

THE CHARACTER OF CHANGE:

WHERE BUSINESS STRATEGY AND THE VETERINARIAN'S OATH INTERSECT

CLAIRE PICKENS, CVPM, SHRM-CP, CSSGB, FEAR FREE (10DEC2019)

As the industry evolves, there is an increase in business strategy conversation amidst the veterinary landscape. These conversations are conducted both by people with a formal veterinary education, as well as those that understand the concepts that make veterinary medicine an attractive business. Amid this, it is important that the veterinary professional keep the character of the industry intact. There must be an intersection of the veterinarian's oath, and the business strategies that are increasingly causing growth and success within the industry. In other words, we must stay increasingly aware of the character of change within our industry.

As a former practice owner, I am intimately aware of the ethical and character considerations necessary to maintain a positive practice character while making difficult and complex business strategy decisions. What will generate revenue is not always in accordance with the veterinarian's oath. What is in alignment with the veterinarian's oath, isn't always a profitable endeavor. The complexity in animal healthcare is combining strategy and an ethical oath to benefit the patient, advance veterinary medicine, and take care of the character of the business to cultivate the correct professional culture. A culture that isn't afraid to talk about the numbers. And a culture that understands that those conversations need to be intertwined with the heart of what is important to this industry – caring for the patients that need us.

To be able to care for the character of change within your practice, consider the following:

ARE YOU LEADING OR FOLLOWING AN INDUSTRY TREND?

Often in the course of practice the choices we make are either on the leading edge of the industry or are catching up with trends that are already happening. Before you make a choice for your practice, be sure that the choice you are about to make is in alignment with the character of your practice. Regardless of the direction of the rest of the industry, the changes you make within your own practice need to be congruent with the culture you envision for your hospital(s).

If you are leading the industry in the change you are about to make, what is your intent? Some decisions are made because of a mathematical discovery of revenue benefit, and others are made because of an intent to bring healthcare to patients in a new and better way. In an ideal world, your decision is based upon both factors. Whichever the reason, the character of that decision must remain aligned with the veterinarian's oath to advance animal healthcare and welfare.

If the choice you are making is in response to trends already occurring, what is your intent to follow this trend? Making a change in your practice just because everyone else is doing it, is not a good enough reason. Will the change add benefit to your practice? Will the character and culture of your practice benefit? Will the change send a message of positive movement for animal healthcare, or will it simply reflect a pressure to keep up with the practice up the street? It's important to ask yourself these difficult questions before making significant changes in your practice.

HOW WILL THE CHANGE IMPACT YOUR TEAM?

The impact of change on a veterinary team can be significant if not well thought out and delivered with the correct messaging. Whether you have a team of 10 or a team of 1000, it is important to consider how the change you are making will impact the team culturally, financially, in their work satisfaction, and in their perception of the character of the company.

While it is tempting to make business strategy decisions that make sense from a mathematical standpoint, that must be aligned with the perception of the portion of the team that looks at veterinary medicine through different lenses. Every decision made within an organization reflects upon the character of that companies impact on the industry, and on the people counted upon to deliver the animal healthcare within the business model.

Is the business decision you are about to make going to help elevate animal healthcare? Is the decision going to help the people within your organization feel like they are exercising their ethical oath to veterinary medicine? Is this decision going to be at the cost of your team, or have you crafted a way for them to feel financially protected amongst the progressive moves made to advance animal healthcare?

Change can be a frightening endeavor for team members that are not in decision-making positions within the company. As a leader in your organization, it is your role to provide comfort, protect the ethics of the industry, and help them feel like the change retains the character of the veterinary medical oath.

CORPORATE MESSAGING VS CHARACTER MESSAGING

As you craft your message to your teams about the pending changes, consider the vital difference between corporate messaging and character messaging.

Corporate messaging is a strategic use of carefully selected words to systematically deliver a message to a target audience. Often with words that are studied and used in a pattern of consistency to ingrain a specific message. While it is an effective and safe strategy for the deliverance of a message to your team, it may also lack the nature needed to achieve the level of genuine connection desired.

Character messaging, while less calculated, is the genuine delivery of a clear message to your team. A message that not only describes the intent of the change but uses words that genuinely express the factors related to the ethical aspects of the change. A less "scripted" message that touches on the heart of the change, to align the decisions made to the ethics of the profession.

CONCLUSION

In a landscape that is increasingly filled with groups of hospitals, rather than individual hospitals, the changes that we choose to make as an industry are becoming more important to the character of veterinary medicine. We are an industry that focuses on a patient that has an inability to speak for themselves. A patient that cannot always rely on insurance or families that have unlimited resources. How we choose to conduct business and make business decisions in an industry that requires so much "heart" will define our future. Some of the evolutions that are necessary in our industry, are due to evolutions in society. Business evolution is a normal and natural process, that we must embrace as we move forward as an industry. How we make these changes in our own practices, will define the character of our practice and ultimately the character of our industry. As you evolve your practice, make choices that not only evolve the business of veterinary medicine, but also align with the heart of the veterinarian's oath to advocate for animal welfare, and advancement the practice of veterinary medicine.

