10 Secrets of Successful Veterinarians.

by Dr. Kelly Cooper

Congratulations on your achievements in the veterinary profession. Whether you're a recent graduate or an experienced practitioner, you've undoubtedly invested a great deal of time and effort into learning and growing in your field. As you navigate your career, it's essential to recognize that success in veterinary medicine extends beyond medical knowledge and clinical skills.

The list below provides insights into the behaviors and choices that will help you thrive both personally and professionally, regardless of your current stage in your veterinary journey. These strategies are attainable because they are choices that you can make. I recommend starting at the top and working your way down the list over time, revisiting it often to reflect on your progress and growth.

1. Be Aligned

Aligning employment to your values ensures your job aligns with your personal purpose and vision for your life and career. Working in an environment where you're aligned with the culture is a critical component of job satisfaction.

- Have clarity: Spend time reflecting on and writing down your values and priorities.
- Know what's important to you and what's important to avoid.
- Include priorities other than work: health, hobbies, relationships, faith, finances, etc.
- Seek development and employment opportunities based on these values.

2. Have Goals

Having a vision and goals will give you a roadmap for success based on your values.

- Goals provide direction, create accountability, and allow you to track your progress.
- Goals that are simple, measurable, and time-bound create momentum and satisfaction when achieved.
- Shared goals create accountability and follow through. Bring or tell a friend.

How to develop your goals:

- Create a vision: imagine the person and veterinarian you could be in the future. Think big about what is possible without worrying about all that could get in the way.
- Long-term goals: Based on your vision, what goals must you achieve in the long-term (5-10 years) to bring that vision to life.
- Short-term goals: Based on your long-term goals, what must you achieve in the short-term (1-3 years) to bring those goals and the vision to life.
- Action steps: Based off your short-term goals, identify the steps you need to take the reach them. Start with this to keep it simple: what is the <u>one next thing</u> you need to do to make this happen?

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3. Have Balance

Prioritizing time to enjoy relationships, activities, and renewal of your mind, body and purpose increases your mental, physical, and emotional well-being and creates resilience.

- Prioritize = Schedule first.
- Set realistic boundaries. Based on your values and priorities, protect the time you prioritize for non-work activities.
- Because veterinary medicine is often a passion, it's easy to let work (and thoughts about work) encompass most of your day, week, year, and life. This leads to disengagement, burnout, and compassion fatigue.

4. Know Your Impact

Be self-aware: understanding yourself and how you relate to the environment and people around you allows you to adapt and develop yourself to make a more positive impact.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is your ability to understand your own emotions and manage your reactions, then recognize and influence the emotions of others. To develop EI:

- Take personal assessments such as Myers-Briggs, DISC, Strength-finders, etc...
- Read books and articles on personal and professional development and EI.
- Attend development workshops and seminars.
- Hire a life or professional coach to help you learn about yourself and grow quickly.

Measure your impact by knowing your metrics: If you work in an environment where productivity matters, understand what success looks like. Your boss knows what success looks like.

- All businesses must meet production and financial goals to pay their bills, keep the doors open, and grow. The more you contribute to your employer's success, the more successful you will be, and the more money you will make.
- In a practice setting, this includes revenue, patients seen and average transaction charge.
- Knowing your metrics allows you to set goals for growth and development.

5. Be Curious

There is no one harder to work with than someone who already knows everything, shares strong judgements, and shuts others and ideas down.

Instead, be curious. Curiosity...

- Opens your mind to lifelong learning.
- Breaks biases and fixed mindsets.
- Creates a willingness to explore other viewpoints, which strengthens relationships.
- Enables adaptation to change.
- Sparks creativity and innovation.

- Makes you more fun to be around.

How to be curious: When presented an idea that is different than yours...
- Set aside your opinion, your story, or your judgement.
- Take that other idea "out for a ride."
- Ask questions to find out more. "Can you tell me more about that?"

6. **Seek Feedback**
"Feedback is critical to self-development. Ask someone you trust for feedback. And then accept it as a gift." Warren Buffet.

Because of a desire to succeed and a fear of failure, perfectionism, and the drive to make the A, hearing constructive criticism can be hard, especially if it speaks to the areas you struggle with the most. But without honest feedback - both positive and constructive - you cannot grow. Be open to feedback.

Seeking feedback from others:
- Demonstrates a commitment to providing the best care.
- Shows humility and a willingness to learn.
- Builds trust and rapport with clients, colleagues, and staff.
- Helps you understand your strengths and weaknesses.
- Helps you learn to accept constructive criticism with grace.

7. **Be Part of the Solution**
You have a choice: Choose to stay "above the line" of personal responsibility, which means you maintain a positive, accountable, and solutions-focused mindset. When you choose to go "below the line," you're in a victim-mindset of blame and negativity. People *who choose* to stay above the line create positive impact... and are much more fun to be around.

8. **Do Only What You Can Do Best**
In veterinary medicine, our traditions and education teaches us to be all things to all people. Seven plus species, and how many different disciplines? While we are general practitioners, we're also surgeons, diagnosticians, technicians, radiologists, pharmacists, internists, family counselors, and more.

We can be a jack of all trades and a master of none. But being all things to all people isn't sustainable in today's world and adds to your stress. The most successful businesses and professionals are very clear on what they are good at and focus on, and what they do not do.

What do practitioners do best? Diagnose, treat, surgery, and communicating with clients. Leverage those around you – technicians, assistants, receptionist, and others – to do what they can do best, so you can do what you do best. You may have to give up some control, but in

return, you have freedom to do your best work, which is where you are most valued and paid to do.

What do you want to be great at? Go be great at it, become an expert, and let others do the rest. Is it surgery, medicine, cats, zebras, leadership, communication, client-service, or business? The sky is the limit. Don't be afraid to fly.

9. **Grow Your Network**
   Veterinary medicine is a rewarding, yet challenging and emotional profession, with ups and downs on a daily, and often hourly, basis. Fostering a network of social connection provides perspective, balance, and wisdom to help you sustain motivation, mental health, and attain career advancement.

   Build a network of support around you:
   - Family to keep you grounded and provide emotional refuge.
   - Friends to bring you joy, humility, and perspective.
   - Like-minded peers who can empathize and know what you're going through.
   - Mentors who provide wisdom, because they have been where you are and can help you get where you want to go.
   - Coaches to grow your perspective and help you create a plan to achieve your goals.
   - Colleagues and a professional community to bring new opportunities and keep you informed and connected to the profession.

10. **Pay It Forward**
    Nothing is more rewarding than giving your special gifts to others. When you focus on lifting others up and making a positive difference in someone's life, you develop a greater sense of purpose, gratitude, and personal fulfillment, and contribute to the next generation's success.

    - Volunteer in your community.
    - Perform random acts of kindness.
    - Teach on the job. Your team loves learning and want to know more.
    - Mentor an employee, student, or more recent graduate.

Summary

The veterinary profession is filled with opportunities for growth, fulfillment, and success. Whether you're just starting your career or you're a seasoned practitioner, the ten secrets outlined above can help you navigate the challenges and rewards of this dynamic field.

By aligning your work with your values, setting clear goals, maintaining balance, developing self-awareness, embracing curiosity, seeking feedback, staying solution-focused, leveraging your strengths, building a strong network, and giving back to others, you can create a thriving and satisfying career in veterinary medicine.

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Remember, your success is largely determined by the choices you make every day. I encourage you to reflect on these ten secrets and start implementing them in your life, no matter where you are in your professional journey. By doing so, you'll be well on your way to building a bright and fulfilling future for yourself and making a positive impact on the lives of the animals and people you serve.