



# 2025 OVMA GREAT IDEAS CONFERENCE

FOSTERING WELLNESS, DRIVING SUCCESS!

PROCEEDINGS

JUNE 18 - 20, 2025 | WHITE OAKS RESORT & SPA NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE, ONTARIO



ONTARIO  
VETERINARY  
MEDICAL  
ASSOCIATION

#2025GREATIDEAS

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# SPEAKER BIOS



## **James DeLano, DVM, VizVet**

UC Davis College of Veterinary Medicine

First and foremost a Veterinarian, Jim loves caring for humans and animals. He is also an Entrepreneur – the “E” in VET, owning and managing seven companies in the veterinary space. Finally, the “T”, for Teacher. In 2011, Jim joined the faculty, as an adjunct instructor, at the UC Davis College of Veterinary Medicine, teaching business and serving as a mentor/coach for the exam room communications program. He also is an instructor of a veterinary business course at the UC Davis Graduate School of Management.

His two greatest passions, outside of being a husband and father are launching veterinarian’s careers through pro-active structured mentorship and helping veterinary practice owners and managers be better at business.

Jim works with all four of his children in their cloud-based companies – one, a learning management system for veterinarian onboarding and mentorship, the other, a business intelligence platform focused on data visualization of practice financials.

Jim opened his first veterinary practice in 1989, followed by a pet store in 1996. Today, the practice has 12 FTE DVMs and 15,000 active clients. In addition to a de novo, he has acquired and merged practices over his 38-year career. Every solution reviewed today is the result of assessing challenges and satisfying needs in his own practice. The influence of Silicon Valley clients has driven him to be a “techie” and create tech driven solutions.

The driving force of these presentations is to help practice owners gain a better understanding of the business side of the veterinary practice. Competing with internet pharmacies, onboarding and mentoring DVMs, understanding COGS and generating non-DVM revenue are some of the topic’s attendees will leave with a greater understanding of.



## **Monica Dixon Perry, BA, CVPM**

Veterinary Division Senior Manager, BerryDunn

Monica has been involved in the field of veterinary medicine for more than 39 years. She earned her bachelor's degree in biology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Monica has been a Certified Veterinary Practice Manager (CVPM) for more than 20 years and remains a strong advocate for other veterinary practice managers to pursue this designation.

For over a decade, Monica managed a successful full-service, small animal eastern and western medicine veterinary practice in Raleigh, NC. As hospital administrator with Bowman Animal Hospital & Cat Clinic, Inc., she managed every aspect of the seven-day-a-week, nine-doctor hospital's operations. For 15 years, Monica was a consultant/partner with Mark Opperman, CVPM at VMC, Inc. where she presented a seminar called Principles of Veterinary Practice Management throughout the United States and Canada. She has lectured at numerous national veterinary conferences and veterinary schools in the United States as well as presented at internationally.

As a consultant, Monica enjoyed lecturing and working with practices that participated in VMC's on-site consultation services. Monica was also a part-time university lecturer at North Carolina State University in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics where she taught Veterinary Practice Management on the undergraduate level. In her current position, she is the Veterinary Division Senior Manager at BerryDunn and enjoys consulting with practices and lecturing nationally and internationally.

Monica is the 2024 President Elect of VetPartners, an active member of the Veterinary Hospital Managers Association (VHMA), Youth Director at her church and sits on the board of Casa Esperanza Montessori Charter School in Raleigh, NC. Monica will let you know that her two primary purposes in life are working with veterinary practices and their teams and being the best possible wife and mom. She shares her Raleigh, NC, home with her supportive and loving husband and their teenage daughter.

Monica is the 2022 Practice Management Speaker of the Year at the VMX Veterinary Meeting and Expo.



## **Katie Ford, BVSc (Hons), CertAVP(SAM), PGCert, MSc, MRCVS**

Co-founder, Vet Empowered

Katie Ford is a co-founder of Vet Empowered, an initiative dedicated to supporting the personal development and wellbeing of veterinary professionals through coaching and group services. A UK-based small animal veterinarian with an RCVS Certificate in Internal Medicine, Katie's journey through the veterinary profession led her to discover a passion for coaching, particularly in helping others navigate imposter syndrome and self-doubt. Katie has built a social media following of over 22,000 as @katiefordvet, where she shares insights on mental wellbeing, resilience, and personal growth. Her work through Vet Empowered, alongside co-director Claire Grigson, provides tailored coaching programmes that address the specific challenges faced by veterinary professionals. Katie's dedication to the veterinary community extends to her role as co-director at VetYou, where she works to improve financial literacy within the profession. She has completed a Masters Degree in Emotional Wellbeing and the ICF component of a Somatic Trauma-Informed Coaching qualification, and CMI Level 7 qualification. Katie's contributions were recognised in 2023 when she was awarded the RCVS Inspiration Award, and in 2024 with the Bright Minds Wellness Champion Award.



### **Taylor McAllister, MSW, RSW**

Clinical Social Worker, Layla Care

Taylor McAllister (MSW, RSW) has been a Clinical Social Worker since 2015, bringing comprehensive experience in mental health across healthcare systems, private practice, and non-profit organizations. She has specialized training in therapeutic interventions, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). After several years of direct client care, Taylor developed a deep interest in improving accessibility and sustainability in mental health service, which led her into a career in project management. As a Clinical Product Manager, Taylor integrates her clinical knowledge with strategic development, shaping digital mental health products and processes that enhance mental health care delivery.



### **Julie McCarthy, M.A., Ph.D**

Professor, Organizational Behavioral and HR Management, University of Toronto

Julie McCarthy is a Professor of Organizational Behaviour and HR Management at the University of Toronto and the Academic Director of the Rotman High Potential Leadership Executive Program. Her research focuses on managing stress, regulating emotions, and fostering strong employee connections to create thriving workplace environments. She also investigates the alignment of organizational policies with job applicants' well-being. Published in top academic journals like the Journal of Applied Psychology and Psychological Science, Julie is a Fellow of the International Association of Applied Psychology and serves on editorial boards for notable journals. In the corporate sector, she conducts leadership and resilience training for public and private organizations, collaborating with various industries, including healthcare and banking. Her expertise has been featured in prominent media outlets like Harvard Business Review and the Wall Street Journal. Julie has received numerous awards and grants, recognizing her contributions to the field of organizational behaviour.



### **Rachelle Watson, MSW, RSW**

Registered Social Worker, Layla Care

Rachelle Watson is a registered social worker in private practice, specializing in nervous system stabilization and resilience for individuals who have experienced trauma and work in high-stress environments. With extensive experience across a wide range of community, clinical and private mental health care settings, Rachelle brings a wealth of practical knowledge and expertise to her work. She has a particular interest in supporting those in the veterinary field, providing compassionate care for professionals navigating the emotional, ethical and physical demands of animal care. Her passion for this industry is rooted in her personal love for canine companionship and this is reflected in her heartfelt and pragmatic approach.





## Sarah McVanel, MSc, BA, CSP, PCC, CHRL

Founder, Greatness Magnified

Sarah is a recognition expert, professional speaker, coach, author, recovering perfectionist, and movement maker of F.R.O.G. Forever Recognize Others' Greatness™. With 25+ years of experience, I invigorate companies to see their people as exceptional so that, together, they can create a scrumptious, thriving culture where everyone belongs.

Sarah is also the founder of Greatness Magnified, I'm proud to have built a thriving organization that specializes in providing training programs and certifications for employees at large.

### Sarah's credentials:

- 25+ years in adult education and professional speaking
- CSP (Certified Speaking Professional)
- PCC (Professional Certified Coach)
- CSODP (Certified Senior Organizational Development Professional)
- CHRL (Certified Human Resources Leader)
- Degrees in Psychology (BA) and Family Relations (MSc)
- Author of 5 books and dozens of peer-reviewed and trade magazine articles
- Designations in Healthcare Administration and Human Resources
- Certified in MBTI, Personality Dimensions, BarON EQi, DISC
- Owner of the trademark and certification mark F.R.O.G. Forever Recognize Others' Greatness™

# BEING HUMAN TO CREATE IMPACT IN VETMED

## MORNING PLENARY

 *Dr. Katie Ford BVSc(Hons) CertAVP(SAM) PGCert MSc(Wellbeing) MRCVS*

People often ask, “What’s wrong with them?”  
But rarely: “What happened to them?”

It’s about recognising that every single one of us brings a story into the room - into the clinic, into the team meeting, into the consulting space. We may never know what someone else is carrying, or their full story. But we can bring curiosity. We can bring compassion. And we can choose to dare to create spaces where humanness isn’t hidden, but honoured.

We know so much about animals. We understand behavioural cues, fear responses, protective mechanisms. But when it comes to people - to ourselves, our clients, and each other - we’re not always offered the same grace.

We see clients at emotionally charged moments - fear, grief, guilt, frustration. Sometimes, that’s expressed as anger. Sometimes, we become the target. But we also know the depth of connection animals bring to people’s lives. We know what it means when someone trusts us with the creature they often love most in the world. We know what it means to be part of that story.

And the same goes for our teams. That colleague who seems short today? That student who’s suddenly gone quiet? It’s easy to label. But what if we paused? What if we asked, “What happened to them?” instead of assuming we already know?

This session is about the power of being human in veterinary medicine — not as a limitation, but as the heart of our impact.

We make assumptions all the time. About the vet who always seems to have the right answer. About the person sharing their latest award or publication on LinkedIn. We assume they must have it all together - confident, certain, unfazed. But often, what we see is only the

surface. Beneath it, there’s often fear, hard work, self-doubt, or a story we’ll never fully know.

I’ll talk about what it really means to bring your whole self to this work. Not in a performative way, but with safe vulnerability. With honesty. With permission to not have it all together all the time.

I’ll share some of my own story. I didn’t expect to pivot my career. I didn’t plan to coach others, speak internationally, or build a community of 20,000+ online. And I certainly didn’t expect to win the RCVS Inspiration Award. But what changed everything wasn’t learning more. It was allowing myself to be more human and a lot more real - and learning how to do that safely.

This session is a chance to pause. To reflect. To remember that self-compassion isn’t self-indulgence - it’s a lifeline. That your worth was never meant to be measured by how much you can carry without breaking. That you can make an enormous difference and still need support yourself.

## YOU’LL WALK AWAY WITH:

- A fresh lens on the moments we often label as “difficult” - in others, and in ourselves
- Gentle encouragement to reconnect with your own humanity in a profession that sometimes forgets it
- Validation for the powerful, skilled, human work you already do - often in the most emotionally loaded of moments
- And maybe, permission to be just a little more human - without needing to apologise for it

Because being human isn’t the opposite of being professional.

It’s how we create connection, trust, and the kind of impact that truly lasts.



3001

# ORGANIZED ONBOARDING

## BUILDING A STRONGER PRACTICE

 James DeLano, DVM, VizVet | UC Davis College of Veterinary Medicine

"If our onboarding program for new associates worked perfectly, new associates would feel welcome and comfortable. They would feel free to ask questions and to offer input. They would understand the practice's protocols and values and understand the "why" behind the policies."

