I blamed unmotivated staff, financial constraints, demanding clients and myriad circumstances to explain why my practice wasn't a fun place anymore. In times of self-doubt, I blamed myself for poor choices.”

In May of 2007 Dr. Fryer attended the Veterinary Leadership Academy. There she learned that her role as a leader was to clarify her expectations for the staff, the practice and herself. If practice wasn't fun or the staff weren't performing up to expectations, she realized it was 100% her personal responsibility. With that in mind, she wrote down the core values of her practice.

Dr. Fryer also formed a “culture club” of experienced team members to help her redirect behavior in the practice. “We refer to these ideals often and attempt to live them every day,” says Fryer. “Defining our core values and mission has helped me to develop a road map for success for my practice. Interacting with clients is more fun, and the mood in my clinic is lighter and more positive. I may have purchased my practice 10 years ago, but I didn't really own it until I bought into the concepts of our core values and mission.”

Every business has an aura – a distinctive but intangible quality associated with it. When clients and patients visit your practice, you want them to feel warmth, compassion, and healing emanating from within. Calm, friendly, professional assistance encourages clients to relax and respond in the same manner – no matter how they're feeling on the inside. Positive energy and a stress-free environment keep patients calm and clients coming back for more. That can only happen if you've committed to those qualities on a core level.

So ask yourself this question: Does your environment encourage clients to return by promoting harmony? Or, is it like the chaos of rush hour traffic? “Our pets can be the victims of our inertia or the beneficiaries of conscious action,” concludes Larson. “Even small steps toward harmony in the environment are steps in the right direction.”

To obtain additional information:

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