

WE ASKED ...

What is your best advice for dealing with challenging client situations in a mixed animal practice setting?

Set boundaries and manage expectations. This profession will ask a lot. Learn when to say yes and when to step back. Be clear and honest. When expectations are realistic, trust follows. Manage your own expectations, too. You won't know everything, and you will make mistakes. That doesn't make you a bad veterinarian. It makes you human.

Clare M. Scully, MA, DVM, MS, DACT
Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine



I was taught to think of people as “people in a difficult situation” versus “difficult people.” The wording is subtle but helps remind me that we often meet people on less-than-ideal days and that, at heart, many of them are good people in a challenging situation.

Jamie Kopper, DVM, PhD, DACVIM (LAIM), DACVECC-LA
Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine

We sometimes forget that veterinary medicine is, at its core, a people profession. Effective client communication is essential; it requires active listening, clear and honest conversations, empathy, and the ability to build trust through consistent, professional engagement. The truth is that we must speak honestly and truthfully, even when the message isn't what a client hopes to hear. The animal depends on our best care, regardless of the outcome. And ultimately, clients appreciate transparency; it strengthens their trust in us. That is veterinary medicine—caring for animals through meaningful, human connection.

Ricardo M. Stockler, DVM, MS, PhD, DABVP (Dairy Practice)
Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine

A great technique to avoid reacting emotionally, getting defensive, or matching energy is self-distancing. Respond as if you are watching an interaction from afar. What would your lines be if someone wrote a script and you are in the role of the most gifted communicator in the world? A brief shift in your brain produces measurable change. It may feel weird at first, but it is a game changer!

Liz Arbittier, VMD, CVA
University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine



PeopleImages/shutterstock; goodluz/shutterstock