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## **Client Satisfaction**

### **By Linda Wasche**

**Question:** We are always looking for ways to boost client satisfaction. Do you know of some good quick fixes” that are easy for staff to implement and that will increase out ratings with our clients?

**Answer:**

“A customer is not an interruption of our work . . . he is the purpose of it.” -- From a sign posted at L.L. Bean headquarters

What does a veterinary practice have to do with a seller of outdoor apparel? Regardless of the business, the concept is the same. You must build a culture around this premise: the customer or client is everything.

Veterinary care, unlike consumer products, is difficult for clients to evaluate. How often do you hear, “You should see the great job Dr. Jones did on my cat’s neuter.” Or, “This is the best removal of a foreign body in a Beagle that I’ve ever seen.”

While a veterinarian may possess outstanding technical skill, clients cannot tell the difference. They *can* tell how they are treated. Additionally, as more pet owners view their animals as family members, service expectations are rising.

Boost client satisfaction with quick fixes in two areas.

#### **The client experience.**

Your clients will evaluate their experience at each point of contact.

#### ***The appointment***

- Avoid placing callers on hold for long periods of time; instead, offer to call back. Set up an email appointment system.
- Confirm appointments via phone, email or mail with uplifting, helpful messages. (“We will expect Fluffy on Friday; remember we are doing a completed wellness check so please set aside one hour.”)

#### ***The visit***

- Use clients’ names and the names of their pets.
- If clients must wait, provide coffee and other amenities. Give clients something to do: brush their dog, amuse their cat with toys, clip bunny’s nails.
- Become an information source. Provide literature, web addresses and access to CDs and DVDs.
- Be particular about the practice’s appearance. Make sure it looks and smells clean. Choose soothing colors and welcoming décor.
- Train all staff in compassion and good bedside manner. The vet who kissed my sick cat on the forehead now treats my three cats, four rabbits and many neighbors’ pets.
- Make it convenient for clients. Offer curbside assistance for clients with multiple pets. Develop a network of visiting specialists so clients do not have to drive.

**Follow up**

- Provide clear discharge instructions. Type them instead of hand write. Avoid jargon and terms that clients will not understand. Be explicit about medication, special diets and other care.
- Call to see how the pet is doing following treatment.
- Call or send condolences to clients whose pets are deceased.

**Client value.**

Looks for ways to add value to your client's experience.

- Add related services. Pet bathing and grooming, nutrition counseling, wellness/preventive care and behavior training can all be done in limited space.
- Become a partner in the pet's care. Educate clients and discuss new services via electronic newsletters, booklets and bulletins.
- Sponsor seminars, workshops and other events tailored to particular groups: seniors with cats, first-time bunny owners, clients with geriatric pets.
- Reward owners who take good care of their pets with unexpected perks and gifts.