1

# Organized Onboarding<sup>®</sup>

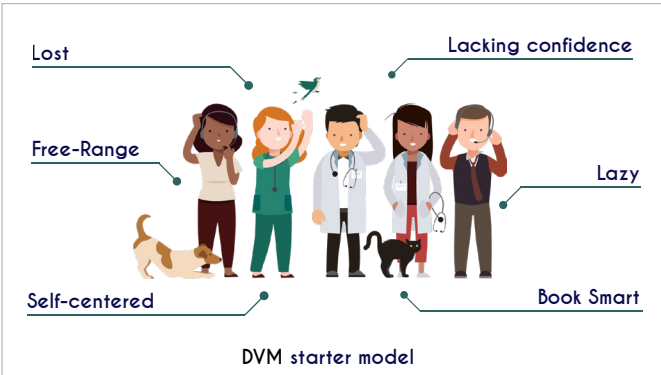
trust | mentoring | structure



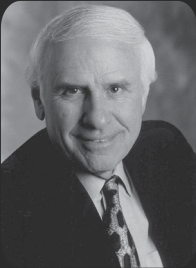
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What do you mean, 'grow' a DVM?

3



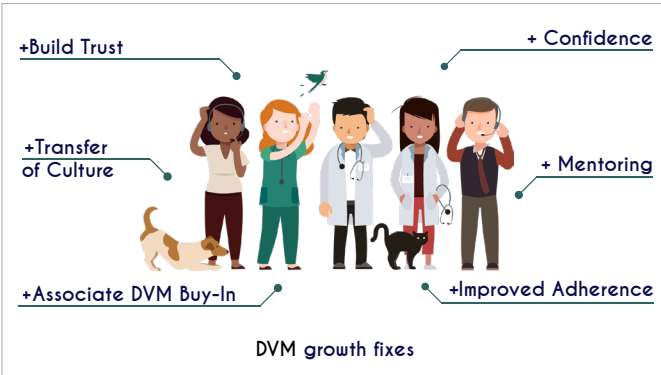
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If you keep doing what you've always done, you'll keep getting what you've always got.

-Jim Rohn

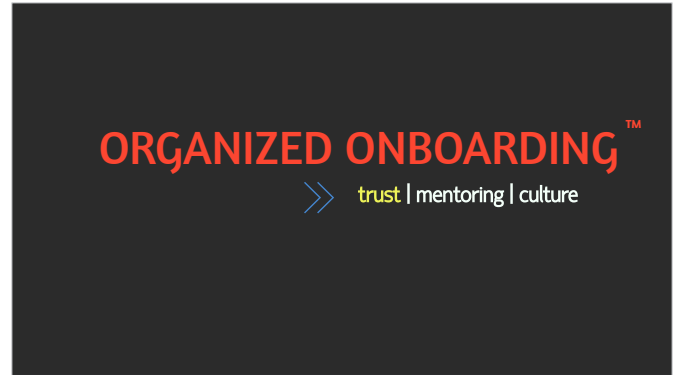
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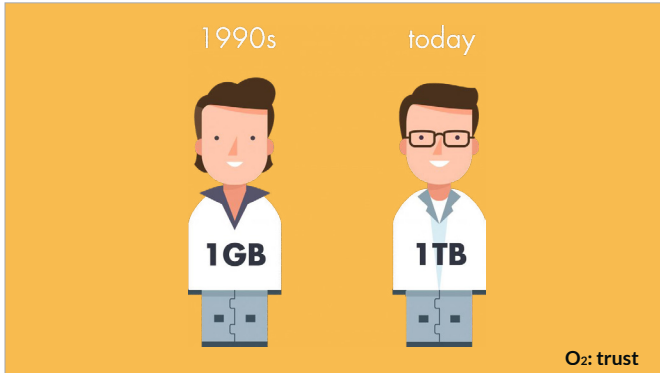
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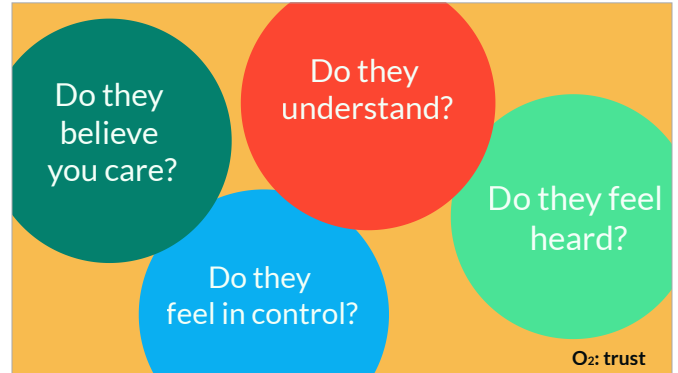
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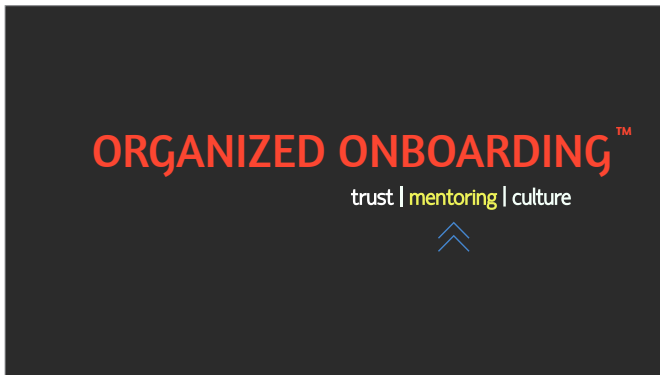
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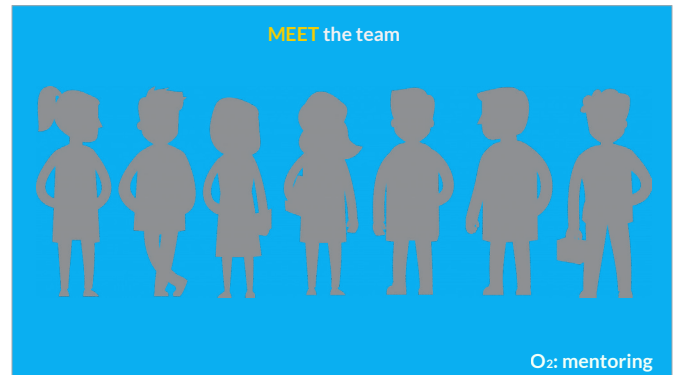
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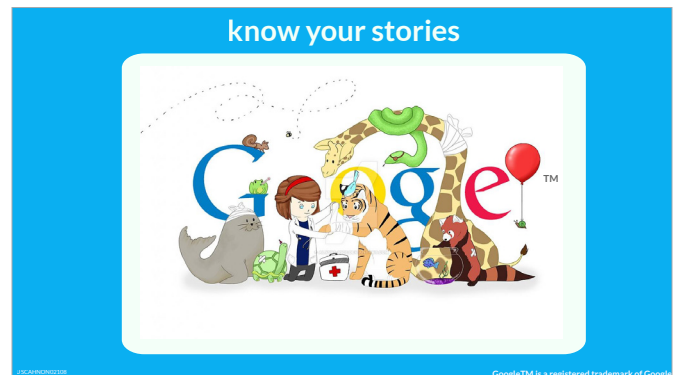
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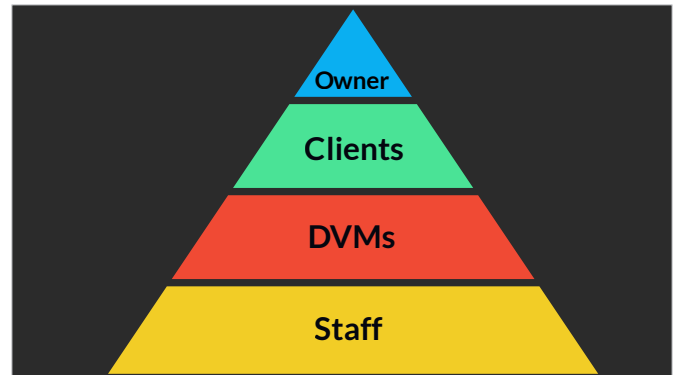


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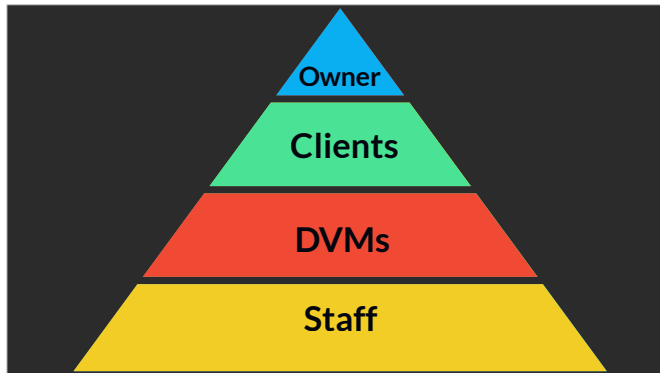
# ORGANIZED ONBOARDING™

trust | mentoring | culture <<

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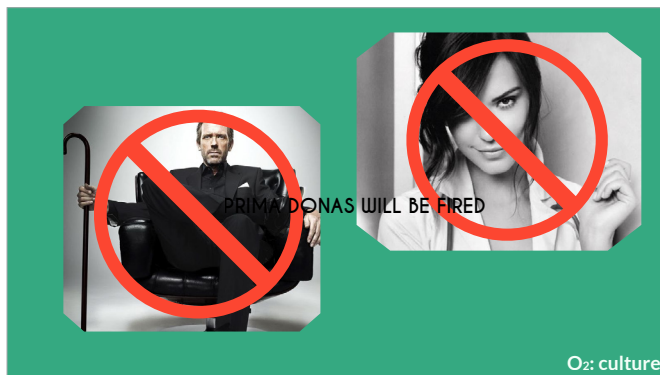
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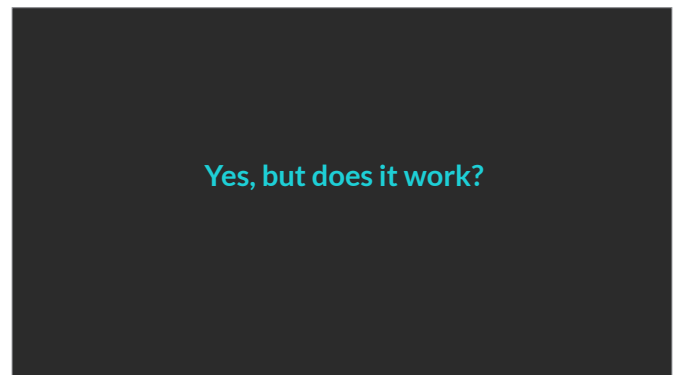
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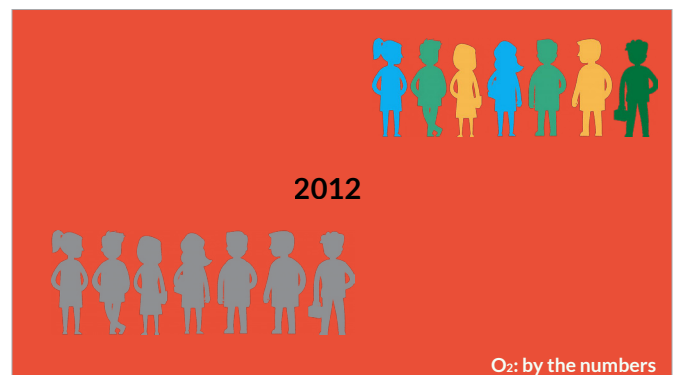


