



PERSONAL WELLNESS

Work-Life Balance for Employees

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Those of us who are in the veterinary profession are passionate individuals. On a daily basis we give 100% of ourselves to improving the lives of pets. That shared passion is often what unites a veterinary team and makes a veterinary practice best in class. But it is that same passion that can sometimes interfere in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. We value members on the veterinary team who are passionate about their life's work, but is it possible to create a workplace environment where the staff can devote themselves to their jobs at a very high level, and still have the energy and time to devote to the other, very important part of that equation—their lives outside of work?

It may seem to be an impossible task at times. Finding a balance between being of service to people and their pets, while still maintaining personal identity, best self, and a life other than work, takes intention and practice. It's crucial to recognize that our role in the veterinary profession is *what* we do and not all of who we are. It is an important distinction. The work your veterinary team does provides comfort to animals and humans alike. But that doesn't mean they should stop caring for themselves. Ensuring that your team understands that a healthy work-life balance enables them to thrive at work and outside work requires you as a team leader to lead by example and to establish guidelines that reinforce the work-life balance philosophy.

Balancing one's personal life and profession can be challenging. There will be moments when it is skewed toward one more than the other; however, actively adjusting in order to keep it as balanced as possible will help improve and maintain overall wellbeing and satisfaction.

As a team leader, having realistic expectations of your team and respecting their space and personal time are essential. This can be accomplished in several ways.

- Respect the boundaries of others and set boundaries for yourself. This will go a long way toward reducing the potential for anger, resentment, and burnout. When setting boundaries, it is essential to state why they are important to you without going into a great amount of detail. The positive psychology program (positivepsychologyprogram.com) is a wonderful resource on helping set clear, healthy boundaries in multiple areas of life, including work.
- Define and stick to the number of hours you expect your team to work, including clarifying when overtime is or may be expected. When a schedule is in place, individuals can make plans outside of work hours accordingly. When the schedule changes at the last minute, it could interfere with an employee's plans, which can become an extra stressor (especially if it is something that is time sensitive).
- Discourage team members from taking work home.

- Encourage individuals to take vacations. You might want to consider giving them a floating holiday or their birthday as a paid day off.

Try this to create a positive workplace environment:

- Encourage open dialogue with everyone on your team. Have an open-door policy where team members feel safe speaking to you about concerns or innovative ideas without fear of being judged.
- Be flexible and adaptable. Change can be difficult for many, but when you keep an open mind and actively listen to the needs of your team, not only will they appreciate your efforts, but you can address their needs more readily. This may require that daily tasks be shifted to another individual if someone is overloaded. Ensure tasks are assigned to individuals who are best suited for them and that you have considered each individual's strengths when assigning them.
- Establish regularly scheduled meetings to connect. These may be weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. Find the time that works best for your practice. A breakfast meeting off-premises may work well because it is a more neutral environment and there is no risk of phone or client interruptions. During the meeting, share what the team is doing that is working well and openly praise individuals for their efforts. Allow for open discussion of any challenges or issues and work through them or solve them as a team.

UNDERTAKE A PRIORITIES AND PURPOSE ASSESSMENT

Consider having team members complete a priorities and purpose assessment to identify the things that matter most to them outside of work. The purpose of this exercise is to help members of your team gain insight into their personal priorities by establishing which core values are most in need of their attention. It

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is a personal discovery process. The results are often surprising and enlightening.

As you learn about the things that matter most to the individuals on your team, you can encourage them by showing an interest. In some cases, you may be able to facilitate their favorite hobby, activity, or personal goal. For example, if one of your employees is missing an after-work yoga class because it starts 15 minutes before he or she can get there, you might be able to adjust that individual's work schedule. You can create a designated quiet space for someone who likes to read on his or her lunch hour. When individuals are able to connect to the things they value most, they will have a greater sense of peace and satisfaction. This will translate into a more positive attitude, greater productivity, and better patient care. To begin a priorities and purpose assessment, go to laurabaltodano.com/priorities-and-purpose and enter TVP2019 to gain access.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Be sure to also set some boundaries for yourself. Remember, you are leading by example.

- Make a commitment not to take work home.
- Find ways to use your time wisely at work so that you do not feel the need to take work home. This may include checking and responding to email or social media during set times in the day only.
- Once you are home, establish guidelines for work-related tasks, such as not checking email or phone messages after dinner.
- Set aside time to relax and be with your loved ones. This should be sacred and non-negotiable.
- Make clear to your team when you are available for phone calls or texts after hours. Do not respond outside of those hours. To facilitate this protocol, place your phone on Do Not Disturb, shut it down or keep it in a place where you will not see or hear it. Otherwise, you may be tempted to grab it when it rings or a notification comes in.

Heather Schuck writes in *The Working Mom Manifesto*: "You will never feel truly satisfied by work until you are satisfied by life."¹ Whether you are leading by example or implementing the changes necessary so that your team can have a healthy work-life balance, it all begins with you.

TVP

Reference

1. Schuck H. *The Working Mom Manifesto*. Voyager Media Inc.; 2013.