



FROM THE FIELD

Build Lasting Client Bonds That Make an Impact

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From the Field shares insights from **Banfield Pet Hospital** veterinary team members. Drawing from the nationwide practice's extensive research, as well as findings from its electronic veterinary medical records database and more than 8 million annual pet visits, this column is intended to explore topics and spark conversations relevant to veterinary practices that ultimately help create a better world for pets.

Being a veterinarian is a calling. We go through years of schooling and dedicate our lives to practicing veterinary medicine because we have a deep desire to care for pets. But what school doesn't always prepare us for are the complexities of effectively communicating with clients.

Our goal as veterinary professionals is to positively impact as many pets as possible by providing high-quality veterinary care, but I believe we should equally prioritize making meaningful and emotional connections with our clients.

CLIENT ENGAGEMENT AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

With the deep focus so many of us have on providing care to pets, it can be easy for veterinary professionals to overlook the benefits that can come from building connections with clients. My first experience working in the profession was at a small-town veterinary hospital. What struck me right away was how often the veterinarians talked with clients about topics other than

veterinary care—there was a palpable feeling of happiness radiating from the veterinarian when a client wanted to connect on a more personal level.

At the time, I chalked this up to small-town talk and camaraderie, but I quickly learned what the other doctors had already caught on to—that nurturing strong doctor-client relationships can make a real impact on emotional wellbeing. For example, those clients who brightened the really tough days were oftentimes also the clients who trusted me to care for their pets during very difficult treatment protocols and allowed me to practice the level of medicine I dreamed of when I first began my career.

I took this lesson with me, and it's an important part of why I continue to feel fulfilled in my work to this day.

MAKING THE UNEXPECTED EASIER

Research professor and author Brené Brown describes connection as “the energy that is created between



people when they are seen, heard and valued—when they can give and receive without judgment.”¹ When clients feel seen and valued, I’ve seen firsthand how it can help set a strong foundation for the unexpected and inevitable tough situations that happen in our day-to-day lives as veterinarians.

I’ve seen this come to life in many ways throughout my veterinary career—a client who asks if everything is okay after having to reschedule an appointment due to one of my children being ill or a client who thanks my hospital team for our long hours of hard work, even when they had to wait because we were running behind in schedules that day. Through these small gestures, these clients let us know they understand we have their pet’s best interest at heart.

A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY

I visualize each client interaction as a stepping stone toward building a more meaningful relationship, with each step creating further trust—trust that I have the best intentions, knowledge, and expertise needed for their pet’s care.

As veterinary professionals who are intensely dedicated to our calling of providing quality medical care to pets, we can sometimes lose sight of how big an impact a small gesture toward our clients can have.

Here are 3 small gestures you can implement during client interactions to help build more meaningful and lasting bonds with pet owners.

1. Pets are our focus, but don’t forget to be human

To me, the most important aspect of building strong client relationships is to remember to be human, which can sometimes be difficult after we’ve spent years in veterinary school focused on medicine. For some, being “human” can sometimes mean being vulnerable, but do what feels best for you. Maybe it’s practicing more honesty and empathy in your client conversations or making a concerted effort to connect with clients on topics beyond their pet’s care.

2. Ask your clients questions

This notion might seem obvious, but one simple question can lead to in-depth conversations that make a big difference in how clients feel walking out of the hospital. One of my favorite relationship-building conversations starts by asking pet owners the origin of their pet’s name. I usually end up learning valuable information about clients in the process, and the client often leaves the appointment feeling heard and valued.

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3. Small talk can have a big impact

Small talk has the potential to be much more than just casual niceties. Looking back, almost every conversation I’ve had that strengthened a client relationship started with talking about something as simple as the weather, sports, or local events around town.

For a veterinarian, it can be extremely rewarding to know that you and your clients share a mutual care and respect for one another—as well as a genuine love for pets. By building deeper bonds with pet owners, I believe we are better able to focus on what we’re most passionate about: providing high-quality veterinary care to pets. **TVP**

Reference

1. Brown B. *Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. New York: Spiegel & Grau; 2015:182.



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