



Diligence

Diligence has been defined as “careful and persistent work or effort” and “constant and earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken”.

In the veterinary context, diligence means a veterinarian who is **hard-working, persistent and reliable** (often referred to as ‘work ethic’), and gives careful **attention to detail and quality assurance**.

The VetSet2Go project identified diligence as an important capability for employability in multiple contexts:

- **Diligence in general approach to work:** being neither too sloppy/casual, nor too controlling/perfectionistic
- **Diligence in approach to work tasks:** being organised, thorough and deliberate with surgeries and clinical skills, e.g. taking a thorough history, doing a thorough physical exam, working up a case methodically
- **Diligence in attitude:** aspiring to do the best possible job, within external constraints such as equipment and finances etc; not having a “she’ll be right mate” attitude
- **Diligence in workflow:** following instructions and protocols; being focused, engaged and professional, even when ‘caught on the hop’
- **Diligence in seeking further information:** looking things up or trying to work things out first, but also knowing when to ask questions or seek help, without worrying about ‘looking stupid’

What they said

*“I think it is important that, prior to an appointment, my vet has **read notes of previous appointments** (particularly in an ongoing situation) so that I don't have to relate the previous history on each visit.” (Client)*

*“I guess I'm just happy for people to be diligent and to put their **best effort** in, and to be caring and to **try and be thorough**. They learn a procedure of a physical exam and they take a long time, the nurses want them to hurry up ... but they're **doing the right thing** and I just think that they need to stick to their guns, as long as they're trying to **work off first principles** and do that basic exam and get a good history ... You've got to get that **groundwork** of information and then you've got to observe it, try and find it on the animal and then you've got to be able to communicate the options and be caring and sensitive. So if they can do that at the front, with the client, then I think they're on a winner.” (Employer)*

*“Care, passion, diligence and enthusiasm ... it's not just care as in the sort of caring for 'animals', but it's care about the client, care about the standard of work; it's care about, I guess, all aspects of their performance. It's actually having the **desire to improve**, or to be the best that you can be. It's that kind of vibe.” (Employer of recent graduate)*

How is diligence recognised?

Perceived by you:

- You feel that every task or case deserves your best effort, within the constraints of the situation
- You have a disciplined approach to work that is thorough and deliberate
- You are hard-working and conscientious, with a good ‘work ethic’
- You take pride in your work and your professional identity
- BUT: you're not a perfectionist, and can let go when ‘gold-standard’ is not achievable

Perceived by others:

- Diligent, hard-working, industrious, good ‘work ethic’
- Conscientious, thorough; pays attention to detail and follows things up
- Focused, strives to do their best
- Punctual and reliable; gets to work on time and does not feign ‘sick leave’
- BUT NOT: perfectionistic or obsessed with unachievably high standards

Why is diligence important to employability?

Diligence promotes employability by ensuring work is done carefully and effectively, and to a high standard. Diligence is linked to many capabilities for veterinary employability, including **teamwork** and team dynamics, **trust** between colleagues, patient and task outcomes, **continued learning** and **workflow**.

In turn, diligence is influenced by **motivation**, values, **commitment**, the desire to improve and the drive for excellence. Interestingly, in the VetSet2Go project, responses gathered from new graduates, employer veterinarians and academic experts were all very similar regarding the importance of diligence for veterinary employability, dispelling the myth of the generational divide between new vets and employers.

However, stakeholders also told the VetSet2Go project that it is possible to be 'over-diligent', for example: asking the boss about every little thing; panicking about outcomes, e.g. surgery, if you feel things are not going perfectly; lying awake at night worrying; being overly concerned with recriminations, e.g. registration board complaints; being too focused on 'gold standards' and not having the capacity to take client financial constraints into consideration; thinking in 'black and white' and therefore not coping when things aren't 'textbook'.

*"Vets could take a small **time-out to ring a client** and check on their animal. This is especially important with small animals; for example, after a surgery, or after the animal coming in very unwell. I believe **follow-up** is very important." (Client)*

*"A strong work ethic builds **trust and rapport**" (Delphi expert)*

*"I've used the word **diligence**. I think that's a strong attribute in a veterinary practice; **you can't leave things undone**. You can't wait for someone else to do it." (Delphi expert)*

*"Because that's why I am a vet ... because I want to **give good care**, not because I just want to rush through everything." (Recent graduate)*

*"Just trying to do as good a job as I can and, if things happen, then they happen, as long as I know that I **couldn't do anything more than that**." (Recent graduate)*

*"**Reliability and work ethic** are crucial, particularly in clinical work. These qualities are important for **sustaining employment** in the long term." (Delphi expert)*

*"Students being **willing to engage** and not just be passive in their veterinary placement is probably the most important thing. They're making sure – I guess that the universities may be telling them, 'Hey you should really treat every single one of your placements like it's potentially a job interview'. Because it could be, down the track." (Employer)*

Possible strategies to enhance your diligence

Thinking about Others:

Recognise how your behaviour can influence colleagues' perceptions of you. Diligent behaviour earns the respect of your colleagues, creates trust in the team, and improves people's opinions of you.

Seeing their Perspective:

Recognise the impact that your behaviour has on others. It isn't all about you. It is very likely that you may be annoyed with a colleague who regularly leaves work early, leaving others to finish off the day. However, what if that person is you? Be honest with yourself; reflect upon your own behaviour. You may not intend to be late to work every day – but you never arrive on time. If that was a colleague, and it was you doing the morning rounds for them every day because they couldn't get to work on time – how would you be feeling? How would you be thinking of this person?

Checking your Motivation:

Look at the bigger picture. Is your motivation waning? Are you invigorated by your job, its demands and your colleagues? Is the job fit right?

Setting Goals:

Set specific goals. Change your morning routine so you can be at work on time. Set goals for challenging yourself with regards to case management. Try to 'go the extra mile' in a small way, every day.

Being Honest with Yourself:

Are you avoiding tasks because you don't feel confident in dealing with them? Be honest with yourself, ask for help, but at the same time commit to challenging yourself to try/do/learn something new each time. Doing this creates more confidence and then challenges will seem less daunting.

Paying Attention to Detail:

When applying for a job, pay careful attention to the application instructions and spelling errors, etc – employers use this as a selection filter. Arrive on time for interviews.

Avoid Overdoing It:

Appearing overly diligent or anxious may raise concerns about your perfectionism and resilience.