



Chad Roeber D.V.M  
Chuck Maker D.V.M  
Louise Marron D.V.M, D.A.V.D.C.  
Melissa Gisleson D.V.M  
Reese Davis D.V.M  
Alicia Nolfi D.V.M  
Evelyn Iacono D.V.M

17776 Highway 82  
Carbondale, CO 81623

Phone: 970-963-2371 Fax: 970-963-2372

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June 29, 2017

RE: Forward Booking Contest Submittal

To the VMAE Task Force,

In Carbondale, 25 miles from Aspen, Colorado, residence and pet owners are familiar with having to pay inflated rates for just about everything. Being compassionate for the care of our patients, staff are also compassionately understanding of the high costs of living in our valley. Caring for pets is a component of that challenge. They are particularly sensitive when being asked to recommend that the client “come back- to spend more”. When I arrived at Alpine Animal Hospital and we started talking about reminding clients that certain treatment for their pets was due, especially those more expensive items like dental care, I would hear, “I am not comfortable with selling the client on anything”. “Selling” was the key word used.

We all know that it is impossible to be persuasive if you don’t believe in the message you are delivering and so we realized that we needed to start at the very foundation of why we were “here”. We needed to get to the passion of our vision, not just what and how we do our jobs. So we started a conversation toward working together as a team to build a culture that is purposeful. A purposeful culture will create an environment that naturally supports and encourages the level of care that your practice leaders wish to provide. You can’t provide that level of care without a clear definition from leadership and you can’t implement it without buy in and support from your staff. People who do not buy into the culture you build, will change it – so keep talking and be prepared to have some difficult conversations in case you need them. You must engage staff, not just dictate protocol.

Two other tips to a successful approach:

1. Another factor that strongly supports scheduling forward is to provide packaged healthcare. This provides your clients with a motivating and cost effective way to meet all the healthcare needs of their pets. If your clients see the value in the plans, they will buy them and this in turn will create pride and enthusiasm in staff. Those staff who were reluctant to “sell” are now motivated to help clients realize the value of the care they have purchased.

2. A barrier to forward scheduling can be communication between staff providing treatment and the front desk. Your customer service staff at the front desk need to know “next steps”, so have a mechanism for that to be obvious when clients are checking out. We use the code Ready to Go (RTG), everyone must have that code before they check out and within that code notes are posted that communicate next steps – “i.e. recheck in two weeks”. This also goes into our reminder system; if the client does not schedule before leaving, a call is made prior to the designated time frame.

If you believe in what you are doing, you won't be apologetic or ask for permission when scheduling further care; you won't approach it with a questions - either directly or indirectly through your body language and hesitation. It will become natural to say “let me help you schedule that exam”. As clients, most of us will appreciate the efficiency in offering that help.

Thank you to Task Force for your consideration,



Mary Fox, Practice Manager  
Alpine Animal Hospital  
17776 Hwy 82  
Carbondale, CO 81623  
970-963-2371

[www.alpinehospital.com](http://www.alpinehospital.com)

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