

Collaboration & Teamwork

Collaboration and Teamwork can be defined as “fits into, and supports, an effective veterinary team; works with others collaboratively towards shared goals; is friendly and personable” (VetSet2Go, veterinary employability framework).

Veterinary teams are truly **inter-professional** and will include stakeholders with different roles — often an employer will work alongside their employees during the course of a day in practice — and, of course, nursing and support staff are essential for providing **safe and efficient clinical care**.

All of these people will bring different perspectives, knowledge, understanding and levels of commitment to work each day.

Working collaboratively as a team will always enhance the day’s **productivity**, but do we really understand what collaboration and teamwork look like?

What they said

“Never walk by a dirty cage at night. I think I’ve seen it from the nursing point of view and the veterinarian point of view as well.” (Employee)

“Humility ... I reckon it’s probably one of the most important things, and that points to teamwork, and points to not thinking that you know everything.” (Employer)

“She was a good team player. She would jump in and do things to help other people. So she wasn’t just like, this is my work and that’s your work, and that’s your problem. So that was probably the major thing, is that she could look at the whole team and see what was required, and not just focus on herself.” (Employer)

“I think vets should also treat their staff with respect and courtesy. I think it reflects badly if they are disrespectful of their staff, especially in front of a client.” (Client)

How is collaboration and teamwork recognised?

Perceived by you:

- You understand how you work in teams and can ‘fit in’
- You enjoy working in teams and social situations
- You are a ‘team player’ – you help others to get the job done together
- You are always mindful of how you impact on others
- You treat others as equals

Perceived by others:

- Good ‘interpersonal skills’ ensuring ‘team fit’
- A ‘team player’ who ‘pitches in’ and does things that aren’t necessarily their job
- Commits to shared goals
- Friendly, personable and considerate
- Humility

Why is collaboration and teamwork important to employability?

With the evolution of veterinary practice from single-vet to multi-vet practices, the ability to work well in a team becomes even more important. A toxic team environment has been shown to hinder job satisfaction and promote exhaustion and cynicism¹, thus illustrating how important collaboration and teamwork are for experiencing satisfaction with one's working environment.

Collaboration and teamwork are enhanced by **effective communication, trustworthiness, empathy and respect**, and **emotional competence** (the ability to regulate your emotional responses and remain calm). Effective teamwork benefits everyone in the workplace, and the improved communication and shared goals of an effective team are likely to lead to better clinical outcomes for the patients.

*"And often they're academically brilliant and their knowledge is amazing and they say all the right things in the interviews. But again, it's the people skills. It's — a lot of them tend to have almost like a superiority kind of vibe about them, that when they start work as vets, they tend to think, well, I don't need to clean that cage, because I'm a vet and that should be a nurse's job. And it's that kind of **attitude** that's really corruptive in a practice like ours. We really look for the opposite. We look for people who are going to say, "It looks like you're snowed under there, let me mop the floor for you." (Employer)*

"Interact well with the whole team. So be bright and bubbly. And that's really important. Because someone who comes into work depressed and doesn't want to be there I don't consider a good team player." (Employer)

"With the nurses, if you're friendly to them then obviously they help you out maybe a bit more when things get a little bit tough." (Employee)

Possible strategies to enhance your collaboration and teamwork

Improve communication:

This is the foundation of teamwork – without effective communication you cannot build relationships with team members and the team cannot function well.

Appreciate the perspective of others:

Be genuinely interested in the perspectives of others in your team, and explore their ideas, concerns and expectations. Your way isn't the only way!

Demonstrate empathy and interest in others:

Ask others about their weekend/family/latest conquest (although be careful that the conversation does not impact upon workflow). Everyone appreciates some interest being shown in them, including you.

Remember the common goal:

Focus on working together to achieve the team's common goal, rather than solely focusing on your own needs and feelings.

Practise respect:

Effective teams are founded upon mutual respect for the role played by each member of the team. Treat other team members with respect — we can guarantee that is how you want to be treated.

References:

1. Moore, I.C., Coe, J.B., Adams, C.L., Conlon, P.D. & Sargeant, J.M. (2014) The role of veterinary team effectiveness in job satisfaction and burnout in companion animal veterinary clinics. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 245: 513-524