
The Good, The Bad and The Ugly: Online Criticism

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DoveLewis Annual Conference Speaker Notes

With just the click of a button, a client can hurt your feelings, your business, and your team's wellbeing. Online reputations are more important than ever, so what do you do with 1-star reviews and criticism from clients when it's out there for anyone to read?

Online criticism is good for you and bad for you at the same time, and we can't avoid it. We're tasked with finding balance to leverage the good and mitigate the bad.

- Why do we react the way we do when we get a negative review and what is it about our brain that doesn't let it go? We're conditioned to learn from negative stimuli quickly, and so we linger on it more than we do positive stimuli. "Evolution would favour humans who dwell on the negatives." (1)
- Self-care for yourself and for your team can be practical. Be transparent with your team about your plans for responding to negative criticism and the thinking behind it. The more they understand, the better they'll be able to cope with the chatter.
- Clients care about your responses.
 - "Consumers read an average of 10 online reviewed before feeling able to trust a local business" (2)
 - "57% of consumers will only use a business if it has 4 or more stars" (2)
 - "88% of online customers are less likely to buy from companies that leave their social media complaints unanswered." (3)

Client Experience is your brand in action. Strong brands weather storms.

- "80% of customers say the experience a company provides is as important as its products and services. Expectations for the customer experience have never been higher." (3)
- Brand Examples: Tylenol versus BP

Responding to criticism is essential for the health of your business, and there are three key steps to follow.

1. **Show empathy.** *"The reviewer's experience is their own. You may argue with the facts of the situation...but you can't argue with how they feel. It's how they feel."* (4)
2. **Be brief.** *"Briefly speak to the reviewer's primary concern. Doing so shows that you're paying attention to their review — that you hear them and care enough to tailor your response to their unique situation."*(4)

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3. **Move the conversation to a private place offline.** Human-to-human communication can dissipate emotions and help clarify confusing or stressful experiences in a way that online commenting oftentimes cannot.

References

- (1) <https://www.theguardian.com/science/brain-flapping/2014/may/09/you-suck-why-criticism-is-more-powerful-than-praise>
- (2) <https://www.brightlocal.com/research/local-consumer-review-survey/>
- (3) <https://www.business2community.com/consumer-marketing/25-stats-on-consumer-shopping-trends-for-2019-02175812>
- (4) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ryanerskine/2018/12/31/how-to-respond-to-negative-reviews-including-examples/#248c772c7534>

Communication in the Time of Unions

Ron Morgan, President & CEO and Monica Maxwell, Chief
Administrative Officer

DoveLewis Annual Conference Speaker Notes

The last two years has brought a lot of union activity to the veterinary industry. In this session, Ron and Monica will discuss the history of unions, current trends, and best practices in communication that will help your staff feel respected and heard.

Union activity has increased in the veterinary field over the last several years, particularly on the west coast. Unions have an important role in our history and shaped our current workplace. Without unions we would not have:

- Child labor laws
- Health care benefits
- Paid sick time
- Weekends off
- Vacations

Since 2014, membership in unions has grown, though overall membership has declined since the early 80s. Public sector still holds the majority of union members (34.5% of public sector employees belong to a union). Recent years have seen a hotbed of activity for unions and union activity. While it is speculative, the rise of the cost of living in large cities through the country, especially on the east and west coasts, are likely a contributing factor.

For the veterinary industry, talk of unions began to garner national attention in 2017 with the National Veterinary Professional's Union which started on the west coast. More information about that time period can be found here:

<https://www.avma.org/News/JAVMANews/Pages/171101a.aspx>

Since that time, NVPU has partnered with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. With that partnership, unionization in the veterinary industry has gained traction with three clinics on the west coast: VCA San Francisco Veterinary Specialist, Blue Pearl North Seattle, and Northwest Veterinary Specialists or Portland, OR voting to unionize. Contracts for all three locations are still in negotiation.

Union leaders have expressed concern over the corporatization of the veterinary industry which makes it harder to communicate concerns. Worker and patient safety are also chief concerns.

The biggest lesson we as leaders in the veterinary industry can take from the unionization movement is not a new message; veterinary professionals do not feel valued, supported, or respected. While “pay” is a tangible and important component to feeling valued and respected, often feeling undervalued and disrespected correlates directly to communication. Communication is often overlooked when dealing with staff issues.

Poor communication contributes to:

- Diminishing trust and engagement.
- Increases in problematic behavior (i.e., talking behind other people’s back, gossip, backchannel communication, overall passive aggressive behavior).
- Decreasing performance due to lack of clarity and shared purpose.

