Learning Objectives

After completing this module, your basic understanding should include:

- Realizing the importance of a “team” within a veterinary practice.
- That a team atmosphere can contribute substantially to practice productivity, as well as to personal satisfaction and development.
- Appreciating who members of your internal and external health care teams are, and how each contributes to “the pet’s best interest.”
Introduction

“Team” is a familiar, commonly used word, but one that conjures up different images for each of us. Feelings, both good and bad about teams, are largely based on personal experiences and observations. There are a multitude of resources available on “teams”, and you are encouraged to pursue additional learning on the subject. In this module, we’ll explore what a team is, why teams are important, who can be considered part of your team and how the veterinary health care team concept can enhance the productivity of your practice.

**WHAT is a veterinary health care team?**

The words “team” and “staff” are commonly used interchangeably in everyday conversation. In this module, and as you’ll see throughout the Hill’s Veterinary Nutritional Advocate Program, we have delineated between the two words, for very specific reasons. Hopefully though, no matter what semantics or designation your practice uses for employees, you are all allowed to contribute to the practice’s success.

One main dictionary definition of “staff” is: “A body of assistants to an executive”. Relating that definition to a small animal practice, “staff” could simply mean a group of practice personnel (assistants) working for the owner (executive). In this context, it is hard to imagine employees being able to be creative, proactive or empowered. So, let’s focus on “team”.

“Team” (as defined by J. Katzenbach and D. Smith in their book, The Wisdom of Teams):

>“...people with complimentary skills, who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually responsible.”
Introduction

Feel the difference? One (staff) is about individuals helping a boss or bosses, while the other (team) expects and depends on the utilization of everyone’s skills, talents and abilities to achieve success (goals), based on a shared vision.

Figure 1. With a “staff” concept, the focus is oftentimes centered around the practice owner.
WHY have a veterinary health care team?

The adage (adage = an old familiar saying): “If you want something done right, do it yourself,” is just that: “familiar” to us, but “old” in rationale. If one subscribes to the “scarcity mentality,” (there is only so much to go around, so I better protect what I know and can do), one would want to maintain control, for fear of losing out.

On the other hand, people with the “abundance mentality” believe there is more than enough to go around, AND that even more opportunities will arise from the sharing of ideas and information.

So, why teams? Succinctly, to enhance and accelerate overall performance (productivity), based on defined criteria. The Veterinary Health Care Team (VHCT), then, if truly a team, should be able to capitalize on everyone’s creative contributions to collectively increase productivity in a veterinary practice.

What is practice productivity? Two of the most common and important measurements (as you’ll learn more about in Level III), are the income generating ability and profitability of a practice. This is true for any business, and a veterinary practice is certainly a service business. As such, it is critical for the practice to be profitable in order to remain viable within the community. As long as everyone in the practice is focused on what is in the best interest of the pet, increased productivity is an ethical, positive outcome. Understanding and communicating the benefits of proper pet nutrition is a good example of how the practice team can be involved in the pet’s best interest.
Figure 2. Illustrates the importance of you, as a satisfied employee. A great way to allow you to contribute, as the definition of “team” states, is by establishing common purpose, performance goals and approach.

All veterinary practices have the same, general purpose; to try and provide quality veterinary care. But, what makes your practice stand out from others? What makes a practice not only the best “in” the community, but also the best “for” the community? What makes a practice the preferred place of employment? Oftentimes, it is because of palpable team energy, continuously enhanced through a productive team approach.
WHO is on your veterinary health care team?

In Figure 1., we saw how “staff”, by definition, seemed focused around the practice owner. More and more practice owners, managers, consultants and advisors are realizing that this is no longer the appropriate approach to maximize patient care, employee satisfaction and productivity. The “veterinary-centered” practice idea (that was appropriate in earlier, more agrarian times) is giving way to the more beneficial “pet-centered” practice. Figure 3. illustrates this concept. By focusing on the pet (what is in the pet’s best interest, combined with what the health care team believes and recommends), one can appreciate how a team approach is integrative and reinforcing. It is also important to point out that in the “pet-centered” concept, that veterinarians (practice owners and associate veterinarians), are part of the team, not the focus of the team. This paradigm shift in thinking and behaving has transformed many veterinary practices into much more efficient and effective pet health care providers.