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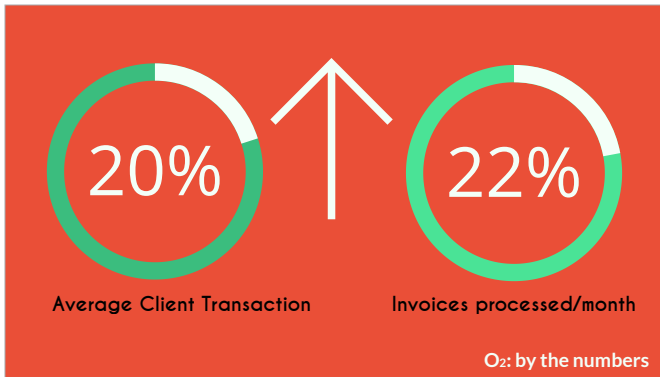
# ORGANIZED ONBOARDING™

by the numbers >>

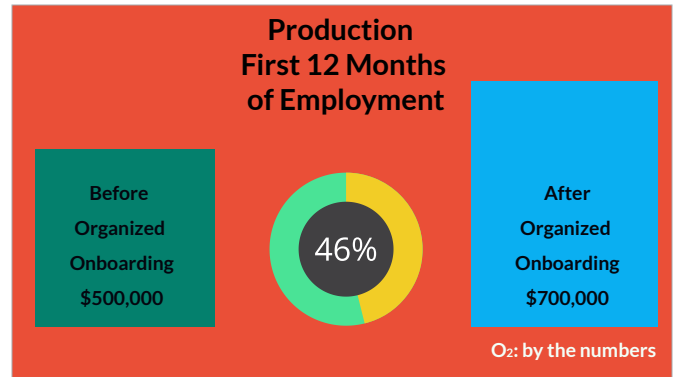
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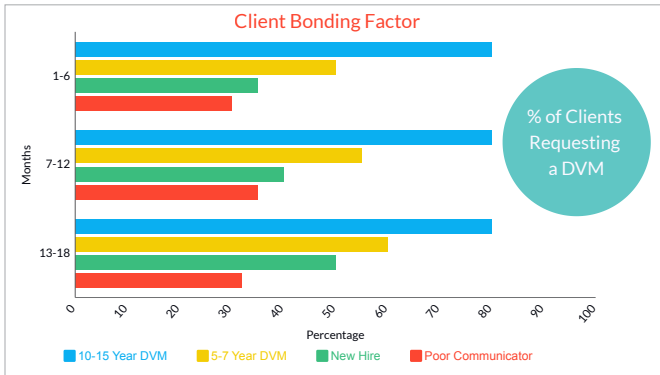
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23



24



25

So...how do I make it work for my practice?

26

ORGANIZED ONBOARDING™

>> structure

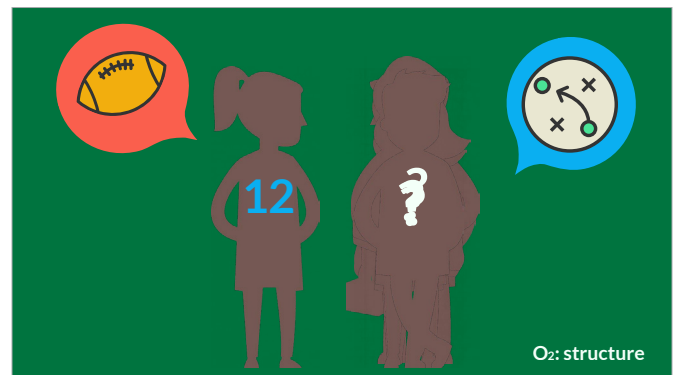
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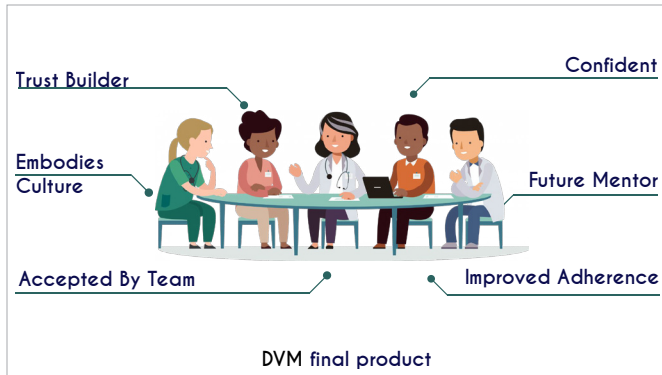
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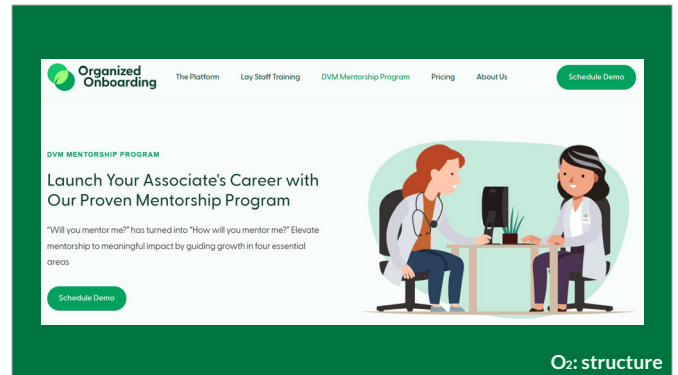
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30



31



32



33

3002

# FINANCIAL LITERACY & THE CHART OF ACCOUNTS

## BUILDING A STRONGER PRACTICE

 James DeLano, DVM, VizVet | UC Davis College of Veterinary Medicine

### Financial Literacy

Inc Statement, Balance Sheet, EBITDA  
GL Codes (classes/subclasses) how it works!

1



Join at [menti.com](https://menti.com) | use code 5364 9819

2

### Well-Managed Practice



> 15% net income

3



4

### Understanding Profit and Loss

6.31

5

### Understanding Balance Sheet

5.91

6



## Understanding AAHA COA

6.44

7

## Revenue Sources

From operations	Miscellaneous Revenue
Services	Rental income
Products	Studies for pharma
Boarding	Interest income
Grooming	Removed from EBITDA

8

**Internet Profit**

Professional Services  
Pharmacy  
Laboratory  
Anes | Sx | Dental  
Imaging  
Diets | Ancillary  
Boarding | Grooming

9

**Internet Profit %?**

Professional Services 31%  
Pharmacy 26%  
Laboratory 19%  
Anes | Sx | Dental 11%  
Imaging 6%  
Diets | Ancillary 4%  
Boarding | Grooming 3%

10

## COGS - Cost of Goods Sold



11

**No Internet**

Diets | Ancillary 62%  
Pharmacy 41%  
Laboratory 26%  
Professional Services 11%  
Anes | Sx | Dental 11%  
Imaging 11%  
Boarding | Grooming 2%

12

**Internet COGS**

Diets | Ancillary  
Pharmacy  
Laboratory  
Professional Services  
Anes | Sx | Dental  
Imaging  
Boarding | Grooming

13

## Gross Profit

Gross receipts from services & products  
minus  
COGS  
equals  
Gross Profit

14

**Expenses**

- Payroll
- Payroll taxes
- Benefits
- Other Emp costs

**Other Expenses**

- Labor
- G&A
- Other Misc Exp

**Facility & Equipment**

- ITDA

**Added to EBITDA**

The diagram illustrates the components of expenses. A central box labeled 'Expenses' contains 'Payroll', 'Payroll taxes', 'Benefits', and 'Other Emp costs'. To the left, a box labeled 'Other Expenses' contains 'Labor', 'G&A', and 'Other Misc Exp'. To the right, a box labeled 'Facility & Equipment' contains 'ITDA'. A double-headed arrow connects 'Other Expenses' and 'Facility & Equipment'. A single-headed arrow points from 'Other Expenses' to the 'Expenses' box. A single-headed arrow points from 'Facility & Equipment' to the 'Expenses' box. A single-headed arrow points from 'Other Misc Exp' to a box labeled 'Added to EBITDA'.

A pie chart illustrating the cost breakdown for a business. The chart is divided into four segments: Labor (49%), Direct Costs (COGS) (23%), Profit (15%), and General & Administrative (13%). The segments are color-coded: Labor is light blue, Direct Costs (COGS) is dark blue, Profit is orange, and General & Administrative is light purple.

Category	Percentage
Labor	49%
Direct Costs (COGS)	23%
Profit	15%
General & Administrative	13%

# Other Miscellaneous Expenses

- Miscellaneous expenses
- Owner life insurance
- Fines & Penalties
- Owner disability

# Net Income


Revenue from all sources  
minus  
Expenses from all sources  
equals  
Net Income

**Net Income**

flows through to the

**Balance Sheet**

**Personal Financial Statement**



**Balance Sheet**

# Balance Sheet

Moment in time

Business		Personal aka PFS
Assets	←→	Assets
Liabilities	←→	Liabilities
Equity	←→	Net Worth

# Assets

Things you own, either whole or in part

- Current asset - converted  $< 1$  year
- Fixed asset - held longer than 1 year
- Other asset - Intangible (primarily)



**ONTARIO  
VETERINARY  
MEDICAL  
ASSOCIATION**

## Current Assets

- Cash
- Accounts Receivable
- Advances (payroll)
- Inventory
- Prepaid expenses

23

## Fixed Assets - primarily tangible

- Building - real estate
- Leasehold Improvements
- Property & Equipment

24

## Other Assets - primarily intangible

- Goodwill
- Business name/records
- Covenant not to compete
- Equipment
- Accumulated amortization
- Accumulated depreciation

25

## Liabilities

Money you owe, but haven't paid

Current - or short term	Long term - >1year
Accounts payable	Loans
Payroll (all assoc. accts)	Leases
Sales tax	
Credit card charges	

