

Commitment

Commitment was identified by the VetSet2Go project as an important element of employability for many stakeholders.

Commitment describes dedication to a cause, in the dual sense of feeling both a **personal bond** (i.e. devotion, allegiance) and an **obligation** to it (i.e. responsibility, duty).

In the context of veterinary employability, commitment describes **dedication to the greater veterinary 'mission'**, and taking responsibility or **'ownership'** for contributing to this mission.

The nature of this greater cause or mission will vary depending on the work context, but may include commitment to:

- animal health and welfare
- quality or excellence
- 'best practice'
- 'doing your best' for a patient or client
- **continual learning** and improvement
- the success of the practice or organisation
- the success of the broader profession
- 'making a difference' to animals, to people through their animals
- contributing to society

For many vets, this mission aligns with their underlying **motivation** and their sense of their chosen profession as a vocation or 'calling'.

What they said

"The commitment that you're going to try and always further your knowledge, to take advice from others so you can give all your clients and animals the best care they can get."
(Recent graduate)

"The most employable new graduate is someone who is going to be able to have sound veterinary knowledge, good animal skills and excellent communication skills, and, at the end of the day, understand the importance that the pets play in the role of our clients and be really dedicated to making a difference to those animals and be willing to sometimes put their job first ... veterinary science is not a nine-to-five job, it will require – more than other jobs will require – emotional input and sacrifice." (Employer)

"Quality of care is a huge consideration. When our cats recently had dental surgery, the vet called a few days later to see how they were going, as one in particular had some problems. This was unexpected, but very much appreciated. [She] is extremely busy, but this extra show of care for our pets really made us feel like [she] treats her work as more than just a job description." (Client)

How is commitment recognised?

Perceived by you:

- Your goals and values are strongly aligned with those of the profession and the practice / organization
- You have a sense of personal responsibility for achieving this 'mission'
- You are eager and willing to take on more responsibility
- You are prepared to put the job ahead of your own needs 'when duty calls'
- BUT: you aren't overburdened by responsibility, and can 'leave work at work'

Perceived by others:

- Committed, dedicated, dutiful
- 'Goes the extra mile' when completing tasks or handling cases
- Will voluntarily take on tasks or extra responsibility for the benefit of the organisation
- Willing to accept a certain amount of sacrifice for the job
- Fully engaged (not 'clock-watching', online, texting, etc.)

Alignment of personal commitment with the goals of the organisation in which you work is important for personal satisfaction and well-being. Viner¹ notes that while success in veterinary practice will likely follow from the pursuit of high quality client and patient care, long-term satisfaction depends on **harmony** between our **personal values and goals** and our **professional objectives**, and contentment with the place that our profession occupies within our lives.

These aims are contextual, and can be a moving goalpost. For example, pursuing 'quality care' or 'best practice' might often mean being informed by the ideal or 'gold standard' approach, but modifying this to achieve the best outcome for that particular patient, client and situation. This may not equate to 'gold standard' diagnostics or treatment for every case, recognising that 'gold standard' may not be achievable within the constraints of your practice or workplace, and clients' goals for their animal. Best practice can thus be viewed as a **balance** of the **most effective approach** (i.e. producing optimal outcomes) and the **most efficient approach** (i.e. optimal cost:benefit ratio) – that is, what 'works best' in a particular workplace and situation.¹ It is also not a fixed standard, since it implies striving for **continual improvement** to get even better.

Employers told the VetSet2Go project they recognise commitment from multiple cues, for example: general **motivation** and enthusiasm; **eagerness** to take responsibility for cases; a **balanced understanding** of 'best practice'; being prepared to 'go the extra mile' (e.g. staying back to help with a difficult or novel case); being okay with being contacted about cases when off-duty; being willing to put the job ahead of your own needs at times; **willingness** to accept a certain amount of sacrifice for the job; appearing to '**want to be there**'; viewing it as 'not just a job'; showing a genuine interest in, and enjoyment of, the job; demonstrating a capacity for industry; not 'clock watching' and working until the job is done.

Why is commitment important to employability?

Employers told the VetSet2Go project that committed veterinarians are more likely to be **successful**, and to **bring value** to their practice or organisation. Employees who have high levels of commitment will work harder and more diligently, and accept more **responsibility** for achieving outcomes. They are also more likely to **upskill**, to continually learn and develop their clinical and technical skills, and to **foster a supportive attitude in others**. Clients also expect their vets to be strongly committed to the veterinary mission, in particular prioritising animal welfare and high quality care.

Commitment is linked to motivation, **diligence** and alignment of personal and organisational values and goals. Commitment to quality care and animal welfare encourages **continual learning**, which, in turn, positively influences **motivation**, **sustainable engagement** and **application of expertise**. An important caveat is that **over-commitment** may predispose to burnout, thus the level of commitment needs to be compatible with self-care, such as taking lunch breaks, work-life balance, etc. to optimize employability.

*"To be a vet, I feel you should have a **very high commitment to the animal's welfare** and not just the pay check at the end of each month." (Client)*

*"We do **expect a lot** from our employees. And you can tell straight away, there's some people that just have a lackadaisical attitude ... they're like, 'Oh, I can't be bothered with that. Near enough, good enough'. I am not the right sort of boss for that sort of person. They need to find a boss that suits their style. Conversely, when you get people who are **switched on** and motivated and want to do a good job and they're driven to achieve results, I'm probably a much more suitable boss for that kind of person." (Employer)*

Possible strategies to enhance your commitment

Feeling Good about Work:

Start with reflecting on how you feel about the job. Do you feel committed/motivated/passionate about your work, or is something lacking? If you feel a lack of commitment internally, or feel resentful about your work, reflect upon the reasons why – discussing with a mentor may help.

Aligning your Values:

Are your values aligned with those of your workplace? A major source of dissatisfaction and lack of commitment is misalignment of these values and goals. Is this job or position the right one for you – and are you right for the organisation?

Finding the Balance:

Employers and colleagues look for commitment but not **over-commitment**, which risks burnout. Do you feel overworked or overwhelmed? Do you feel as though you have a work-life balance that works for you? Everyone is different in this regard, but if *your* balance is not right, then you are unlikely to feel fully committed to your work.

Seeking References:

Personalised, well-written references from past employers can be

very useful for demonstrating a history of commitment and good work ethic.

Checking your Motivation:

Do you feel motivated? Sometimes getting back in touch with what you love about the job, or doing some more learning or continuing education is enough to get your motivation flowing again, and reinvigorating your commitment.

Looking Committed:

Your level of internal commitment is estimated by others from your external behaviour. Try to appear interested, keen, enthusiastic, engaged, eager, etc. Be proactive and flexible, and volunteer to do things without being asked. Be conscious of taking breaks at appropriate times.

Evidencing Commitment:

Employers may review your past work history to get a sense of your capability for commitment. Sustained work experience from any job will help, particularly demanding service industries. Extracurricular responsibilities (sport, volunteer roles etc.) may also provide evidence of your commitment.