

The Power of Stepping Up & Reaching Out



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It is all over the news and social media—people making a difference. Through small and large actions and endeavors, positive changes and effects occur.

The veterinary community—by the definition of what we do—makes a difference in the lives of animals and humans alike on a daily basis, no matter what our specialty. But is it enough? When faced with challenges we have never before encountered, how do we respond? Do we embrace the opportunity, give it our minimum effort, or avoid the issue altogether?

UNIQUE CHALLENGES

When I began my career in veterinary medicine, I was unprepared for the many ethical and moral questions I would face and the baffling cases I would see that defied medical logic. A day in the life of a veterinarian often is filled with unique challenges, many of which land us in uncharted waters. Our response to these challenges is what defines us personally and professionally.

The challenges we encounter in the veterinary field are not limited to medicine. Veterinarians see issues related to animal abuse, domestic violence, and animal welfare. While not rare problems, they often go undetected or may be completely ignored. These issues fall outside the comfort zone of most veterinary practitioners yet directly impact the health and welfare of patients and clients.

We can no longer simply focus only on medicine—we play an important role in identifying and resolving these issues that affect animal and human welfare. When we step up and reach out for needed information and tools, we become leaders who can make a difference.

STEP UP & BE BRAVE

There is power in stepping up to challenges. It speaks to who we are and what matters. Too often we are intimidated by the unknown and allow fear to direct action or inaction. Instead, we need to obtain knowledge that empowers action. The good news is that the veterinary profession has a variety of resources and continuing education opportunities available to help expand its members' knowledge and skills.

However, while continuing education and identification of available resources are necessary when stepping up, bravery is just as important. Embrace the courage to step out of your comfort zone and ask the hard questions; this accomplishment will likely lead to actions you have never experienced. For example, when a puppy presents with broken ribs, ask yourself, "Could this puppy be a victim of abuse?" This should lead to further discussion with the owner with a possible

discovery of domestic violence in the home. Your next action, reporting suspected animal abuse, could make a direct impact on the health, welfare, and life of the puppy and its owner.

EMBRACE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Continuing education has been a cornerstone of preparedness for the veterinary community, and the NAVC is committed to providing this needed resource to members of the profession. For example, in 2015, the NAVC Conference, which annually includes topics on veterinary forensics and animal welfare, launched a leadership program that discussed the issue of domestic violence.

In situations when real-time information or assistance is needed in daily practice, the NAVC's VetFolio—an online learning platform—provides valuable information that is readily available, including certificate courses in Animal Forensics and CSI, Clinical Views on specific animal welfare issues, opportunities to "Ask the Faculty," and peer interaction.

IDENTIFY ORGANIZATIONS & EXPERTS

The ability to identify resources outside of veterinary medicine is an important step to prepare for the challenges specific to pet and client welfare encountered in veterinary practice. These resources include domestic violence organizations, social services, animal welfare groups, animal cruelty investigation, and other legal assistance. These organizations are also typically willing to provide training and materials.

In addition, often we forget, or hesitate, to approach our colleagues and coworkers and take advantage of their readily available knowledge. Be open to discussions with others to gain valuable insight and perspective from their experiences. Identify experts and make the call—that is what they are there for!

FIND YOUR VOICE

There is a wide range of challenges in veterinary medicine, each with its own distinctive problems to address. We need to seek solutions to problems, especially those that affect the welfare of our patients, clients, and staff. It is our approach and execution that can determine success or failure.

Apparent roadblocks should be perceived as opportunities for personal and professional growth instead of impediments or limitations. There are so many ways we go above and beyond in our veterinary practices. But when the going gets tough, or when you stand alone in your viewpoint, that is when you need to step up, reach out, and find your voice.

—Melinda Merck, NAVC President Elect