So, what can we learn from this?

Lessons are not dissimilar to common lessons we learn about being a good leader. Good leaders, according to Chester Elton, author of *“For leaders looking for a plan of “Why What & How” to become a better leader”* have developed skills in the following areas:

Self-awareness is about knowing your intentions and values, as well as knowing what can ‘push your buttons’ and derail you.

Self-confidence comes from knowing your strengths and abilities. As we take actions and develop skills, we become more confident.

Self-efficacy is the belief that whatever comes our way, we can handle it. We can take the feedback, accept, adjust and advance. With self-efficacy we can be more creative and innovative.

Additionally, with specific situations it is important to:

Keep calm and take things one person at a time: Team members, especially in the veterinary space, will often feel most comfortable speaking as a group and in support of one another. This tends to happen because veterinary medicine, at its core, is a team sport. In situations like this, it is important to follow up with each person individually. Often, when you really get down to details, individuals have individual needs. While, for example, they may agree the team is struggling with pay, but what is more important to them is schedule. This can help you respond to issues more efficiently.

Know when to ask for help: It is important to be honest with yourself and others about your areas of expertise. If your staff is talking about unionization, it is good to get some legal advice on what you can and cannot say. The National Labor Relations Board sets regulations in this area and it is important for you to be aware so you don’t accidentally violate labor relations laws.

Be aware of optics: If your staff has communicated that they are frustrated with pay, planning a weekend retreat for your management team might be a poor choice. Staff

watches leadership closely, be aware of what you do, what you spend your energy on, and how you prioritize and respond to staff feedback.

Be open to feedback about how you can improve as a leader: In the end, your ability as a leader to flex your communication, take feedback seriously (including making adjustments to your management style), and respond to your staff with sincere empathy is critical.

Most importantly:

- Listen.
- Address where you can what you can.
- Build relationships with those around you.
- Create a win-win solutions.
- Listen more.

When you Have Conflict About Conflict

Monica Maxwell, SPHR-SCP and Cheryl Latta

DoveLewis Annual Conference Speaker Notes

People communicate, process information, make decisions, and plan differently, which is a large part of what makes us all special and unique. But let's face it: it also makes things a lot more challenging.

While we know diversity in communication styles is important, when in the workplace, however, it can make our jobs a lot more difficult. We all know that communication is easiest with people who communicate and make decisions similar to us. Think about your family or some of your closest friends: it's likely that you have similar styles with them, hence why you might get along so well. However, when we are communicating with someone that thinks differently than us, it can be easy to make assumptions or fill in the gaps in communication. One of the easiest assumptions we can make is that they are wrong and we are right.

As managers, we should to be skilled on flexing, but we should also be able to offer different perspectives. This is true for all our work but especially when it comes to conflict resolution.

Different issues call for different approaches. You wouldn't handle a sobbing employee the same as you would an employee so angry they are throwing things at you, would you? Not likely. Even when we flex our approach, however, we are still likely using our core strengths to increase trust – therefor coming across as more genuine, which usually works in our favor.

When working with multiple approaches, we have to be careful about falling into the good cop/bad cop problem. This happens fairly easily if you aren't watching out for it. Taking the heavy handed role all of the time can give team members the impression that management is not on the same page. This system gives the "bad cop" all the perceived power and undermines both people. It can lead to trust issues and a real lack of credibility. And credibility is difficult, if not impossible to repair.

On the flip side, taking the "good cop" approach can demean your work, your position, and your authority. It can leave you open to being taken advantage of.

The other issue that can come up with multiple approaches is the perceived value problem. This is where one of the managers perceives their position as greater than or less than the others'. This can be due to many factors, but usually they are tied to seniority within the practice or the position's role itself (manager vs. lead vs. owner, etc). It's important not to

get stuck here. This is a trap where no one wins and the success of resolving the conflict is put in serious jeopardy. Try to get out of your own way and remember that you both have the same goal – to resolve the conflict. Rank shouldn't affect this.

When thinking about finding your own personal conflict resolution style remember to think about your own personal strengths first. What comes most natural for you? This more natural approach can often be the best, and most comfortable to start with. Have a goal in mind. Go into each conversation with a plan of what you hope to get out of it. Be objective. Think about the conflict from a few perspectives, not just your own. Is it possible you are over-reacting? Is it possible you are under-reacting? Remember to ask for help when you need it. If you have another manager or clinic owner to bounce things off of it can be very helpful in working to see another perspective. And remember, be true to yourself. No one is asking you to be someone other than you. You are you in your position at work for a reason, and someone trusts you to do the right thing.

