

Knowing Your Clients' "Why": Communicating the Value of Veterinary Care

Learning Facilitators



Jason B Coe DVM, PhD (he/ him/ his)

Jason is internationally recognized for his leadership in researching and teaching clinical communication in veterinary medicine. After graduating from the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) in 2001, Jason returned to the College from mixed-animal practice to complete a PhD in veterinary communications in 2008. Currently, Jason is a Professor and the VCA Canada Chair in Relationship-Centred Veterinary Medicine at OVC, where he has published over 100 peer-reviewed journal articles and coordinates the clinical-communication curriculum across all 4 years of the veterinary program. In 2022, he founded the research program Relationship-Centred Veterinary Medicine at the Ontario Veterinary College (<https://rcvm.uoguelph.ca/>).



Kat Sutherland PhD (she/ her)

Kat is currently a postdoctoral fellow with the Relationship-Centred Veterinary Medicine research team at the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) and is an instructor in OVC's Medical Communications Program, where she enjoys working with student veterinarians to refine their communication skills. Kat's research focuses on understanding how veterinary-client communication can be enhanced to improve the quality of life for pets. Her research includes the development and evaluation of a 10-hour continuing education program designed to enhance veterinary professionals' communication in small animal veterinary practice, with emphasis on obesity-specific communication.



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Exploring Perceptions of Value

For Veterinary Professionals

For Veterinary Client

Feature, Function, or Benefit?

For each feature identified below, describe the function and benefit.

| Feature | Function | Benefit |
|---|----------|---------|
| <p>Chest Radiographs for Hit-By-Car</p> | | |
| <p>Intravenous Fluids with Electrolytes for Parvovirus</p> | | |
| <p>Therapeutic Urinary Diet for a Cat</p> | | |

Review Your Clinic's Online Communications

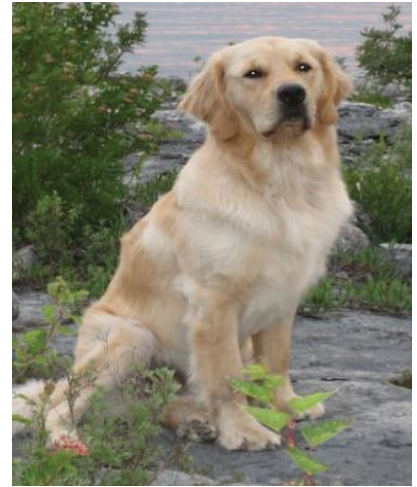
1. Pull up your clinic's homepage
2. Find communications or message promoting a service(s) offered
3. Evaluate whether the message conveys feature, function and/ or benefit
4. Write the feature, function and/ or benefit into the table below, adding any pieces of the value communication (feature, function, benefit) that are missing

| Feature | Function | Benefit |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| | | |
| | | |

“Value Matrix” Exercise: Cruciate

“Dexter”

- 4 years old
- Golden Retriever
- Male; Neutered
- 34.1 kg; BCS 6/9
- Presenting complaint: Lameness left hind
- The client identifies no specific concerns
- During your physical exam you are able to illicit a positive cranial drawer movement in Dexter’s left stifle
- **Diagnosis: Ruptured cranial cruciate ligament**



Task

1. Based on the described case, identify ALL management or treatment options that could be discussed with the client (including options you may not recommend or agree with)
2. List the options you identify down the left-hand side of the page
3. Across the top of the matrix identify a cumulative list of the benefits associated with all of the options identified

Using ✓ and ✗ indicate which options are associated with which benefits

Value Matrix

| | Cost |
|--|------|
| | |

Resources to Take Back to Practice

1. Perceptions of value - Veterinary team vs. Clients - WORKBOOK
2. Introduce feature, function, benefit – PROCEEDINGS/ WORKBOOK/ LUNCH AND LEARN
3. Review your clinic's online communications - WORKBOOK
4. Introduce the Value Matrix – WORKBOOK/ LUNCH LEARN

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Lunch & Learn Guide: Conveying Value

Prepared by Jason B Coe DVM, PhD



It has been found that veterinary clients' perception of value closely relates to the importance brought to the overall health and wellbeing of their animal whereas veterinary professionals often discuss the value of veterinary care in relation to the time and service they are providing. To communicate the value of veterinary care in a way that is relevant and meaningful to pet owners, veterinary staff need to go beyond describing the time and services they can offer to ensure they communicate the value of their time and service to the overall health and wellbeing of the client's animal.

