

# Northwest Veterinary Associates, Inc.

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## January 2017 Newsletter – New Year, New Opportunity *Prepared by Dr. Tom Linden*

I hope everyone had an enjoyable holiday season! I wanted to try and tackle a sometimes difficult and not often focused on aspect of our day to day lives, but one that I would argue is as important as, say, having a good pregnancy rate or increased finishing weight. In my last newsletter, I emphasized the importance of healthy interactions with cattle. This month, along the same line of thinking, I pose this question: how effectively do you and others communicate with each other?

Trivial as it may seem, good communication ranks as one of the most common traits of highly successful businesses (dairy and beef operations included). Search “communication skills” in the books section of Google and you will get 772,000 results. Similarly, several articles in *Progressive Dairyman*, *Dairy Herd Management*, *Beef Magazine*, and on extension sites are devoted entirely to improving communication. Peter Drucker, described as “the father of modern management”, is attributed with saying that 60% of all management problems are the result of poor communication. Thoughts, ideas, opinions, instructions, questions, etc. that are not communicated well create roadblocks, lead to conflict, and ultimately decrease efficiency. This may be further exacerbated by language or cultural differences. Very often well-intentioned workers make poor cow-side decisions because they either aren’t clear on what to do or aren’t motivated to do the right thing.

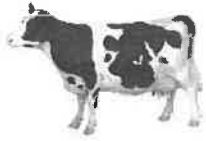
A great means of improving communication is the creation of a team. This makes sense for producers with many employees (whether family or non-family), but holds true for those of you that perform all the duties within your own business (think meeting in a routine manner with your clinic veterinarian and nutritionist). Team creation makes it simpler to meet at regular intervals for a designated amount of time (even if only 20 mins) to identify and set goals, monitor those goals, and provide positive feedback.

Here are some key (but by no means inclusive list of) ideas for improving communication both in 1-on-1 situations and within a team:

Be positive and professional – Negativity will detract from successfully communicating. Creating a positive and professional environment allows for a culture of problem solving rather than one of blame.

Provide a reason why – Offer a clear and concise factual reason for performing a task or existence of procedures. Written protocols with explanations can help to further eliminate confusion on important practices or policies.

Be understanding – The reasoning behind why one says something or the manner in which it is said may be the result of a unique situation that is not shared between both parties. Taking time



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to understand an individual's background or situation may prevent escalation or taking a defensive position.

Practice attentive listening – Getting your point across is only half of the equation! Attentive listening is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. This is probably the most difficult part of communicating. Often, we are distracted by things going on around us or by problems, tasks, etc. weighing on our mind. This leads to half-listening and can result in misunderstandings. A good way to check if you are listening is to paraphrase what was said back to the person who said it.

Taking the time and opportunity to improve communication isn't always easily achieved, but doesn't cost anything and can be incredibly helpful and rewarding in business (and in life). Remember, communication is a skill; it is learned rather than being an intrinsic attribute, and is a discipline that needs to be practiced!

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## REMINDER!

Please remember that **the Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) is now in effect**. Although the topic has been covered very well in previous newsletters, these new regulations have still left room for questions. Hopefully you were able to attend the most recent Franklin County Dairy Discussion group meeting, during which NWVA vets reviewed the VFD and its implementation. If you missed out (or even if you attended!) your herd health veterinarian is a good resource for answering questions about the VFD.