26

## Accounts Payable

Money you owe, but haven't paid

- Bills to vendors
- 401k
- Sales tax
- Credit card charges

27

## Equity

**Assets - Liabilities = Equity**

28

**Questions on  
Income Statement  
&/or  
Balance Sheet**

29

3003

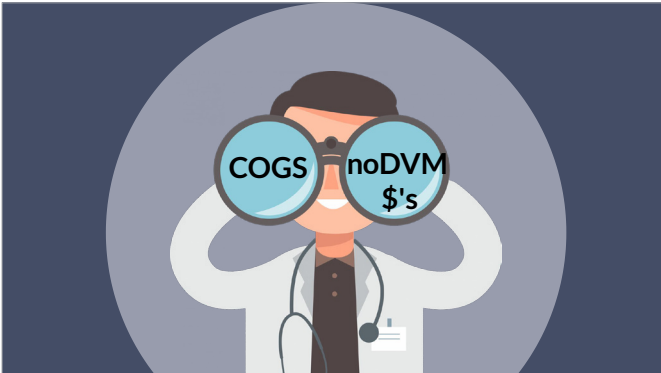
# COGS (COST OF GOODS SOLD) AND GENERATING NON-DVM REVENUE

## BUILDING A STRONGER PRACTICE

 James DeLano, DVM, VizVet | UC Davis College of Veterinary Medicine



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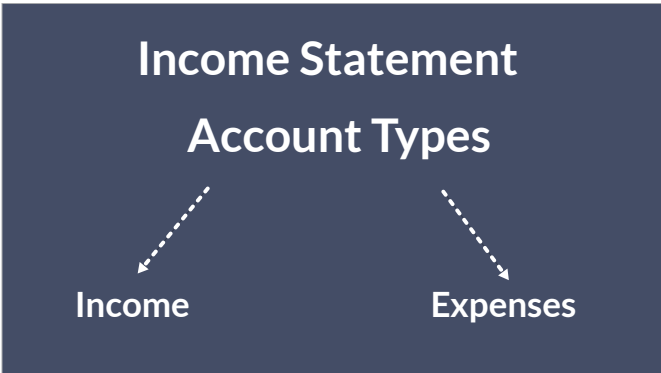
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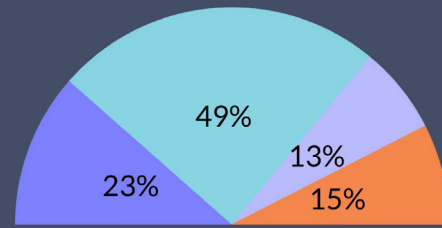


6

## Income Statement



7



Direct Costs (COGS) Labor  
General & Administrative Profit

8

## Income Statement



9

## Well-Managed Practice



> 15% net income

what is the COGS target - how can we help them get there

10



Direct Costs a.k.a COGS

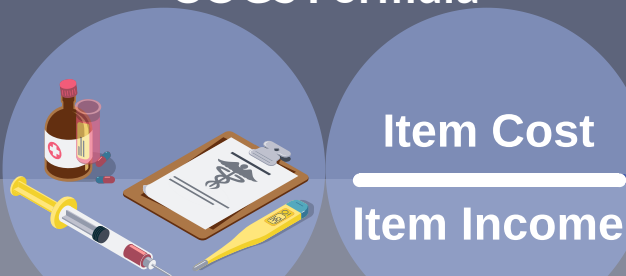
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## COGS

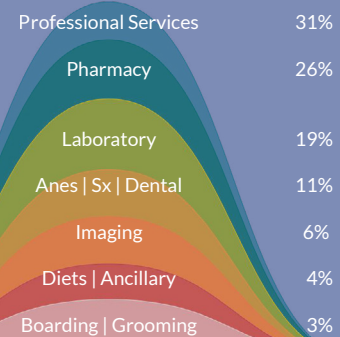


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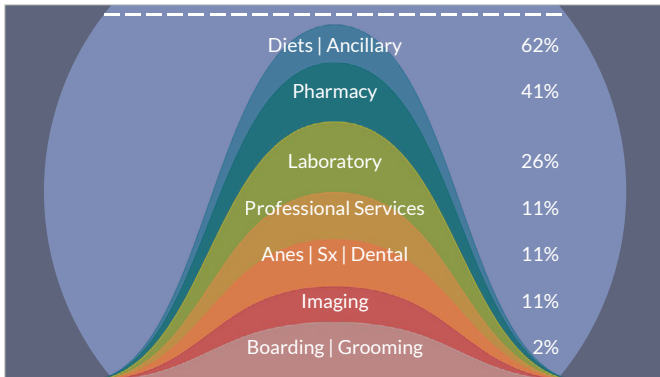
## COGS Formula



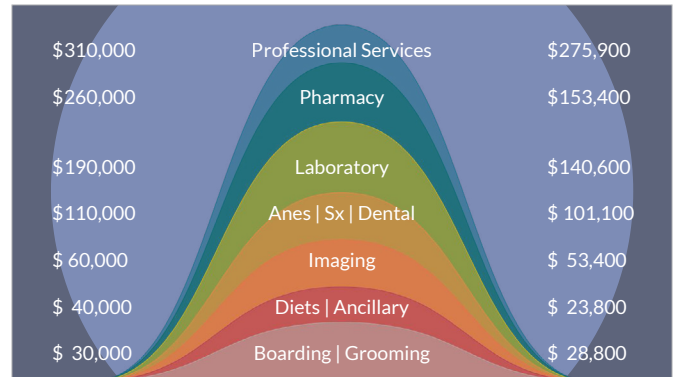
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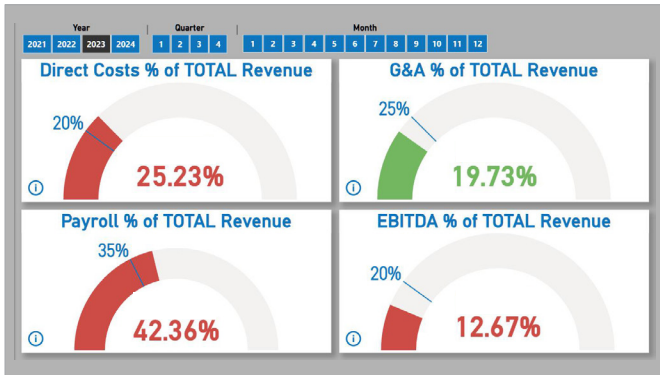
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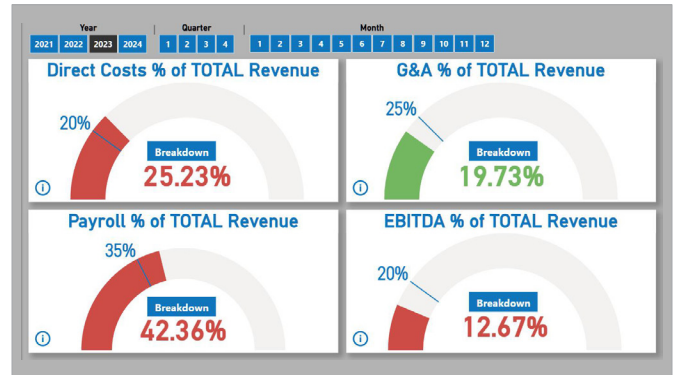
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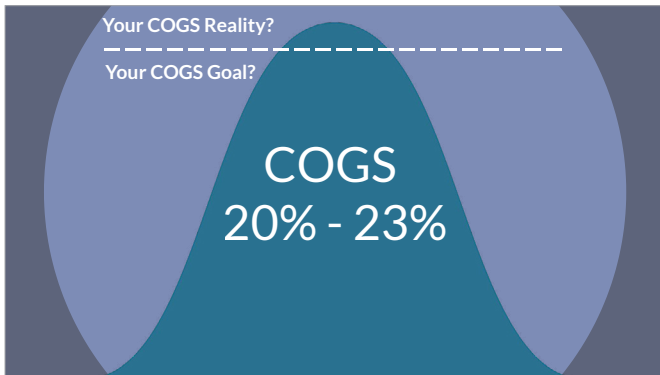
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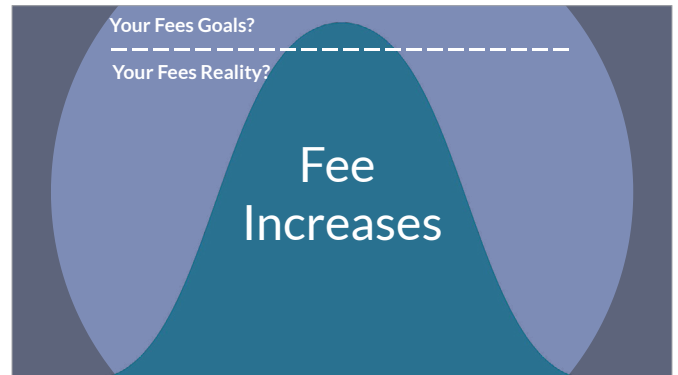
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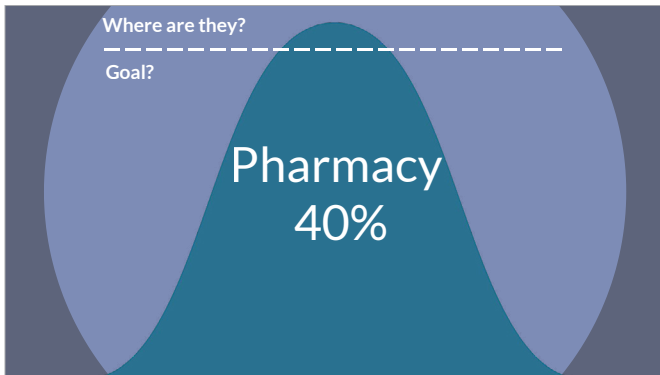
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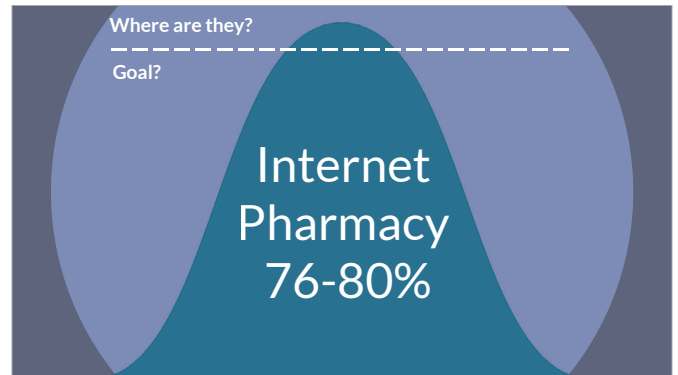
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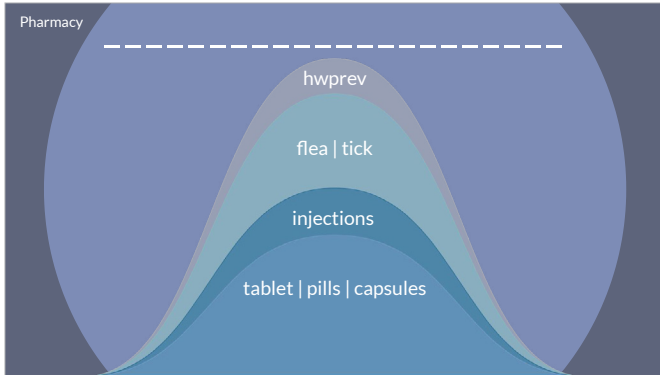


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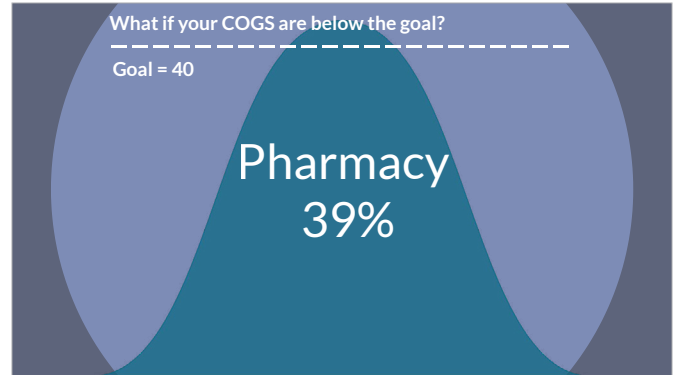


