

NCVEI Update

Enhancing nontechnical skills, knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes through veterinary leadership development programs

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The need for leadership skills in the veterinary medical profession has never been greater. Although a number of very good veterinary leadership development programs exist, robust national and international dialogue on the topic has generally been lacking.

During 2002 and 2003, the NCVEI Working Group on SKAs¹ conducted a needs assessment to provide a foundation for developing initiatives to enhance the leadership skills of veterinarians and veterinary students.² Published in 2005, results of that study included both a listing of the leadership attributes that were thought likely to be critical for the future success of the veterinary medical profession and a cadre of suggested approaches to consider for strengthening those attributes across the veterinary profession.

The study suggested that leadership development opportunities be designed in a modular approach, to include the following major categories: personal growth for leadership excellence; strategic thinking; team building; communications, influencing, political skills, and advocacy; and developing leadership in others. To ensure that a balanced and broad-based approach ensued for the profession as a whole (ie, that all 5 categories received appropriate and adequate emphasis), a centrally coordinated approach was recommended. Although specific responsibility for such central coordination was not clearly allocated to any single organization or individual, a key conclusion was that "...success will be determined by the degree to which leaders are expected to be educators, and educators are expected to be leaders."²

With education having such a prominent role in the study's recommendations, it is reasonable that the AAVMC has accepted some of the responsibility for follow-up. In that regard, a workshop was coordinated by

ABBREVIATIONS

NCVEI	National Commission on Veterinary Economic Issues
SKAs	Skills, Knowledge, Aptitudes, and Attitudes
AAVMC	Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
AAHA	American Animal Hospital Association
CVM	College of Veterinary Medicine
VLE	Veterinary Leadership Experience
MSU	Michigan State University
VLA	Veterinary Leadership Academy
VBMA	Veterinary Business Management Association

the AAVMC and NCVEI on July 15, 2006, for purposes of identifying key existing initiatives in veterinary leadership development, reviewing existing initiatives in light of the study's recommendations, and suggesting directions for individual and collective action in the future.

For this workshop, several presentations provided background on key veterinary leadership development initiatives that have been successful to date, with primary emphasis on those originating with the AAVMC, AVMA, and AAHA. Subsequent discussions identified gaps on the basis of workshop participants' perspectives, keeping recommendations of the NCVEI study in mind. Along with the AAVMC and AAHA executive leadership, participation in the workshop was sought from deans and associate deans of North American colleges of veterinary medicine. In addition, members of the Association of Veterinary Practice Management Consultants and Advisors were invited to participate because of their unique perspectives on the nontechnical SKAs critical for success in veterinary medicine. This is a report of that workshop.

Veterinary Leadership Development Initiatives

The AAVMC leadership development programs—In 2004, the AAVMC approved the development and offering of a leadership program designed for the mid- to upper-career faculty in the CVMs. Although no specific leadership topics were prescribed for the leadership program, the AAVMC contracted with WholeSystem Consulting of Reston, Va, for program development and teaching. Leadership Challenge, a 2-day course,

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along with Leading Teams to Effective Decisions and Strategic Think-Shop, both 1-day courses, were offered in March 2005 and March 2006.

Prior to attending the Leadership Challenge, participants were asked to complete a 360° assessment (where an individual's leadership attributes were evaluated by their supervisors, peers, and direct reports) as designed by Kouzes and Posner.³ Building on Kouzes and Posner's framework for leadership development, the Leadership Challenge workshop included interactive sessions with the facilitators and small discussion groups. The objectives of Leadership Challenge were to understand the major purpose and practices of leadership, understand one's own strength and developmental needs, practice key tools of leadership, and plan for the application of leadership skills and concepts when back on the job.

During the Leadership Challenge, participants reviewed and discussed the 10 commitments of leadership:

- Search out challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate, and improve.
- Experiment, take risks, and learn from the accompanying mistakes.
- Envision an uplifting and ennobling future.
- Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to their values, interests, hopes, and dreams.
- Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust.
- Strengthen people by giving power away, providing choice, developing competence, assigning critical tasks, and offering visible support.
- Set the example by behaving in ways that are consistent with shared values.
- Achieve small wins that promote consistent progress and build commitment.
- Recognize individual contributions to the success of every project.
- Celebrate team accomplishments early.

