



HERE'S A SECRET ...

You Can Swear at Work ... Sometimes

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Is there anything worse in a vet clinic than hearing shouting from another room? Nothing else quite gets the blood pressure spiking like that! Imagine running into your reception area to see the calmest, kindest, most experienced front desk professional (the one who has always been able to deal with every problem client with astounding ease) completely panic-stricken and on the phone with emergency services while 3 red-faced, screaming clients lean over the desk, shoving a seizing animal in her face and threatening her. The veterinary technician who beat you to the scene is trying to wrestle the animal from the venom-spitting owners to help it, other clients have eyebrows raised above their foreheads, and the rest of the staff is running to gather behind you for support. The situation has completely lost control. Completely.

There are several great communication options you can go with here: redirection, gentle reasoning, or empathy. When this happened to me, I chose another one: swearing. In my surprisingly booming voice, I sternly informed those owners that they could get in an exam room and sit the f%*k down and shut the (same word) up, or

they could leave and their pet would probably die.

Silence.

It was the proverbial slap in the face that the situation called for. We were able to help their pet, get them to discharge the next day, and then follow up with a nice, “You can’t come here again” firing letter. If you were an observer that day, you may have thought me a hothead. You may have approached it differently, and you may have had better results. But maybe not.

I love learning about communication and conflict, and I have grown so much in the range of ways I interact with clients and colleagues, but I think we sometimes forget that desperate times call for drastic measures; the last resort does sometimes become the only option left. (There are times with clients, and even with patients, that we have to figuratively break the glass on the fire extinguisher.) It would be easy to judge those emergency situations from the outside and find fault, but the effect of saving your fight until the fight comes to you is that you can react powerfully when you need to. And sometimes, as a veterinary professional, you will need to drop an f-bomb to reset the situation. Use that power carefully, my friends!

And yes, the police did come check on us. When the officer stuck his head into the room to ask if everything was OK, I had the pleasure of looking calmly at the owners to say, “I don’t know. Is everything OK in here?” Their sheepish faces and affirmatives said so much more than any words. **TVP**

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This column is titled “The Secret Life of Vets” so I can talk about the secrets that really should be considered well-known truths. These are the not-so-secret secrets that can help change our thinking and our profession for the better.



Ben Kirchner