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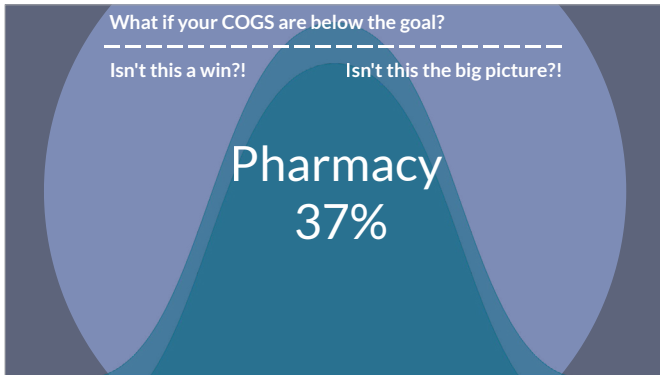




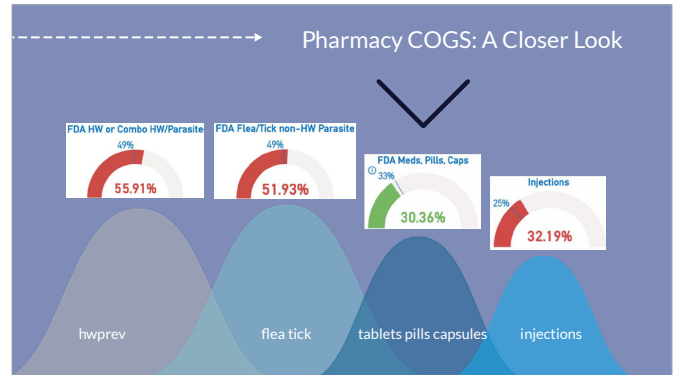
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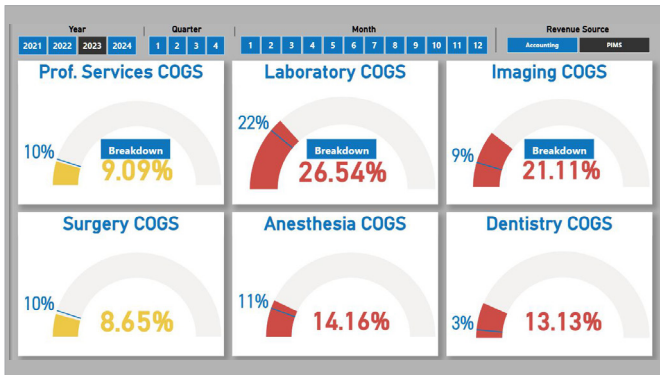
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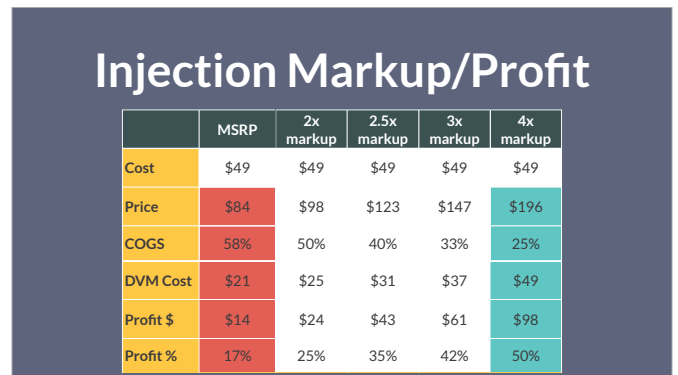
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30

## Injection Markup/Profit

No Office  
Visit fee

DVM Comp  
on injection

	2x markup	MSRP
Cost	\$49	\$49
Price	\$98	\$84
COGS	50%	58%
DVM Cost	\$25	\$21
Profit \$	\$24	\$14
Profit %	25%	17%

31

## Injection Markup/Profit

No Office  
Visit fee

No DVM  
Cost

	2x markup	MSRP
Cost	\$49	\$49
Price	\$98	\$84
COGS	50%	58%
DVM Cost	\$0	\$0
Profit \$	\$49	\$35
Profit %	50%	42%

32

## Injection Markup/Profit

\$75  
Office  
Visit fee

	2x markup		MSRP	
Cost	\$49		\$49	
Price	\$98	\$75	\$84	\$84
COGS	50%	50%	58%	58%
DVM Cost	\$25	\$44	\$21	\$40
Profit \$	\$24	\$80	\$14	\$70
Profit %	24%	46%	17%	44%

33

## Injection Markup/Profit

No Office Visit  
fee

No DVM comp

\$20 Tech Fee

	2x markup	MSRP
Cost	\$49	\$49
Price	\$98	\$84
COGS	50%	58%
Tech Fee	\$20	\$20
Profit \$	\$69	\$55
Profit %	58%	53%

34

## Injection Markup/Profit

	Profit \$'s	Profit %
No OV - Yes DVM Comp	\$24	25%
\$75 OV - Yes DVM Comp	\$80	46%
No OV - No DVM Comp	\$49	50%
\$20 Tech Fee	\$69	58%

35

non-DVM Revenue  
chasing % or \$'s  
0.25 on the \$1

36

## Product Markup/Profit

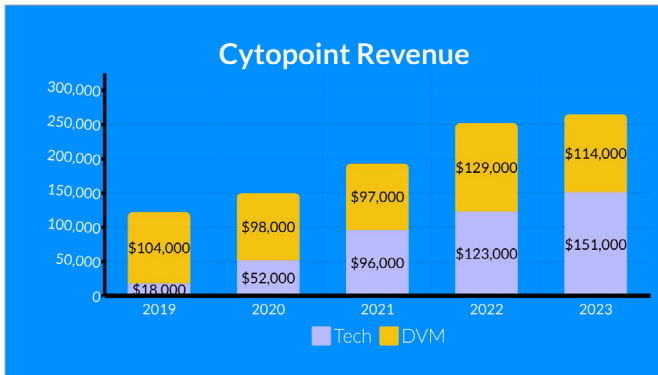
	Injection by Tech (\$0), DVM seeing another client			Injection by Tech (\$20), DVM seeing another client		
Product Name/Size	ACT, Librelle 20mg vial	Combined		Librelle 20mg vial	Combined	
Price	\$205.00	\$98.00	\$303.00	\$205.00	\$98.00	\$303.00
Product Cost	\$47.15	\$49.00	\$96.15	\$47.15	\$49.00	\$96.15
COGS %	23.00%	50.00%	31.73%	23.00%	50.00%	31.73%
OV Fee or Tech Fee				\$20.00		\$20.00
DVM Cost	\$51.25		\$51.25	\$51.25		\$51.25
Total Client Cost	\$205.00	\$98.00	\$303.00	\$205.00	\$118.00	\$323.00
Profit \$	\$106.60	\$49.00	\$155.60	\$106.60	\$69.00	\$175.60
Profit %	52.00%	50.00%	51.35%	52.00%	70.41%	57.95%

37

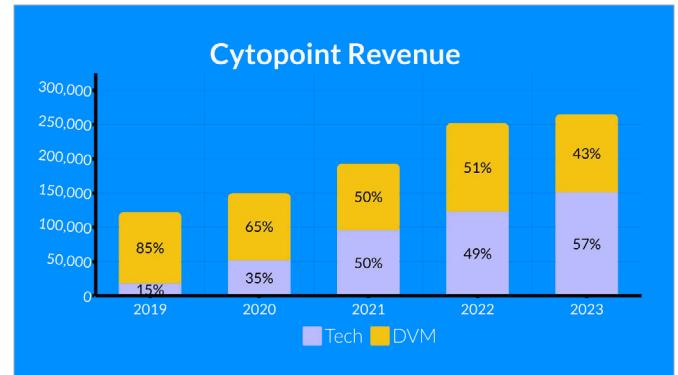
## non-DVM Revenue

- Diversify revenue streams
- Less sensitivity to reduced DVM hours
- > revenue production when DVM working
- Recurrent revenue
- Saves 0.25 of every \$1

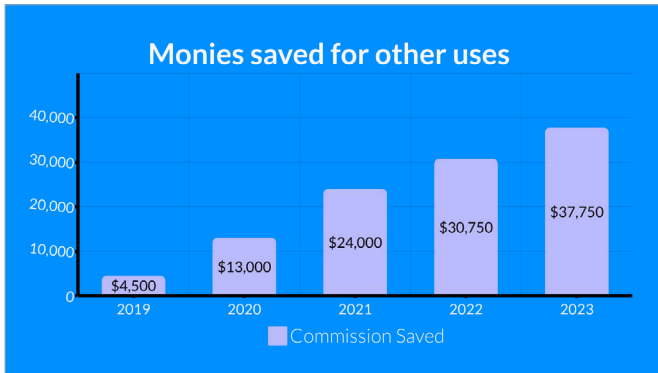
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39



40



41

## "Finding" More \$'s for Other Uses

42

## Paradigm shift on Fees nickel & dime?

43

Medical Waste Fees	Biowaste / Surgical Waste
Cremation	Medical Records Fee
Scribe Fee	Fluid Pump Fee
Pharmacy refills	Hospitalization
Toe nail trims	Anal sacs
SQ fluids – outpatient	Sample collection
Bandage changes	Controlled drug fee
Surgery room fee	Radiology image storage
Laser Therapy (after 1st treatment)	
Outpatient tech performed injections	
Technician visits for services and education	

44

## The Story We Tell

- The appointment book can open up
- DVMs caring for more sick patients
- DVMs providing more wellness
- Expanding revenue services, not just fees
- Patients receive care "on-time"
- Utilize lay staff more efficiently
- Cover increasing costs of compliance

45

## Questions?

46

4001

# CREATING YOUR IMPOSTER TOOLKIT: PERSONAL STRATEGIES FOR CONFIDENCE

## OVERCOMING SELF-DOUBT AND EMPOWERING TEAMS

 *Dr. Katie Ford BVSc(Hons) CertAVP(SAM) PGCert MSc(Wellbeing) MRCVS*

Imposter feelings are a common experience within the veterinary profession, and yet they often remain shrouded in isolation and self doubt. This session offers participants the opportunity to both normalise and gently explore their experience, moving beyond blanket advice to develop a nuanced, self-compassionate toolkit grounded in individual needs.

Veterinary professionals are often high-achievers, conditioned to strive for excellence while silently navigating internal narratives of inadequacy. Research suggests that up to 82% of individuals will experience imposter phenomenon during their lives (Bravata et al., 2020), and yet the veterinary profession's culture of perfectionism, comparison, and constant learning can heighten its prevalence. Often, the real struggle isn't the imposter feeling itself, but the judgment that we shouldn't be feeling it - we label it as bad or wrong, rather than meeting it with curiosity or compassion.

We begin by reframing the language: while "Imposter Syndrome" is widely used, it implies pathology. The original term, "Imposter Phenomenon" (Clance & Imes, 1978), is more accurate - an experience, not a flaw. Others may prefer terms like "imposterism," "imposter moments," or even a rebrand altogether, to more accurately describe the human experience underneath.

### UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS

Imposter experiences don't exist in a vacuum. They're shaped by societal messages, professional culture, and personal history. Psychologist Valerie Young's five archetypes - The Perfectionist, The Expert, The Soloist,

The Natural Genius, and The Superhuman - offer insight into the internalised ideals many of us unknowingly measure ourselves against (Young, 2011).

But let's be honest. Most of us have never sat down and consciously chosen these standards. We absorbed them quietly, subtly, from the world around us. And often, they're based on outdated or unrealistic expectations of who we think we should be.

Yet these archetypes are more than just classifications of pressures. They often reflect deeper messages we've received: that worth is earned through achievement, that asking for help is weakness, or that ease equals competence. When we start compassionately questioning these scripts, we begin to reclaim our value beyond productivity.

We often think the opposite of feeling like an imposter is confidence. And yet, we've been misold a story on that too. So before we jump into strategies, let's pause and look more closely at what confidence actually is.

### REDEFINING CONFIDENCE

Confidence is not the absence of fear or doubt. It's not a fixed trait, nor something reserved for an elite few who seem to have it all figured out. Confidence is a process, and one that can be built like a muscle.

Often, we believe we must feel confident before we take action. But what if confidence is actually the by-product of taking action? What if it's built through showing up, not knowing every answer, but trusting that we can learn, adapt, and ask for help?

And here's something important. Confidence doesn't always look loud. Sometimes, it's quietly backing your decisions. It's saying, "I don't know... yet." It's being willing to try, even when the outcome is uncertain. And it grows from self-compassion — treating yourself like you would a trusted friend navigating something new.

Understanding this shift in how we view confidence can offer relief, and also guidance. So if confidence grows from action, what supports us to take those actions, especially in moments where doubt feels overwhelming? That's where our toolkit comes in, starting with the short-term strategies that help bring us back to centre.

### **SHORT-TERM: soothing the nervous system**

Imposter feelings can feel intense because they trigger our threat response. The body often doesn't distinguish between "I might make a mistake" and "I'm in danger." That's why short-term strategies start with nervous system regulation. Breathwork, grounding techniques, or simply pausing to notice the sensations in your body can signal safety (Neff, 2011).

Reflection prompt: In moments of self-doubt and imposter moments, what helps you feel most grounded?

### **MEDIUM-TERM: questioning the narrative**

With some space from the intensity, we can begin to observe and challenge the thoughts we listen to. The 2015 study by McDowell et al. highlighted that highly supportive workplaces and increased self-efficacy were associated with lower imposter scores. This reinforces that imposter feelings are not just internal - they're relational and contextual.

Coaching approaches can help uncover the assumptions underpinning imposter thoughts. Ask: Is this true? Who told me this? What standard am I measuring myself against — and is it fair?

These questions don't need immediate answers. Just starting to ask them can open up a new way of seeing ourselves. Remember, additional professional support is available, and valuable, for recurrent narratives that may be linked to past experiences.

### **LONG-TERM: reconnecting with identity**

This stage is about self-discovery and building self-efficacy. Many of us have been told who we "should" be so often that we forget who we truly are. Exploring values, strengths, and what truly matters creates a more stable sense of worth. We realise: we don't need to earn our value - we already have it.

So what is the opposite of imposter? It's not perfection. It's authenticity. It's being real, unique, and human. Not a copy, not a performance - but someone worth getting to know. And that sits at the heart of this longer-term work.

And it might feel strange at first. Like learning a new language, or returning to a place you'd forgotten you once loved. But with time, self-trust becomes less about perfection, and more about presence.

Over time, your imposter toolkit becomes just that - yours. Not a prescription, but a personalised set of strategies grounded in self-awareness, community, and compassion. Zanchetta et al. (2020) explored coaching as a tool for imposter experiences, affirming that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, but rather a deeply individual exploration.

### **YOU'RE NOT ALONE**

This session reminds participants that imposter feelings are often a sign of growth and stretch, not failure. By exploring their roots, calming the body, reframing unhelpful narratives, and anchoring in identity, attendees can build confidence that doesn't require perfection.

#### **Reflection prompts:**

- What pressures have I been carrying that I'm ready to release?
- What does support look like for me right now - short term, medium term, long term?
- What would change if I believed I was already enough?

You're not an imposter. You're a complex, evolving human being doing meaningful work in a challenging profession. That's more than enough.

### Learning Objectives:

- Recognise the prevalence of imposter experiences and the broader social and systemic factors that contribute to them
- Differentiate between short-, medium-, and long-term strategies for responding to imposter feelings
- Apply principles of self-compassion, nervous system regulation, and thought inquiry to your own experiences
- Begin developing a personalised confidence toolkit grounded in your values, needs, and context

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4002

# FROM ME TO WE: IMPOSTER SYNDROME AND TEAM CULTURE

## OVERCOMING SELF-DOUBT AND EMPOWERING TEAMS

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Imposter feelings are often framed as a personal problem with personal solutions. But what if the biggest shift comes when we zoom out and look at the system around us?

In veterinary practice, many of us carry the weight of internalised self-doubt - the fear of being found out, the feeling that everyone else knows more or belongs more. And while these thoughts might feel deeply personal, they rarely begin in isolation. They're shaped by stories we've absorbed about success, perfection, and worthiness - and often reinforced by the cultures we work within.

This session is about connecting the dots between imposter experiences and workplace dynamics. Because when someone feels like an imposter, it's rarely just about them. It's also about how safe they feel to show up, how mistakes are handled, whether their voice is heard, and whether they're met with inclusion or quiet assumptions.

### OUR ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

Let's be clear: culture isn't the posters in the break room. It's the unspoken norms - what's rewarded, what's hidden, what's tolerated, what's celebrated. It's "how we do things around here."

Psychological safety - the belief that you won't be humiliated or penalised for speaking up - is a foundational element in reducing imposter experiences (Edmondson, 1999). This is explored further in a different session.

McDowell et al. (2015) found that individuals who perceived their workplace as highly supportive had significantly lower imposter scores. And that makes sense. When we're surrounded by open communication, psychological safety, and honest feedback, our nervous systems can settle. We don't have to brace for judgment. We can be learners, not performers.

But the opposite is also true. Cultures that reward overworking, that treat mistakes as failures of character, or that equate confidence with competence? They can unintentionally amplify imposter feelings - not just in one person, but across whole teams. It creates a ripple effect: we see others hiding their struggles and assume we're the only ones who feel this way. The silence becomes the standard.

### TANGIBLE CULTURE CUES THAT SHAPE IMPOSTER EXPERIENCES

- How are mistakes handled? Are they learning moments or something to hide?
- Is feedback specific and timely - or vague and inconsistent?
- Do all voices get heard in meetings, or just the loudest or most senior?
- Is psychological safety talked about, or truly felt?
- Is there space to be a beginner?
- Are diverse role models present?

These small signals add up. And for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds, those signals can be even louder - shaped by societal stereotypes, microaggressions, or unspoken norms about who “belongs.”

Factors like race, gender, neurodivergence, or socioeconomic background can shape how imposter thoughts are experienced and whether someone feels safe enough to share them. Psychological safety doesn't land equally - it must be intentionally cultivated.

## THIS ISN'T ABOUT BLAME. IT'S ABOUT BELONGING.

The goal here isn't to 'fix' people; nobody is broken. It's to ask: what kind of environment helps us thrive and grow? What kind of culture makes it feel safe to say, “I don't know,” or “I need help,” or “I made a mistake - can we talk about it?”

Imposter feelings can be protective - a way to stay safe in uncertain or evaluative environments. They make sense when people have learned that being 'wrong' or visible carries risk.

Imagine if imposter feelings were met with understanding instead of shame. Imagine if struggling didn't make someone feel broken - it made them feel human. That's the kind of workplace many of us wish we'd had when we graduated. And the good news? We can start building it now.

## SMALL ACTIONS, BIG RIPPLES

Culture change doesn't require a title. It starts in the everyday. Checking in with a colleague. Sharing your own learning moments. Asking someone quieter what they think. Celebrating progress, not just perfection.

You don't have to be a therapist. You don't have to 'fix' anything. But you can be a catalyst. And when we each show up a little more human, we make it easier for others to do the same.

### Reflection prompts:

- What unspoken messages about success or confidence show up in my workplace?
- What helps me feel safe enough to speak up or ask for help?
- What's one small change I could model or advocate for in my team?
- What systems or unspoken rules in our workplace might be unintentionally fuelling imposter feelings?

You don't need to know everything. You don't have to prove your worth. And you are not alone. Let's move from me to we - together.

Let's create workplaces where people don't feel like imposters for not knowing an answer — but feel like humans, supported in their learning, valued for showing up, and trusted for being real.

### Learning Objectives:

- Explain how team culture and workplace dynamics influence the development and persistence of imposter feelings
- Identify organisational behaviours and norms that may unintentionally reinforce self-doubt and isolation
- Analyse the role of psychological safety, inclusion, and feedback in shaping collective team confidence
- Propose small, actionable strategies to cultivate a culture of support, trust, and shared belonging within veterinary teams

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4003

# WHAT DOES PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY HAVE TO DO WITH IMPOSTER SYNDROME?

## OVERCOMING SELF-DOUBT AND EMPOWERING TEAMS

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When we think about imposter syndrome, we often jump straight to internal strategies - affirmations, achievements lists, or mindset shifts. But what if the most powerful intervention isn't just inside us, but around us? For us, and for our teams.

Psychological safety is the shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999). It's what allows people to speak up, ask questions, make mistakes, and challenge the status quo - without fear of embarrassment or punishment. And it matters deeply when we talk about imposter experiences.

### EVERYONE HAS A STORY

Imposter feelings aren't just personal quirks - they're shaped by systems, stories, and spaces. People come to work carrying invisible experiences: past traumas, cultural expectations, marginalisation, perfectionist conditioning. These layers shape how safe they feel to show up authentically, especially in veterinary workplaces that can be fast-paced, hierarchical, and emotionally intense.

When someone's nervous system and threat response is activated - whether due to present pressures or echoes of the past - they might not feel safe enough to speak up or lean into vulnerability. And that doesn't mean they're not capable or committed. It means their brain is prioritising safety over strategy.

Imposter experiences often thrive where psychological safety is low. If mistakes are punished, feedback is inconsistent, or team culture values flawless performance over real connection, then self-doubt becomes armour.

And from that place, it's harder to learn, collaborate, or bring our full selves to the table.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS NOT ABOUT BEING COMFORTABLE

It's not about avoiding challenge, hard conversations or discomfort. It's about knowing that, even in those moments, you won't be humiliated or excluded. You're still safe to belong. That difference is everything.

When we say someone "lacks confidence," we sometimes miss what's actually happening: often their environment doesn't feel safe enough for them to take a risk. Safety precedes confidence. That's why addressing psychological safety isn't a nice-to-have - it's foundational.

### THE NERVOUS SYSTEM AND THE IMPOSTER EXPERIENCE

Drawing from Polyvagal Theory and trauma-informed leadership principles, we can understand why imposter feelings don't always respond to logic alone. In a perceived threat state - criticism, exclusion, unrealistic expectations — the body may shift into fight, flight, or freeze. Prefrontal cortex functioning (rational thought, problem-solving) decreases, and protective responses take over (Porges, 2011).

