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How to manage disrespect right out the door

By Brendan Howard

As a practice manager, the responsibility to make sure your team is both respectful and feeling respected partly falls on you. One employee who doesn't honor others makes the practice unpleasant for the best team members—and forces them to flee.

"In the short term, you can tolerate disrespect for a day," says Andreas Pahl, MBA, hospital administrator of Valley Cottage Animal Hospital in Valley Cottage, N.Y. But if team members are disrespectful to clients or colleagues long term, you can't be afraid to let them go.

Before termination, though, Pahl suggests you help the employee understand what behavior or speech is disrespectful and offer alternative words or behavior to try. "Consider role-playing with them to show the difference between respect and disrespect," he says.

And when you hear good things from clients about team members' attitude and respect, be sure to share them, says Janice Reilly, LVT, clinical coordinator at Valley Cottage Animal Hospital and instructor at Bergen Community College veterinary technology program in Paramus, N.J. "Anytime a client says something positive, I always make sure my staff knows," she says. When team members feel disrespected and belittled by clients, compliments from appreciative pet owners can balance the scales of self-esteem.



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