Figure 3. In a “pet-centered” practice, the veterinarian is part of the team effort, not the focal point.
WHO is on your veterinary health care team?

A veterinary health care team that is “pet-centered” has the potential to capitalize on each team member’s unique contributions. Then, if team members are proficient in communicating to each other and with (as will be discussed in Level II), pet care, as well as client care increases. So, a VHCT that is efficient, (does things right) AND effective, (does the right things) for all involved, is much more capable of delivering Bond-enhancing service, where The Bond involves the family, the pet and the veterinary team.

While Figure 3. illustrates the practice’s “internal” veterinary health care team, it is important to consider some “external”, crucially important members of the team. It is important to be selective and to gain trust of and from additional members of your practice’s extended team. Members may include:

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<th>The Client, Including The Entire Family.</th>
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<td>On average, most dogs and cats are taken to the veterinarian about two times a year. The average office visit is usually less than a half hour. So, the average pet is in your practice approximately one hour per year.</td>
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There are 8,760 hours in a year, so for a client with one pet, your internal health care team is directly interacting with them about 0.0001% (1hour/8,760 hours) of the time. That’s only 1/10,000th of a year! You certainly want them thinking about veterinary care more than that. Obviously, having all members of the pet’s family understand what to look for regarding prevention and illness is important to the pet’s health, for the simple reason that they are with the pet so much more. Also, having clients feel comfortable talking to members of your health care team, and to contact your practice when there is a question or a concern, can help minimize minor problems becoming major ones. This is great medicine and great business, and it is all focused on the pet’s best interest. Helping the client understand and adhere to recommendations made during a practice visit, and helping them to reiterate that information to the family members at home, will be discussed in more detail in Level II.

Responsible pet owners need to realize their critical role as a member of their pet’s health care team, and feel comfortable interacting with your internal team.
WHO is on your veterinary health care team?

Manufacturer and Distributor Representatives.

Hill’s, for example, has a multitude of very concerned and dedicated personnel, all working to assist you in your efforts to provide the best nutritional products to your patients. Research and development, ingredient procurement, production, marketing, sales, order entry, customer service, shipping, warehousing, distribution, consultation services, web site, practice, local, regional, state, national and international lecturers and conference support, literature, client education materials, skill set development programs... Literally thousands of people at Hill’s alone are focused on proper pet nutrition, all contributing to your ability to deliver exceptional care.

This fact allows you to be able to promote nutritional products you have confidence in, and, through education and usage, have competence in.

A great way to experience one of the many services Hill’s provides is by utilizing the Veterinary Consultation Services phone line, (800-548-VETS) for questions about nutrition, products, and specific cases.
WHO is on your veterinary health care team?

There are a multitude of veterinary and petrelated groups that could be very complimentary to your goals. Having good relationships with certain businesses in your community such as pet stores, groomers, pet sitters, obedience trainers, scout troops, veterinary schools, specialists, human hospitals, schools…, can help you extend your reach of promoting responsible pet ownership.

There are a lot of people who would like to promote your practice, if they believe in you. By advocating what is in the pet’s best interest, your practice’s reputation can flourish, which is beneficial to your community in many ways.

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<th><a href="http://www.AAHANET.org">www.AAHANET.org</a></th>
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<td>American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)</td>
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<td>National Commission on Veterinary Economic Issues (NCVEI)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.NAVTA.net">www.NAVTA.net</a></td>
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Table 1. Examples of Association Web Sites

Valuable resources are available from veterinary associations. Their personnel, products, services and networks can be very rewarding to utilize and are focused on helping you, your clients, patients and practice.
### Financial and Business Personnel.

Certified Public Accountants (CPAs), Tax Accountants, Business Advisors…These types of professionals can do an even better job of helping the practice be productive, if they know more specifics about the, (going back to the “team” definition)” common purpose, performance goals and approach.” If not, they might approach “the books…” for the practice just like any other business, without understanding what the team is trying to accomplish, short and long-term.