In this state, someone might second-guess themselves, avoid speaking up, or overwork to compensate - not out of weakness, but as a survival strategy.

When veterinary professionals learn to understand these responses - both in themselves and others - we can start to build workplaces that are more human, more effective, and more resilient. It's also important to remember that these things take time to build, just like trust.

## SO WHAT HELPS?

- Predictable, fair, and compassionate feedback systems
- Normalising uncertainty and the learning process
- Visible role-modelling of appropriate vulnerability from leadership
- Encouraging reflective practice and emotional literacy
- Making space for nervous system education and regulation

Research supports this too. Uslu (2024) highlights that psychological safety buffers the negative impact of imposter experiences, while structured interventions - such as mentoring and team-based coaching - help individuals reframe negative self-perceptions. Jaison et al. (2024) emphasise that without supportive environments, imposter feelings can spiral into burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and disengagement.

We don't need to get rid of imposter feelings to thrive - we need to stop inadvertently making people feel unsafe for having them and move towards compassion.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Let's create spaces where no one feels like an imposter for needing help, asking a question, or being human. Where they don't have to earn belonging by performing perfection. Where safety and compassion are built in - not earned.

Imposter syndrome might whisper "you're not enough." But a psychologically safe workplace replies, "you are welcome here, just as you are, let's grow together."

## Learning Objectives:

- Define psychological safety and its relevance to imposter experiences in veterinary workplaces
- Describe how nervous system responses influence behaviour in environments lacking psychological safety
- Examine the impact of leadership practices, feedback culture, and inclusion on individual and team confidence
- Develop practical approaches to foster psychological safety and reduce imposter-related stress in your own setting

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# EMPOWERING YOUR TEAM

## OVERCOMING SELF-DOUBT AND EMPOWERING TEAMS

 *Dr. Katie Ford BVSc(Hons) CertAVP(SAM) PGCert MSc(Wellbeing) MRCVS*

Empowerment. It's a word we hear often - but what does it really mean in a veterinary team context? And more importantly, how do we move it from a buzzword to a felt experience for those we work alongside?

This session explores what it means to truly empower your team - not by doing more, 'fixing' others, or holding it all together alone, but by shifting the way we relate, lead, and communicate. It's about supporting people to reconnect with their own agency, capacity, and worth.

### REDEFINING EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment isn't about handing over responsibility and walking away. It's not about rescuing or shielding people from struggle either. At its core, empowerment is about helping others realise they do have power, that it's safe to use it, and that they do matter.

Organisational psychologist Conger & Kanungo (1988) first described empowerment as the process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organisational members by identifying and removing conditions that foster powerlessness. This resonates deeply in veterinary teams where autonomy and agency can often be buried under hierarchy, habit, or hidden expectations.

Self-efficacy - our belief in our ability to succeed in specific situations - plays a critical role in how imposter feelings show up too, with research by McDowell et al. (2015) showing that individuals with higher self-efficacy report significantly lower levels of imposter phenomenon in supportive workplace environments.

To be empowered is to have both the internal confidence and the external resources, support systems, and clarity needed to take meaningful action and make impactful choices. It includes knowledge, autonomy, psychological safety, and the ability to learn without fear.

Recent research continues to reinforce these ideas: empowering leadership has been shown to increase employee self-confidence, autonomy, creativity, and performance - contributing to improved wellbeing and job satisfaction (Lepaya, 2024).

### THE DIMENSIONS OF EMPOWERMENT

According to Spreitzer (1995), psychological empowerment is built upon four core dimensions:

- **Meaning:** The sense that work aligns with personal values
- **Competence:** The belief that you have the ability or skills to perform well
- **Self-determination:** Autonomy in how one carries out tasks
- **Impact:** A belief that one's work influences outcomes

These aren't just abstract concepts - they're daily experiences that can be built, or eroded, through leadership behaviours and team dynamics.

### CONTEXT MATTERS: WHY NOW?

In today's veterinary world, many teams are operating under pressure. The workforce challenges, the emotional labour, financial pressures, social media comparison, and unspoken expectations can leave even the most capable people feeling stuck or "not enough."

We won't always know someone's story - their past experiences, their inner critic, the battles they're fighting quietly. That's why compassion, curiosity, and co-created safety aren't soft skills - they're foundational, human skills.



It's also vital to acknowledge that empowerment doesn't happen in a vacuum. Dynamics of identity, power, and lived experience shape how safe and possible it feels for someone to step into that power.

## WHAT ACTUALLY EMPOWERS PEOPLE?

This session draws from coaching psychology, trauma-informed principles, and somatic leadership theory. It's about:

- Offering support without micromanaging
- Encouraging autonomy while being available
- Building psychological safety through action, not slogans
- Listening actively and reflecting back people's strengths
- Daring to delegate meaningful responsibility
- Asking good questions, not just giving answers

In the session, we will explore tools like the Empowerment Triangle (Chalmers), the Pygmalion Effect in leadership, and how to spot - and step out of - the Drama Triangle (Karpman). Because empowering someone means resisting the urge to rescue, and instead asking, "How can I support you?" or "What are your options?"

## WHEN EMPOWERMENT ISN'T EMPOWERING...

Even with the best intentions, empowerment attempts can backfire. Some common pitfalls include:

- Delegating without adequate context or support
- Mistaking autonomy for abandonment
- Expecting people to lead without appropriate training or clarity
- Using "empowerment" as a way to mask leadership inaction

Empowerment doesn't mean stepping back entirely - it's about staying present in a different way.

## THE LEADER'S INNER WORK

We can only meet people to the level we've met ourselves. That means examining our own patterns: perfectionism, control, fear of failure. This doesn't have to be done alone. It means noticing where we withhold power out of protection or habit. And it means regulating our own nervous systems - because leadership is felt, not just spoken.

When a leader role models self-compassion, honesty, boundaries, and growth, it gives permission to others to do the same. We don't empower through perfection - we empower through presence and connection.

## ADAPTING YOUR APPROACH: SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Empowerment isn't one-size-fits-all. The Hersey and Blanchard situational leadership model reminds us that leadership must flex depending on someone's confidence, skill level, and context. For some team members, high support and guidance are empowering. For others, space and autonomy are key. The skill lies in recognising what's needed when - and being willing to adapt.

## CREATING AN EMPOWERING CULTURE

This includes:

- Aligning your actions with your values
- Celebrating learning and mistakes
- Promoting shared responsibility
- Normalising asking for help

Research shows that psychological safety and inclusive leadership positively influence innovative performance and conflict resolution (Wang et al., 2024; Riaz et al., 2024). Empowerment is not only about wellbeing - it's also about team sustainability and resilience. Additionally, studies show psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between leadership and employees' innovative behaviour (Hu et al., 2025).



Empowerment isn't a one-time act - it's something built moment-by-moment in conversations, in how we give feedback, in how we show up. This is about helping people re-learn that they do have power, and that they don't have to earn their worth through burnout or silence.

You won't empower everyone. Some people won't be ready, and that's okay. But you can be someone who holds them in their highest regard - even when they can't see it themselves. And in the process, you might just empower yourself too.

#### Learning Objectives:

- Differentiate between true empowerment and common misconceptions around delegation or autonomy
- Identify key psychological and cultural factors that influence a team member's sense of agency and worth
- Evaluate your own leadership habits and how they may support or hinder empowerment
- Apply trauma-informed, coaching-led strategies to promote trust, growth, and self-efficacy within your team

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7001

# THE NERVOUS SYSTEMS' ROLE IN ANXIETY AND REGULATION

## PERSONAL & TEAM WELL-BEING

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### OVERVIEW

Anxiety is often misunderstood as a purely emotional experience—something akin to feeling sad or happy. However, anxiety is a deeply rooted physiological response shaped by the brain and body's ongoing efforts to scan for threat and maintain safety. But why would someone experience such anxiety in the workplace? Each individual experiences anxiety differently, influenced by their life experiences and unique triggers. As a result, outward expression of anxiety can be difficult to recognize and challenging to understand.

For veterinary professionals—who regularly encounter emotionally charged, ethically complex, and time-pressured environments—it is natural that the biological response that triggers feelings of anxiety can become particularly sensitive. This session integrates neuroscience and psychology to examine how anxiety arises from nervous system processes and how these physiological states influence behavior, communication, and team dynamics in veterinary workplaces. Participants will be introduced to practical strategies for nervous system regulation and begin to explore how to recognize and respond to anxiety in themselves and others. The session combines education with experiential learning, using case-based discussions to promote reflection and support compassionate, real-world application.

### SESSION OBJECTIVES

Participants will leave the session with the ability to:

- Understand how the autonomic nervous system (the part of the body that manages stress and

relaxation) plays a role in how we experience and respond to anxiety.

- Recognize the physical and behavioral signs that someone's nervous system may be in a heightened, stressed state.
- Gain insight into why some people are more sensitive to stress than others, based on both biology and life experiences.
- Explore practical, research-informed strategies to help regulate the nervous system—for both individuals and teams.
- Begin using a compassionate approach to better recognize and respond to signs of anxiety in others at work.

### SESSION CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

**Nervous System Foundations:** The session begins by introducing the polyvagal theory, which explains how our nervous system influences feelings of safety, connection, and stress regulation. Participants will explore how these nervous system states influence our anxious reactions and can affect focus, decision-making, and relationships in the workplace.

**The Physiology of Anxiety:** Anxiety is a natural, body-based response to perceived threat. In veterinary practice, frequent stressors like high caseloads, emotional client interactions, and ethical challenges can lead to repeated nervous system activation. When the body gets stuck or spends prolonged periods of time in a heightened state, the result may be fatigue, emotional

reactivity and reduced overall well-being. We explore how these patterns may be normalized in high-performing teams and discuss how to recognize and respond effectively to these patterns.

**Why Stress Affects People Differently:** This part of the session explores the many factors—such as personality, past experiences, current workload, and team environment—that can shape how someone reacts to stress and how quickly they recover from it. Participants reflect on these differences and consider how to respond to the stress of others with curiosity and compassion.

**Tools for Nervous System Regulation:** Participants will be introduced to simple, practical strategies that can help calm the body and support recovery from stress. The session will explain why these strategies are helpful—based on how the nervous system works—and how even small actions, when used intentionally, can support focus and resilience at work.

**Responding to Anxiety in Others:** The session concludes by shifting focus to the team as a whole—how to recognize and compassionately respond to anxiety in colleagues. Participants will leave with a foundational understanding of why anxiety shows up in the workplace and how to begin responding with empathy.

## PRESENTATION ELEMENTS

This session blends educational content with interactive learning. It will include a partial presentation format to introduce key concepts, alongside live case studies and group discussions. Through these real-world and sometimes ambiguous scenarios, participants will practice identifying signs of anxiety and understanding them through a compassionate, nervous system-informed lens. The goal is to equip attendees not only with knowledge, but also with practical skills to enhance self-awareness, strengthen relational interactions, and more confidently respond to anxiety in the workplace—particularly within the unique context of veterinary medicine.