Participants in the Strategic Think-Shop course spent time understanding and reviewing the role and core skills of strategic thinking for effective leadership and then practicing these skills by completion of a strategic thinking self-assessment. Visioning was also a major component of the Strategic Think-Shop course. Visioning allows leaders to develop a vivid picture of the desired future state on the basis of the current reality (strengths and weaknesses) and potential opportunities and threats that may arise in the future from external influences. Specific components used in the visioning process include an assessment of the organization's past achievements, an evaluation of how the organization functions, and a review of core values and the mission statement. The process leads to identification of those dimensions of the organization that may need to be changed.

Leading Teams to Effective Decisions was the third leadership course offered by the AAVMC. Participants became familiar with the key behaviors of effective teams and a model for decision making to be used at individual and team levels. Small group discussions and breakout sessions were used during the day-long course to practice the skills of facilitating teams toward effective

decisions, and participants developed action plans to apply what they learned when they returned home.

The three 2006 AAVMC leadership courses had a total of 26 attendees who paid \$620 for the 2-day course and \$320 for each of the 1-day courses. Attendee evaluations of the 3 courses were strongly favorable.

The AVMA VLE—The AVMA VLE is an experiential program developed in 2004 for veterinary students and educators. Originating at Washington State University (with support from Hill's Pet Nutrition Inc and others), the 2004 VLE class had 80 participants and the 2005 class had 110, and in 2006, there were 145 individuals from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Caribbean. The program was designed to provide a foundation in character to balance the traditional emphasis on technical competency found in professional veterinary medicine academic programs. The AVMA VLE addresses the "rest of the doctor," providing communication skills, principle-centered thinking, emotional intelligence, and ethics. The AVMA VLE is based on the concept that leadership can be taught and emphasizes that one must first lead oneself through self-awareness and self-management before one can lead others and manifest true leadership-caliber values, principles, integrity, compassion, and emotional intelligence.

The AVMA VLE embraces a philosophy of advancing others through servant leadership (relational leadership) as a way of also advancing oneself, hence creating a win-win culture. At the VLE, the relational leader is developed through an interactive curriculum designed to encourage a positive transformation. The VLE experience alternates between collaborative-interactive activities and reflective sessions that explore self-awareness, self-leadership, social awareness, and social skills, all of which are crucial elements of emotional intelligence and leadership.

During the VLE, attributes of servant leaders evolve during the course of the carefully structured, interactive, experiential program on personal and relational leadership skills. Participants engage in an active learning experience during the multiday course that creates opportunities for reflection and introspection, as well as personal growth, networking, and new friendships. A large proportion of VLE alumni report that they leave with a positive change in some way. Many complete the course and return home with a different outlook and awareness of how to reshape their veterinary medical education process or how they will teach in the professional program.

The cost for a participant at VLE is about \$1,100 for the 5-day experience, excluding travel. However, registrants pay nothing because the cost is covered by donations from the AVMA, Hill's Pet Nutrition Inc (founding sponsor), and other partners from across the animal health industries. These figures also exclude the costs assumed by Washington State University in terms of copying, mail, telephones, personnel, and all the other oversight essentials that go into the organization of a large event.

The AAHA VLA—The AAHA VLA is an educational opportunity designed for veterinary professionals in management or leadership positions. The academy was

originated by the AAHA and Pfizer Animal Health and features faculty from The Ken Blanchard Companies, Ninth House, 2logical, and the Center for Management and Organization Effectiveness. Together, these groups have developed a customized curriculum to meet the specific needs of veterinary professionals.

The academy focuses on the needs of practice owners and managers to learn how to practice medicine, run a profitable practice, and inspire and motivate employees in alignment with the organization's vision. The VLA starts from the precepts that leadership is not solely positional (ie, where one is in the organizational chart) and that leadership is a learnable discipline that takes practice. Participants learn how leadership differs from management, gain skills to develop a vision for a practice, define a positive workplace culture, direct positive change, and provide employees with the motivation and direction they need to be successful. In addition, attendees build a strong network with fellow attendees as they move through the course, which provides benefits long after the program is complete.

The VLA consists of 3 courses, Intrinsic Leadership, Extrinsic Leadership, and Experiential Leadership, to be completed over a period of approximately 12 to 18 months. Each of the courses lasts 3 days. Intrinsic Leadership helps the participants discover their inner leader and sets the foundation for a paradigm shift to become a more effective leader. During the course, attendees create personalized development and action plans along with identifiable and prioritized high-payoff coaching and mentoring activities. Attendees also learn a model for delivering effective feedback and practice the model via role-play exercises and simulated coaching cases.