### Consultants and Advisors.

The Association of Veterinary Practice Consultants and Advisors (AVPMCA) [www.AVPMCA.org](http://www.AVPMCA.org) is a network of individuals and businesses concerned with the health and vitality of veterinary practices. Many of its members have extensive background and experience working directly in practices. They are able to see first hand with a different perspective, what the issues are, then help to create and carry out a plan specific for each practice.
HOW to begin to create a great veterinary health care team

The concept of “team” cannot be fully explored in this module. Neither can the intricacies of actually becoming a true team, which involves the right “compliment” of adaptive personalities. That is why knowing as much as you can about the practice you want to, or do work at, is as important as the other personnel knowing about you. Will you, or do you; “fit in” philosophically, be able to contribute, learn, educate and grow, and be adequately compensated for your efforts?

As stated in the Introduction, “team” may have different connotations, depending on experiences and observations. Still, there are some fundamentals regarding cohesive, productive teams. Some of them include:

• **Leadership:** “To direct towards a definite result (outcome).” Teams are most productive when one or more people, (acknowledged as leader(s) by the others), define expectations, and lead by example and consistency. Leaders in any practice, (practice owners, chief medical officers, practice managers, …) who espouse: “Do as I say, not as I do” are setting themselves, and their team, up for disappointment. Leaders need to understand that; lack of conviction, personal discomfort and weak organizational performance ethics are three of the main reasons people develop a resistance to teams. Team members need to agree with and feel confident in, the leadership’s direction and directives. If not, those employees will not perform to their potential, and may even be counterproductive to the team’s efforts. Leadership will be covered in more detail in Level III.

• **Interdependence:** “Relying on one another for support”. Teams encourage, celebrate and enhance personal identity and development, while at the same time, using everyone’s skills, talents and abilities in a focused, productive fashion. Teams continually find ways for individual contributions in a synergistic fashion.
HOW to begin to create a great veterinary health care team

• **Culture:** “The act of developing by education and training”. What is the culture of your team? Is it crafted and focused enough, (for example, from being able to rally around a collaborative mission and vision) so every team member further develops, allowing all to do their jobs even better? What steps are in place to continually allow you to learn, to enhance value to yourself, your practice and to the pets and people you serve? Difficulty in answering such questions may alert you to opportunities.

• **Goals:** “Purpose.” Teams perform better when there are meaningful performance criteria established, monitored, rewarded, and celebrated. Most people want to be part of, and contribute to, the success of a team, but the objectives need to be clearly defined. Goals and goal planning will be covered in more detail in Level III.

• **Respect:** “To consider deserving of high regard (care, concern, esteem)”. Respect, like “trust”, develops over a time period, then, must be continually reaffirmed and validated. In addition, in order to gain respect, one must be respectful.

• **Trust:** “Assured reliance on the strength, character or truth of someone”. As Stephen Covey relates in The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: In order to receive “trust”, one has to be “trustworthy”-worthy of another’s trust. As a team member, others are relying on you for your contributions, and your integrity.

The fundamentals mentioned above help illustrate Hill’s commitment to your team:

• **Leadership:** Within the veterinary profession globally, and in product innovation.
WHERE Hill’s fits into your veterinary health care team

- **Interdependency**: Making exceptional products for veterinary health care team members to utilize, which benefits all involved.

- **Culture**: Hill’s Mission Statement is: “To help enrich and lengthen the special relationships between people and their pets.” One way this is accomplished is through programs such as this, where you become more educated and productive, therefore helping clients make informed nutritional decisions for their pets.

- **Goals**: Proper pet nutrition can and should be much more integrated into veterinary medicine. In becoming a Veterinary Nutritional Advocate, Hill’s can help you enhance practice performance related to “great medicine and great business”.

- **Respect and Trust**: For well over half a century, the veterinary profession has continually relied on Hill’s. Likewise, Hill’s has respected the veterinary profession’s desire to help pets and people, and has entrusted it with exceptional products. This strong relationship continues to grow.

Figure 4. Hill’s as part of your productive team
Summary

Team: People with complimentary skills, who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually responsible.

The concept of “team” is complex, but a vital one to master in a service business such as veterinary medicine. The personal rewards of being part of a true veterinary health care team can be numerous, from enhanced self-esteem to enhanced productivity. With a “Pet-Centered” approach, all team members can contribute to the pet’s best interest, and as a result, the continual success of the practice.

Are you ready?

To continue, you will need to complete the quiz for this module. When you are ready, click on the forward arrow below to take you to the quiz.