Conflict? Nope! Facing Conflict When You'd Rather Avoid It

Cheryl Latta, Human Resources Manager

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We experience conflict in our lives every day whether we are actively aware of it or not. Conflict isn't always an aggressive interaction. Conflict can take many forms. Typically, conflict presents itself in one of three ways: 1) passive, 2) aggressive, or 3) passive-aggressive. I bet you can think of an example of each type you've experienced in your life.

Conflict isn't always the classic verbal argument; conflict can also arise in choosing what flavor of La Croix you want with your lunch. But likely, more commonly, you deal with varying levels of conflict every day in at your job. This can be co-worker to co-worker conflict, manager to employee conflict, or manager to clinic owner conflict to name a few. Whichever form conflict shows itself to you, if you're like me, you might rather avoid it than deal with it head on.

But why is this?

Conflict can evoke many feelings and emotions from within in us. Feeling of avoidance, fear, stress, frustration, adrenaline, the works! But what if it also evokes feelings from deeper inside of us? Feelings that maybe we aren't as comfortable with, feelings that we may even try to avoid. Deep seated feelings stemming from our own sense of self-worth. Feelings that create anxiety and sometimes even catastrophic thinking.

Fear of conflict typically starts with a predisposition about conflict itself. If you grew up in a household like me where conflict was avoided, you likely have a natural avoidance mechanism for conflict. On the other hand, if you grew up in a household filled with conflict you might be well versed with handling conflict. But – you also have an avoidance mechanism for fears of repeating the past. With either scenario, when conflict becomes something to avoid, we typically avoid closeness and intimacy as well. You can't have one extreme without the other.

Based on our predispositions, we begin to form our beliefs about conflict. Mental scripts begin to form that say, "conflict is bad, therefore must be avoided at all costs." We start to believe that conflict is something to fear; something that makes us vulnerable and not perfect.

On top of all of this, we throw in the stress factor – which means that in addition to our predisposition and beliefs about conflict, we don't want to face adding additional stress or discomfort to our lives. Let's face it; we are stressed enough already!

So what can we do about it?

We first need to remember the benefits of conflict itself. Some of these benefits include: holding people accountable, improving processing, promoting innovation, eliminating poor behavior, making tough decisions, and even gaining confidence in ourselves. These are all important factors to consider. Remember these as your “why’s” when working on getting comfortable with conflict.

Being content with conflict is also heavily influenced by our level of comfort with being assertive. Assertiveness means being confident and not afraid of saying what you want or believe. This is obviously easier said than done for most of us, however I do believe assertiveness is the middle ground between passive and aggressive and something for us to all to strive for as leaders in our practices.

With assertive skills in mind, think of your “why’s” of why the conflict should not be avoided. Use this to give you that push to move forward. Challenge your anxiety and catastrophic thinking. Talk back to it! Is your fear of the conflict really worth you not getting what you want or need?

Remember, “You cannot change what you refuse to confront.”

When (you think) Your Staff is the Problem: Manager Compassion

Fatigue; what it is, how it is different, and how to combat it

Monica Maxwell, Chief Administrative Officer

DoveLewis Annual Conference Speaker Notes

In this session, Monica discusses manager compassion fatigue and how it appears differently from traditional burnout. Managers will often become resentful of their clinic's expectations without recognizing their own bad habits that created this environment. Tips on how to achieve work life integration, including in a 24/7 environment will be discussed as well as ways to survive and thrive as a manager of a small business.

Veterinary professionals are a part of the larger network of healthcare workers who are deeply committed to the service and care of their patients (whether the patient has two legs, four, or no legs at all). Most of the people who enter the healthcare field do so with a great sense of purpose and compassion. They tend to be driven, hardworking, and mission centered. These traits also tend to accompany the willingness to self-sacrifice for the greater good, in this case, patients.

According to a 2014 study by the Mayo Clinic

([http://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196\(15\)00716-8/fulltext](http://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196(15)00716-8/fulltext)) about burnout and satisfaction in physicians, 46% of physicians had high levels of emotional exhaustion according to the Maslach Burnout Inventory, 34% experienced high depersonalization, and 16% experienced a low level of feeling personally accomplished.

These numbers are both higher than when they tested the same group in 2011 and substantially worse than the general population who were tested in the same areas. Physicians working in specialty medicine (emergency, internal medicine, surgery) had even poorer results.

