

DAVE NICOL

VETERINARY SERVICES

How professional skills coaching helped me

By Alex Davies MRCVS

Somewhere amongst the panic of surviving that first year in the veterinary deep end, we as vets lose one of our biggest learning aids. At university we had the benefit of 10 weeks a year watching our seniors consult, learning from the way they handled their nicest and (perhaps more importantly) nastiest clients.

Suddenly I had reached 4 years qualified and though the panic was gone some serious questions raised their head. My confidence was knocked by a mixture of too many cases that had not gone as I'd wished, emotional fall out from two clients who had been quite aggressive in their dealings with me, and the difficulty of working alongside more experienced vets who I felt both judged and criticized my work.

I was at the stage where charging embarrassed me, I was making decisions for clients based on the money I believed they had, and where my poor confidence allowed every case to become more stressful through a self-made series of financial traps and emotional pitfalls.

My week with Dave was predominately about trying to restore my confidence in myself and my work. The first part of our time focused on his observation of my consulting style and my interactions with clients. Although it was at first intimidating having an 'assessor' in the room, none of my clients even questioned the issue and as they seemed to not even notice I relaxed myself. It was through this process that Dave identified my confidence issues and noted the lack of structure my consults had.

It was a fair assessment. Having had no formal instruction in consultations I had developed my own plagiarised style with no running theme, leaving some of my clients confused and overloaded with information. This in turn was leading to communication errors and adding to the stress that created my downward spiral.

Dave's approach to my problems was threefold. Firstly we discussed the issues he had noted to bring them more fully to my attention. After this we then went

through the theory of sales, marketing and service in a calm way over a welcome coffee. What I especially liked about this was the use of effective comparisons to my own shopping experiences and the attempt to change my perception of what it was clients wanted.

The second approach was a relaxing period where I simply observed Dave consulting himself. During this time he tried to show how he had developed his own structure and the benefits this brought. This time allowed me to see how Dave dealt with clients and their problems, it was also comforting to see a more senior vet selling services in a way that was far less hard sell than I had expected but still achieved the results I myself had wanted.

The third approach was to watch me put these ideas into practice in my own consults. Consults were doubled spaced to allow time for discussion and re-emphasis of the points already covered. I had to follow a more strict and rigid structure and although this was uncomfortable at first it did improve over the course of the session.

One month on and I have been trying to improve on the points that our week together raised. Some of the pressures of work inevitably creep back into practice life, but the most important thing is that once again I can genuinely say I love my job, and though it will continue to be a learning path, I have the confidence back to really give it a go.

Follow Up Note

Alex's demonstrably improved confidence was remarked upon by the practice management who described him as having a "spring in his stride". In the six months following these sessions his turnover had increased by over 25% through improved numbers of investigations being generated from his branch.

If you are interested in receiving professional coaching or mentoring from Dave then [click here](#) to go to the contact form to submit your request.