## CONCLUSION

The fast-paced, high-stakes nature of veterinary medicine can increase the likelihood of anxiety being triggered—yet because these pressures are so normalized, the signs of anxiety can be easily overlooked. By understanding how anxiety shows up in the body and learning to respond with compassion, veterinary workplaces can foster greater self-awareness, and contribute to more supportive, sustainable team environments. This session offers a science-based,

human-centered framework to navigate anxiety in both clinical and interpersonal settings.

7002

# BUILDING RESILIENT VETERINARY TEAMS THROUGH PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

## PERSONAL & TEAM WELL-BEING

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### OVERVIEW

Veterinary professionals operate within high-pressure, emotionally demanding environments that require technical precision, emotional resilience, and teamwork under stress. In a high stress environment, trust and open communication do not develop automatically across the team—they must be intentionally fostered. Psychological safety is the shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. It enables individuals to express themselves, ask questions, offer feedback, and admit mistakes without fear of embarrassment or retribution.

This session provides a practical and research-informed framework for building psychologically safe veterinary teams. Participants will explore what psychological safety looks like in practice, why it matters, and how to begin shifting culture. Through case examples, reflective discussion, and actionable strategies, attendees will leave with tools to foster trust, inclusion, and authentic communication in their clinics and leadership roles.

### SESSION OBJECTIVES

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Define psychological safety and identify its core components.
- Understand the relationship between psychological safety, team resilience, and mental health.
- Identify common barriers to inclusion, trust, and open communication in veterinary settings.

- Develop communication skills that foster approachability, curiosity, and clarity.
- Gain an understanding of leadership principles that support psychological safety, shared responsibility, and open communication.
- Explore introductory practices that help strengthen collaboration within teams.

### SESSION CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

**What is Psychological Safety?:** Psychological safety is not about comfort or the absence of conflict—it is about creating a climate where individuals feel respected and empowered to take interpersonal risks. This section introduces the concept with a focus on the unique challenges of veterinary settings. Participants will explore how psychological safety can enable better outcomes, team cohesion, and individual well-being.

The Importance of Inclusion and Belonging Feeling seen, heard, and included is a key part of psychological safety. This section explores how factors like social identity, hierarchy, and clinic culture shape team dynamics and impact team well-being.

#### **Communication and Approachability in Leadership:**

This section addresses how verbal and non-verbal communication patterns affect psychological safety. Participants will learn practical tools to increase approachability, such as transparent communication, active listening, normalizing uncertainty, and responding constructively to feedback and mistakes.

**Navigating Barriers in Veterinary Practice:** Many factors inherent to veterinary medicine—such as time pressure, emotional fatigue, and client expectations—can make active implementation of psychological safety more challenging. We will explore these unique challenges, helping participants recognize where psychological safety can be inadvertently compromised and how to begin rebuilding it.

**Leading Through a Psychological Safety Lens:**

Creating lasting change requires leadership practices that model vulnerability, invite dialogue, and respond with empathy. This portion of the session introduces leadership strategies rooted in psychological safety. Attention will also be given to managing discomfort and resistance as culture shifts begin.

**From Understanding to Action: Practical Tools and Next Steps:** Participants will be introduced to a set of actionable strategies for fostering psychological safety at the team level. The session concludes with reflection on how to initiate change within participants' unique contexts—whether leading a team or contributing as a valued member.

## PRESENTATION ELEMENTS

This session combines presentation-style teaching with interactive components to support both knowledge-building and practical application. Participants will begin by developing a foundational understanding of psychological safety, then engage in guided analysis of a workplace interaction—either real-world or mock scenarios. Together, the group will examine the communication dynamics, tone, and behaviors that influence psychological safety, and reflect on how these same factors show up in their own clinic or team environments.

## CONCLUSION

Psychological safety plays a critical role in team resilience, mental health, and the quality of care delivered. This session introduces the concepts and practices that can help foster trust, inclusion, and well-being at work. By exploring these ideas through a veterinary-specific lens, the session invites participants to consider how psychological safety might shift how individuals work, communicate, and support one another in high-pressure environments.

7003

# STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION, BOUNDARIES, AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

## PERSONAL & TEAM WELL-BEING

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### OVERVIEW

Veterinary professionals navigate emotionally charged interactions, high-volume caseloads, and ethically complex decisions on a daily basis. While clinical knowledge is essential, the ability to manage emotions, set boundaries, and communicate effectively is equally critical to sustaining individual well-being and fostering a functional team environment. These interpersonal dynamics can help build health team environments, while also being applicable in one's clinical settings.

This session offers a practical, skills-based approach to supporting emotional regulation, assertive communication, and workplace boundaries. Drawing from evidence-informed practices, participants will learn actionable strategies for navigating stress, expressing needs clearly, and sustaining healthy interpersonal dynamics under pressure. These competencies are essential for preventing burnout and creating collaborative work cultures.

### SESSION OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Understand the concept of the "window of tolerance" and how it relates to stress management and emotional regulation, specifically in the context of veterinary care.

- Apply emotion regulation strategies to maintain clarity and presence during high-pressure situations.
- Practice assertive communication skills that support both clarity and respect in workplace interactions.
- Identify and articulate personal and professional boundaries that contribute to resilience and prevent emotional exhaustion.
- Recognize how communication and boundary practices influence team dynamics and psychological safety.
- Anticipate common barriers to implementing these skills and develop strategies to navigate them effectively.

### SESSION CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

#### Emotion Regulation in Veterinary Workplaces:

Participants will be introduced to the concept of the "window of tolerance," a therapeutic framework for understanding how different individuals respond to stress and how it impacts behavior and communication. This section will present practical tools—such as grounding techniques and brief emotion regulation strategies—to help professionals return to their optimal zone of functioning when emotions are elevated.

**Assertive and Effective Communication:** Effective communication is not only about expressing thoughts clearly but doing so in a way that respects both the speaker and the listener. This portion of the session explores communication styles (passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, assertive), with an emphasis on learning and practicing assertive language that facilitates clarity, reduces conflict, and supports collaborative relationships.

**Understanding and Maintaining Boundaries:**

Workplace boundaries are vital for preventing burnout and sustaining professional identity. This section uses scenario-based learning to explore common situations where boundaries may become blurred—such as overcommitting, difficulty saying no, or taking on others' emotional stress. Participants will be introduced to practical skills for recognizing and navigating these challenges in a way that supports both individual well-being and team dynamics.

**Integrating Skills into a High-Stress Veterinary Environment:**

While interpersonal effectiveness skills can be useful in any team environment, they can be difficult to implement consistently in high-volume, fast-paced workplaces. This section addresses common barriers—such as time pressure, fear of conflict, or lack of organizational support—and provides strategies for working around them, including micro-practices, reframing techniques, and team-level interventions.

## PRESENTATION ELEMENTS

This session combines presentation-style teaching to build foundational knowledge with interactive elements that support practical application. Through group discussion and situational analysis, participants will break down real-world challenges and explore strategies for communication, emotional regulation, and boundary-setting. The goal is to equip participants with insights and introductory skills they can begin applying in their daily work.

## CONCLUSION

In veterinary medicine, how we communicate and manage emotions directly impacts patient care, client trust, and team dynamics. When these skills are lacking or there are significant barriers to implementation, it can contribute to stress, conflict, and ultimately burnout.

Supporting well-being in this field calls for a shared commitment to healthy communication, clear boundaries, and emotional awareness. This session highlights why these skills matter and how they can be modeled across teams to create a more supportive, sustainable clinic culture.



7004

# MORE THAN JUST SELF-CARE: FOSTERING WELL-BEING IN VETERINARY TEAMS

## PERSONAL & TEAM WELL-BEING

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### OVERVIEW

Workplace culture plays a significant role in either supporting or hindering individual well-being. In a field defined by high rates of burnout, compassion fatigue, and emotional labor, sustainable well-being must be viewed as a shared responsibility—rooted in attunement, organizational responsiveness, and collective care. This session reframes well-being not as a checklist of

self-care activities, but as a dynamic, relational process shaped by context and connection. Participants will explore what well-being can realistically look like in veterinary settings, how to recognize early signs of distress, and how to help foster a culture that balances genuine support with the demands of clinical performance.

### SESSION OBJECTIVES

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Define attunement and its relevance to both individual and team well-being.
- Recognize well-being as a fluid spectrum, rather than a fixed goal or binary state.
- Assess commonly held beliefs about traditional wellness.
- Identify practical, team-driven strategies to support well-being and continue to foster wellbeing within the team dynamic.
- Practical steps to developing a tailored well-being approach that reflects the real needs and challenges of their unique workplace.

### SESSION CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

**Understanding Limits of Capacity:** This section explores how ongoing strain, emotional load, and systemic pressures impact individual capacity and team sustainability. Participants will consider common stressors in veterinary work to give context to broader challenges. This sets the foundation for understanding why well-being strategies must extend beyond self-care, addressing the structures and cultures that shape daily experience.

**Reframing Well-being:** Beyond the Idealized Narrative: Traditional views of well-being often suggest perfect balance or constant calm—expectations that feel out of reach in a profession marked by emotional intensity and complexity. This section reframes well-being as a spectrum, recognizing that veterinary professionals move through different levels of stress, energy, and capacity—even within a single day. Attendees will explore how small shifts in awareness and support can make a meaningful difference and help prevent more serious signs of distress. We also begin to introduce attunement—the ability to notice and respond to internal and external cues—as a valuable tool for guiding both personal and team well-being.

**What Does Well-being Actually Look Like in Veterinary Practice?:** This section invites a realistic discussion about what well-being can look like in the context of high-demand veterinary work.

Participants will be encouraged to identify common barriers to well-being at both the team and clinic level, helping to consider how strategies are developed and applied. Participants will consider how well-being might be integrated into everyday workflows, how

to align efforts with the actual capacity of veterinary professionals, and how to prioritize approaches that are practical, meaningful, and maintainable over time.

### **Practical Steps Toward Team-Level Well-being:**

Participants will explore actionable strategies that continue to highlight the shared responsibility and collective resilience of well-being. The discussion will focus on identifying approaches that can be adapted to fit the specific needs and realities of veterinary teams. Emphasis is placed on designing supports that are sustainable—not only within the broader context of the veterinary profession, but also within the unique dynamics of each individual clinic and workplace.

### **PRESENTATION ELEMENTS**

This session will blend presentation-style teaching with guided discussion and group reflection. Participants will be encouraged to think critically about how well-being can be realistically supported within the fast-paced, high-demand nature of veterinary work. As traditional wellness narratives are reframed, the session will offer space to explore more sustainable,

context-specific approaches. The goal is for participants to leave with a refreshed perspective on well-being and practical strategies that can be adapted to meet the unique needs of their own workplace.

### **CONCLUSION**

Veterinary professionals are navigating a field with exceptionally high rates of stress and burnout. While individual self-care matters, sustainable well-being must also be supported at the team and workplace level. This session encourages a shift in how we understand and approach well-being—moving away from all-or-nothing thinking and toward a more flexible, integrated model. By reframing well-being as a shared, ongoing effort that can be built into daily practice, we create more realistic and supportive environments for those doing demanding and essential work.



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