

Leadership: Showing up as a Leader vs just showing up , and the importance of it to your business.

Sue Armstrong, BA, CPCC, ACC

Executive Coach Managing Partner, Oculus Insights Canada

Take home message

As Owners, Veterinarians and Practice Managers you are busy with the everyday running of the clinic. Thinking about leadership is an after thought, a hope strategy, or not occurring at all. In order to achieve great company culture, employee engagement and a successful business it begins with You. You have to **decide** to show up everyday as a leader in your practise.

Introduction:

In my work coaching owners, veterinarians and practice managers one of the most requested topics is Leadership. How do I do it? How do I get better at it?

The first step is to identify with being a leader. Most of you go to work every day as a Veterinarian or a practise manager and identify that as your job. When in reality you are also the leader in the room. It cannot be an after thought. Your staff are looking to you for direction, answers and inspiration. How are you showing up?

There are many leadership styles and theories that you can get bogged down in the details. I don't want to over think this.

Think back to the jobs you have had over your life. Let's focus on your bad bosses.

List the characteristics of your bad bosses:

-
-
-
-
-

(overbearing, micro manager, yelled, never made a decision, mean, control freak, non existent.) The list goes on in fact we can clearly remember our experiences with bad bosses. I think we categorize them into 3 types.

The Lone/Hero type Leader

This leader is fairly effective and traditional. This is the top down/hierarchal management that many of us have experienced. They make all the decisions. We all know who is in charge, you may have a new idea but at the end of the day tradition and legacy are their driving forces. It can be a safe, nice, uninspiring place to work but doesn't invite creativity and leads to disengagement. When, this type of leader

retires or moves on there is a vacuum left, no strategy for the future has been communicated and a break down in the model occurs.

The Bully Type Leader

Unfortunately, we have all experienced or know someone who has experienced this type of leader. They yell, belittle, threaten, they can be passive aggressive, demanding, intimidating and micromanaging. They are bad for: employee mental health, create high turn over, stifle creativity and unbelievably, successful for short periods of time.

The third style of leader and frankly the most common and unsuccessful is:

The Empty Chair Leader

This leader is here in title alone. This leader is apathetic, doesn't make big or little decisions. This leader has no direction or vision. They are disengaged, in it for the money, they believe the rules don't apply to them. They are not authentic. They don't do anything and because of that they set the standard for the rest of the staff to follow suit.

If we are honest with ourselves at one time or another, we have all succumbed to some of the characteristics of poor leaders or bad bosses that we have created on this list. The gift of poor leadership is you know how you **don't** want to lead.

Take a moment and think about great bosses you have had. List their characteristics:

-
-
-
-
-

(Inspiring, hard working, worked beside you, encouraging, authentic, accountable, ethical, integral, kind, mentoring, respectful, vulnerable, real.)

What did they have? What did they do that was so different? Why do you remember enjoying working with them?

Be honest with yourself and think about how you try to implement the characteristics of your great bosses? If your answer is all the time congratulations! If your answer is, I'm so damn busy I don't really think about it much, show yourself some compassion, most people don't.

Let's go back to the question how do I do it? How do I lead? As a Leadership and performance coach I believe in Authentic Leadership.

Authentic Leadership is a style that encompasses Self Awareness, is Values centred, leads with Vulnerability and Accountability. These characteristics foster trust and drive positive culture. It is effective and with commitment is very successful.

Self awareness: Understanding how your decisions and actions impact those around you and having the capacity to learn from your experiences.

Authentic leaders understand that they are under scrutiny. Staff, colleagues and customers are watching. They know they must **be the Professional they want their Staff to be**. That looks like: showing up early, picking up garbage in the parking lot, keeping a positive outlook on the day ahead. They are an active part of the company culture, they don't dictate it.

Authentic leaders know their conscious and unconscious impact on the room. They are aware of how they show up and how their presence affects the people around them. They communicate feedback in a way that helps build and grow their staff. When conflict does occur, self aware leaders ask themselves, what is my role in this and how can I create a positive outcome in the future?

Authentic Leaders are Value Centred.

Its all about Values.

Values are the principles that guide our thoughts beliefs and actions.

When we compromise our values, we are unhappy, distressed, stressed. We are not being true to ourselves. When our Values are in alignment, we feel good, free of distress or conflict.

Authentic Leaders, keep the core values of the business at the forefront while making decisions, correcting staff behavior, dealing with clients and their professional community. When a business is lead with its values at the heart, it is free of distress and conflict, the staff feels it (engaged) the customers feel it and everyone benefits from it.

Authentic Leaders are Vulnerable.

