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Reality Bites:

Bite-Sized Tips for Real Success



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Boundaries that Stick: How to Stop Being the “Easy Button”

As a practice owner, you’re constantly pulled in a hundred directions. Every “quick question” from your team feels small in the moment, but over time, the interruptions take a heavy toll. They break your focus, keep you from doing meaningful work, and turn you into the Easy Button — the fastest way for your team to get an answer without thinking it through themselves.

This workbook will help you identify where your boundaries are missing, where to set new ones, and how to take practical steps to enforce them.

Your boundaries are not just about protecting your time. They're about creating conditions where your team can develop confidence, your patients receive better care, and your practice can grow without requiring you to sacrifice your well-being.

Remember: Boundaries are not set once and forgotten. They require ongoing maintenance, clear communication, and consistent enforcement. The goal isn't perfection - it's progress toward a more sustainable, effective practice environment.

Steps for Success:

1. **Reflect**
   - Complete the Boundary Self-Assessment Quiz
   - After scoring the quiz, complete the “Where are my boundaries weak?” page.
2. **Plan**
   - Complete the Boundary Planning Worksheet for each area you want to set a boundary.
   - Write a SMART goal for implementing each boundary.
   - Complete “Ways of Working: How to Communicate with Me” and refine with the team
3. **Implement**
   - Week 1: Communicate new boundaries to your team. Explain the "why" behind changes.
   - Week 2-3: Consistently enforce boundaries. Expect pushback and stay firm.
4. **Assess and adjust:**
   - Week 4: Evaluate what's working and what needs adjustment.
   - Month 2: Refine and expand boundaries based on initial results.
5. **Celebrate and learn:**
   - Spend time reflecting on the outcome.
   - What can you celebrate? What could you do change?

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Boundary Self-Assessment Quiz

How strong are your boundaries as a veterinary practice owner?
For each statement, rate yourself 1–5: 1 = Never true, 3 = Sometimes true, 5 = Always true

Communication Boundaries

_____ I do not immediately respond to non-urgent messages after hours.
_____ My team respects my focus time and does not interrupt me with routine questions.
_____ I've set clear 'office hours' for when I'm available for questions.
_____ My team understands what qualifies as an emergency vs. what can wait.

Decision-Making Boundaries

_____ My team makes routine decisions without my approval.
_____ My team can troubleshoot and problem-solve without my involvement or permission.
_____ I've clearly outlined what decisions do and don't require my input.

Time Boundaries

_____ I go home at the end of the day when I intend to go home and at a reasonable time.
_____ I take needed breaks without sacrificing them to handle issues others could handle.
_____ I can take time off and trust work will run smoothly in my absence.

Availability Boundaries

_____ After hours, my team knows when I'm available and when I'm not.
_____ I protect family and personal time with clear boundaries.
_____ I've trained my team how to reach me after hours only if it's urgent.

_____ **Total Score**

Scoring

- 40–50 points: Boundary Boss 🎉
  You model strong boundaries. Keep reinforcing and refining.

- 30–39 points: Wobbly Walls 🧱
  You've set some boundaries, but your consistency may be slipping. Time to enforce and reinforce.

- 20–29 points: Easy Button 🚨
  Your team sees you as the go-to for everything. Boundaries need attention now.

- Under 20 points: Firefighter Mode 🔥
  You're constantly putting out fires. Time to reset with office hours, clear rules, and accountability.

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Reflection: Where are my boundaries weak?

Think about your daily work and time at home. Where interruptions drain your focus? Where do you find yourself being the Easy Button?

1. What is the work or goal I need to do but struggle to complete or focus on due to frequent interruptions?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What situations keep pulling me away from my being fully present?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Where do I feel most frustrated by interruptions?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What are the costs of not having boundaries in these areas?

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Boundary Planning Worksheet

Choose your top 2-3 boundary areas from the assessment above. Complete this section for each one. Copy this page to answer the questions for each boundary.

Boundary Area: _____

- What specific boundary do you want to create?

- Why is this boundary important? (What's the cost of not having it?)

- What will this boundary look like in practice? (Be specific)

- Who will this boundary impact?

- Who do you need support from to maintain this boundary?

- What resistance might you encounter?

- How will you handle it?

- How will you communicate this boundary to your team?

- How will you remember to maintain this boundary when old habits resurface?

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SMART Goals for Boundary Implementation

For each boundary you want to create, set a SMART goal:

Boundary: _____

- Specific: What exactly will you do?

- Measurable: How will you know it's working?

- Achievable: Is this realistic given your current situation?

- Relevant: Why does this matter for your practice and personal well-being?

- Time-bound:
    - When will you start?
    - When will you evaluate progress?

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Ways of Working Guide: How to Communicate with Me

Introduction

Boundaries aren't about being less supportive — they're about creating clarity. When your team knows exactly when and how to reach you, they feel more confident and you're able to focus on the work that matters most.

The best way to make this work is by setting clear Ways of Working and sharing them with your team. This guide is designed to help you communicate your expectations around questions, problem-solving, and availability.

How to Roll This Out

Start by holding a team meeting to explain why you're making this change. Let your team know:

- Boundaries protect your ability to lead.
- You want them to solve problems using the resources already available.
- Everyone benefits when communication is clear and consistent.

Encourage them to use SOPs, checklists, and each other before coming to you. Identify subject matter experts (for example: pharmacy, lab, or surgery leads) and leverage your office or practice manager's role as the first point of support.

Once you've had the conversation, walk through this guide and fill it out together.

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The 5 Pillars of Ways of Working

1. When I'm Available (and Not Available)

- Office Hours (times I am available for questions):

_____

_____

_____

- After-Hours Availability (when and how I can be reached, if at all):

_____

_____

_____

2. How to Tell I'm Not Available

- Examples of signals (door closed, headphones, in surgery, on client calls):

_____

_____

_____

3. How to Communicate with Me

- Non-urgent communication methods (notes, message board, email):

_____

_____

_____

- Urgent communication methods (protocols such as "call twice in a row"):

_____

_____

_____

4. What Counts as an Emergency (and What Doesn't)

- Examples of Emergencies:

_____

_____

_____

- Examples of Non-Emergencies:

_____

_____

_____

5. Who Else Can Help

- Team members/roles to go to when I'm not available:

_____

_____

_____

_____

- Types of questions they can handle:

_____

_____

_____

Acknowledgement

I understand these communication guidelines and agree to follow them:

Team Member Signature: _____ Date: _____

Practice Owner Signature: _____ Date: _____

Could you use some direction and support for bringing a change to life in your hospital? Reality Vet Coaching & Consulting is here to help. Scan the QR code for more information.