MATERIALS

- Flip Chart
- Markers
- Cue Cards

Activity 1 *Distinguishing between Features, Functions and Benefits* (10 minutes)

“People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it.”

Simon Sinek, Author of “Start with Why”

Start the session off by defining the difference between a feature, a function and a benefit.

FEATURE – The What (i.e., the time, product or service offered to a client and their animal).

FUNCTION – The How (i.e., the direct effect or result of the time, product or service).

BENEFIT – The Why (i.e., the desirable outcome to the health and wellbeing of the animal).

Develop a set of cue cards in advance that contain examples of various features, functions and benefits relating to veterinary services offered by your veterinary practice. Each cue card should only contain a feature, a function or a benefit – not all on one.

Working as a large group or dividing your staff into smaller groups, invite the group(s) to sort through the cue cards and arrange them into three piles; one pile representing the features, one the functions and one the benefits.

Discuss the results of the sorting activity, inviting the group to discuss the specifics of any cue card that was sorted in to the wrong pile including where it correctly fits and why.

| FEATURE | FUNCTION | BENEFIT |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Flea and Tick Control | Prevents fleas and ticks | Reduces potential health risks for your pet |
| Radiographs | Identifies a fracture | Confirms action needed to return your pet to normal function and health |
| Bloodwork | Assesses kidney function | Confirms if action is needed to keep your pet safe and healthy |
| Therapeutic Urinary Diet | Prevents crystal and stone development in the bladder | Keeps your pet safer in the short and long term |

Activity 2 *The Value Matrix: Communicating the value of veterinary care* (20 minutes)

The reality is there are always options in veterinary medicine. If nothing more, there is the option to do nothing or the option to do something!

The value matrix is a tool which can assist staff in conveying the value of veterinary care to clients, especially when competing treatment or management options exist.

To run the value matrix activity, divide your staff into groups of 3-5 individuals. Include a mix of different practice roles (e.g., associate veterinarian, office manager, technician, client service representative) within each group.

Choose a common clinical scenario for your practice (e.g., dog with a ruptured cruciate ligament, an overweight cat, a dog with bladder stones, a dog to be started on heartworm preventive).

Assign the group(s) the same scenario or half of the group(s) one scenario and the other half a second scenario

NOTE: Recommend using only one or two clinical scenarios per session to allow staff to explore options and to focus on developing the value messages for one or two clinical scenarios at a time.

Provide each group with a piece of flipchart paper and a marker.

Based on the described scenario, ask staff members in their group(s) to identify **ALL** management or treatment options that could be discussed with a client (including options they may not recommend or agree with - it is likely clients are already aware or will hear about these options from another source; therefore, we need to be prepared to discuss these).

Ask each group to list the options they have identify for their scenario down the left-hand side of their flipchart paper.

Next, across the top of the flipchart paper, ask each group to make a cumulative list of the pet benefits (highlight – we are not looking for features or functions) associated with each of the options identified.

Finally, ask each group to use ✓ s and ✗ s to fill in the matrix indicating which options are associated with which benefits, including double ✓✓ where appropriate to highlight even greater benefits.

Example ‘Value Matrix’

| | Pet Benefit | Pet Benefit | Pet Benefit | Client Benefit | Cost / Day |
|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|------------|
| Option A | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | \$ |
| Option B | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ | \$\$ |
| Option C | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | \$\$\$ |

Encourage participants not to include cost until the end of the exercise. Also, if participants identify client benefits (e.g., reduce future treatment costs) this is okay but remind them to also identify the pet benefits.

Debrief the value matrices produced, asking a few groups to discuss the process they took and the decisions they made to complete their matrix.

Discussion points:

- Invite staff to share the challenges they experienced trying to identify pet benefits (remind participants - if it is challenging for us, we can only imagine how challenging it is for our clients).
- Discuss how easy it would be for a client to visually pick out which option brings the greatest value to them and their animal.
- Discuss how the “Value Matrix” could be used to convey the value of veterinary care to clients.
- Discuss identifying the cost of each option as the final step to completing the value matrix, this allows the client to see the value before the cost (encourage staff to compare cost per day between options when possible).
- Discuss what consistent value messages the entire practice team can take away and use from the value exercise.