This is where I get push back as a coach. How can you show vulnerability and be a leader? One of the myths of vulnerability is that it is a weakness. In actuality it is a strength. Vulnerability creates connection. Connection creates trust. Trust creates loyalty.

Here is a real example:

One of my Veterinary Clients was having problems with her staff; they were disengaged, had to be told things repeatedly, they repeated mistakes, communication was poor, attitudes were poor, no one contributed ideas, productivity was down and the list went on.

I asked her “how are you showing up as a leader?” “What?” she replied.

So, I asked her “What does leadership look like to you?” What she described to me was a combination of the traditional lone leader with a flare for an authoritarian communication style. We could see how that was working out for her.

I asked her about showing up with vulnerability.....she was aghast!! “Look Weak” she replied “and let them walk all over me?”

“Look real” I replied, “look human and walk beside them.”

We set out a plan, to repress her need to be seen as perfect, for her to show up from a place of gratitude and humility. To practice giving her staff acknowledgments, not “hey thanks for your hard work today”, but a look you in the eye heartfelt acknowledgment about what they did that day that made a positive impact on her or the customer or the business.

The results, were Results. It took time, when the staff realized she was making a change, communicated she was making a change, they trusted her. They felt a connection. Communication opened up, trust flourished, ideas emerged, staff was happier and got more accomplished. She had earned their respect and their loyalty. Her response to me, “I cannot believe how things have changed, how much happier everyone is, how much happier I am and how I want to come to work now. I always thought you had to BE the BOSS, now I realize I can be (her name) and be the Leader.”

By allowing others to see you as real, imperfect and accepting, you create a space for them to feel connected. Brene Brown says “having the courage to show your vulnerability creates compassion and connection.”

Authentic Leaders are Accountable

What does it mean to be an accountable leader?

Accountable leaders, hold themselves and those around them to higher standards of performance, mediocrity doesn't cut it. Identifying with “its not my job” is unacceptable.

Accountable leaders make the tough decisions and tackle difficult issues. These leaders do not take the bury my head in the sand approach. For example not dealing with employee HR issues that are impacting team performance.

Accountable leaders have a clear vision of the future and they communicate that vision to their staff. They communicate each member of the staff's role in that vision and the importance of it to the success of the business.

Accountable leaders, are optimistic about the business and the future. They stay positive during difficult times, and never communicate disloyalty or displeasure to or around the staff.

Accountable leaders display clarity about external trends in the business and operating environment. They are aware of what is going on, with the business and industry and share that with their staff. For example, online threats to retail, hiring scarcity and communicate strategies to address these issues.

When you decide to Show Up as an Authentic Leader vs just showing up, you are making an agreement. Vince Molinaro Calls it a contract. The Leadership Contract. It is comprised of 4 parts.

Leadership is a decision. When you define yourself as a Leader you must be committed to the role and how to act, with your staff, customers and community. It means no longer accepting mediocrity from the leadership role.

Leadership is an obligation. In order to have a successful business, leaders have an obligation to its short and long term success. These obligations can be broken down into 5 segments. Leaders must provide value to:

- **Employees** -challenging and growing them and providing constructive feedback
- **Customers**- providing the best medicine service and care
- **Industry Partners**-providing partnership and cooperation to the businesses that serve you and you mutually benefit from. (drug/food companies, banks etc)
- **Business/Clinic**- the business itself is an entity to which a leader must provide value to daily. State of repair, equipment upkeep
- **Community**- Leaders must provide value to the community it works in. More than mowing the lawn or paying taxes, what are you doing to be a part of the community you are working in?

Leadership is Hard Work. Leadership is demanding regardless of the level you are leading at. Owner/Vet/Practice Managers, have to dig in. It means not avoiding tough issues. Avoidance weakens your leadership and your teams. It means dig in and have difficult conversations, don't sugar coat issues and give direct feedback. It means dealing with poor performers, manage them before situations become difficult, toxic or unmanageable.

Leadership is Community. Just as Leaders need to align with each other within the business, support one another and collaborate, you need to align with your colleagues outside of the business. Create a community of leaders in your industry,

share ideas, outcomes and learn from one another. Help raise the level of (awareness, leadership,) in your professional communities reach out build relationships. Create leadership peer groups. Maybe that looks like monthly or quarterly meetings to discuss books you have read, spotlighting challenges you have - asking for feedback and insight.

You are building a leadership network-make it meaningful.

Successful clinics with great company culture and employee engagement, wonderful clients, excellent medicine, care and profitability don't happen by Accident. What they all have in common is Leadership. Authentic Accountable Leadership.