According to an article published by American Medical News

(<http://www.amednews.com/article/20130610/business/130619992/5/>), internal factors that contribute to burnout in physicians include paperwork and administrative work, too many hours of work, and on call schedule and expectations.

Additionally, according to an article published by the New York Times Magazine,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/21/magazine/do-you-suffer-from-decision-fatigue.html>, many professionals suffer from decision fatigue. Decision fatigue is a diminishing ability to make decisions. Signs can include, inability to assess pros and cons of a situation, decision avoidance, and impulsivity.

On top of all those factors, the New York Times published an article on attachment styles at work and how those styles often contribute to wasted time, adding to your overall work fatigue. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/19/smarter-living/attachment-styles-work-life-balance.html>. As an example, those with anxious preoccupied attachment will waste time constantly checking email (i.e. checking that everything is okay), or needlessly checking work over and over for fear a major mistake was made.

Sound familiar? Correlations can easily be made to many healthcare professionals, including those clinicians, nurses, and managers in the veterinary field.

And that’s just taking into account the actual job of a caregiver in healthcare. What happens when there is no end to the work hours? When your smart phone that once represented efficiency and convenience is viewed with dread by both you and your loved ones because someone is always working and someone always needs something.

The Harvard Business Review discussed the intensity of a 24/7 work environment in their June 2016 issue. As anyone who has worked in a 24/7 facility will concur, survivability long term is difficult. HBR names three types of strategies that employees use in this high intensity environment and the risks to each strategy (seen in table 1, below).

RESPONSE	STRATEGY	MOTIVATION	RISKS TO BE AWARE OF	WHAT YOU CAN ALTER
<p>RAPID ENGAGEMENT You always reply and, if requested, bang out some work (e.g. “I’ll have it for you in five minutes”). You rarely make evening plans.</p>	<p>ACCEPTING</p>	<p>You devote yourself completely to work because it is expected and rewarded.</p>	<p>You may burn out or be slow to rebound from setbacks.</p> <p>You may have trouble mentoring others and creating a pipeline of promotable employees.</p>	<p>Set aside blocks of time for other aspects of your life.</p> <p>Don’t expect subordinates to make work their highest priority. Be open to different ways of working.</p>

<p>FEIGNED ATTENTIVENESS You respond and give the impression that you are working (e.g. “Am on it-will take a few hours”).</p> <p>You tend to make and keep evening plans but rarely mention them.</p>	<p>PASSING</p>	<p>You seek to protect your career while sustaining other aspects of your life.</p>	<p>You may not build relationships at work.</p> <p>You may perpetuate the ideal-worker myth.</p>	<p>Come out to selected colleagues so you feel better known and they don’t feel compelled to sacrifice their personal lives.</p> <p>Make it clear that outside activities don’t hurt our performance.</p>
<p>NEXT DAY FOLLOW-UP Unless it’s urgent, you don’t alter your plans (e.g., “At a show-will get to this tomorrow”).</p> <p>You may not even respond that evening.</p>	<p>REVEALING</p>	<p>You wish to be open in your relationships and believe the organization may need change.</p>	<p>You may damage your career.</p> <p>You may sacrifice the credibility needed to push for change.</p>	<p>Emphasize results, not effort, when discussing work.</p> <p>Encourage others to be open about their behavior and thus change workplace norms.</p>

Most of those who get into management fall into the accepting category, at least in the short term, which is why managing a healthcare facility and NOT burning out is the ultimate challenge. There is an opportunity to work, a problem to solve, and issues to be made aware of literally every second of the day. Managers who embody servant leadership want to ensure they are available for their staff and want to shield their staff from burnout. Additionally, staff turnover in weekend and night positions is higher than their day hour counterparts, which means managers also want to shield those staff members from burnout in an act of self-preservation.

All that is fine until you are crying every day on your way to work.

Case Summary:

Many years ago Dove had a hospital manager who was a DVM. Like many of our hospital managers, she worried quite a bit about her staff and their own levels of burnout given the intensity of working in a busy ER/ICU. Careful not to ask them to do too much, she would

often take on the burden of working extra shifts, would handle client complaints without passing along feedback to the doctor involved, as to not upset them, and even take on outreach and educational responsibilities. Over time, the staff came to expect that “extra duties” were her responsibility and not theirs. They were reluctant to take on extra shifts and duties as, they would state, they were not paid to do those like the manager was.

By this point, the manager was feeling overwhelmed with her overall duties. She was working 60 – 70 hours a week (all shifts, all hours) and was behind on her administrative duties like reviews and chart auditing, making her feel like a failure. She was exhausted from filling in on the floor as needed and essentially had started resorting to begging and bullying the staff to take on extra shifts. Her personal life was suffering because of her overall lack of availability and her high stress level. She felt overextended in everything she did. Decisions were made in hopes of just keeping the status quo so she didn’t lose any staff, as recruitment for nights and weekends was difficult. She would rather deal with a bad employee than an open shift.

Meanwhile, her staff sensed her stress and her burnout. They didn’t want to bother her with problems, which caused them to feel like their manager could not be relied on for support. Small conflicts the staff had would fester until the issue came to a head. The staff was not getting timely communication or feedback, which led to gossip and rumors. They also became frustrated by their coworkers who would ignore policy or not work, seemingly without consequences.

This case summary is not just an example of a manager at Dove, but many managers working in a healthcare environment. The question: how do we get out of this cycle or avoid it all together?

Following the predictable exhaustion and stepping down of the manager described in the case summary above Dove implemented a few policies to try to prevent a similar situation from occurring again.

Solution 1: We capped the number of extra shifts a manager is allowed to work. At Dove, we found that, frankly, many of our managers do not have good work/life boundaries and had great difficulty regulating themselves. By capping the number of extra shifts they were allowed to take to one a week the manager was forced to get help from their teams and find other scheduling solutions to fill gaps. While there are times in which this rule needs to be bent due to unforeseen circumstances, we actually find we are able to hold to it the vast majority of the time.

Solution 2: We implemented a mandatory on-call for sick call outs. This policy was accepted by the staff as necessary, but is universally hated on a personal level. Each employee was required to take two on-call days a month. They are paid overtime if called in. This policy has helped tremendously to ensure the manager is not required to fill in for all unexpected absences and also helps ensure coverage. Again, the staff likes it if they

are working and need help, but dislike being on call. Some solutions work but are not popular.

Solution 3: We capped the number of people allowed vacation in any given month.

Meaning if you want to take a vacation, but we are at our cap for people allowed to go the manager will only allow you the time off if you find coverage for yourself. This ensured the staff took accountability for their own coverage, and the team worked together to help each other out rather than relying on the manager.

Solution 4: We evolve and empower. There have been times at Dove when our management team was small and there have been times when our management team has been large. The important thing is we evaluate the staff structure on an annual basis and look at what is working and what is not and try to make changes (as appropriate) to respond to our ever growing and ever changing environment. The other important aspect of this is to empower your staff, leaders, and supervisors to make decisions without checking in with you. This starts with training our managers not to jump in and “fix” everything but to have the staff fix mistakes and deal with crises. In doing so, the staff is empowered to do their jobs and make decisions. (Read: stop calling you to check in on every issue, conflict, or decision).

Solution 5: We simplified. Especially important to combat decision fatigue, making decisions ahead of time (like what to eat for lunch) when you’re not drained can help you process more critical decisions. It is important as well to give your staff parameters for decisions that are in their purview so they are able to make those without getting a final approval through you. This will help keep your mind ready and active for the decisions you absolutely need to make during the day.

Solution 6: We assess and encourage work/life integration in the hiring process and beyond. The managers I have seen flare out the quickest are those whose entire professional and personal network is solidly centered in work. When work is stressful, their whole life falls apart. When hiring managers, we work very hard to screen for those with a well-rounded life – outside of just loving vet med, they have friends and hobbies that are distinctly their own. In addition to screening for this, we work hard to encourage managers to keep true to their days off, keep their hobbies, and take vacation. For managers we have implemented flexible vacation and work-from-home policies to give them more control over their schedules so they can have a more fully integrated life.

Solution 7: We talk openly about self-care and compassion fatigue. Being honest about the intensity faced in veterinary clinic is hugely important. “Soldering through” the stress and long hours does nothing but create an isolated and competitive environment of survivors and failures. Discussing stress, coping mechanisms, and different strategies for self-care is critical to the survival of the whole team. This openness also takes away the shaming that can sometimes occur when people need breaks, time off, or are struggling. Ensuring our

brains and bodies rest is critical to our long-term success at work, so there should not be shame in the need to practice self-care (however self-care looks to you).

Working in a healthcare environment will be intense and difficult. That being said, working to delegate duties, create work/life integration, and create opportunities for self-care is critical. Even for managers of one, instituting these policies can help you find time to breathe and can change your status from barely surviving to thriving in your jobs and in your life.