The second course, Extrinsic Leadership, helps attendees recognize their inner leadership potential and helps them master coaching and mentoring skills. Coaching, personality, and behavioral style tools are discussed. Not only are personality styles of the participants explored, but also those of their employees. Practice owners and managers can then apply the appropriate leadership strategy to each employee's developmental needs. This course also includes an extensive 6-hour interactive virtual course, completed prior to the Extrinsic Leadership course, which provides attendees with practice diagnosing and prescribing the most appropriate leadership style on the basis of simulated scenarios. This high-quality precourse work is used by many large companies and organizations, including the US Navy.

Experiential Leadership, the third course in the VLA, covers how to effectively manage and mitigate conflict among teams. Participants learn about the 5 phases of team development and how to provide the appropriate leadership to each individual throughout all the stages of team development. Attendees take team assessments to diagnose their current level of team development and develop a specific coaching-leadership plan to help the team reach higher levels of success.

The AAHA VLA can accommodate about 60 attendees/class. The current fee is \$1,700/course plus transportation and housing expenses.

In addition to the VLA, AAHA offers a stand-alone Veterinary Leadership Workshop designed for owners,

managers, and head technicians that covers the traits of leadership and introduces coaching. These workshops, offered free to accredited AAHA members on an invitation basis, were jointly developed with Pfizer and are supported by MarketLINK. In 2005 to 2006, 18 such workshops were offered around the country, and 8 to 10 more will be offered in 2006 to 2007.

National VBMA—Founded in 2003 at the University of Pennsylvania, the VBMA is a national student-managed organization intent on improving the veterinary profession through increasing business knowledge, creating networking opportunities, and empowering students to achieve their personal and professional goals. As of February 1, 2007, the VBMA had 22 chapters (nearly 2,000 student members) and ran on an operating budget of about \$250,000. The VBMA has several goals, including the following: increase student and veterinarian interest and awareness regarding personal financial management, entry into the job market, career management skills, and professional opportunities that are available to persons with a VMD or DVM degree; involve students and veterinarians in discussions with knowledgeable veterinary practice management consultants and advisors; and provide a forum for learning life skills and the principles of successful business management.

Bringing business management issues to veterinary students is integral to the education of a well-rounded veterinarian and the advancement of veterinary medicine as a profession. Business knowledge will likely translate into increased sales, result in stronger veterinarian-supplier relationships, and allow veterinarians to practice better medicine.

Issues of primary concern to the VBMA, in addition to veterinary business management, include managing debt, how to plan for the future, client interaction, and managing personal finances. Veterinarians cannot be successful professionally without first having firm control of their personal finances. Although the VBMA does not state veterinary leadership development as an explicit goal, many of the specific dimensions of VBMA activities overlap extensively with other veterinary leadership initiatives.

The MSU CVM leadership development program—On the basis of a strategic imperative that identified leadership development as a key priority, the CVM at MSU initiated an intensive effort to strengthen its leadership beginning in 2003. Conducted in parallel with ongoing strategic planning and management, the cornerstone of this initiative was the delivery of an extensive leadership development program. In its first year, the program consisted of 4 day-long training modules: core leadership functions and skills, strategic thinking skills, change leadership skills, and team leadership skills.

The core message of the leadership development initiative at MSU CVM was that leadership needs to exist at all levels; everyone is potentially in a position to demonstrate leadership. Therefore, participation in the courses was open to faculty, administrators, and staff from across the college; nearly 100 people signed up for the courses.

The courses provided a mix of theoretical orientations, practical skills, and exercises to apply the skills in a CVM context. In the second year, an additional set of 1-day programs was offered to reinforce and build upon the first year's training. These were in topic areas that past participants had identified as being of the greatest interest and usefulness and included power and influence, emotional intelligence at work, and advanced team leadership and facilitation skills.

In maintaining focus on the strategic imperative for leadership development, ongoing programs at MSU CVM include creation of a new series of leadership workshops for faculty and staff (Leading for Success, 10 half-day modules offered over the course of 1 academic year that were created in collaboration with MSU Human Resources); a series of lunchtime leadership seminars for veterinary students (Professional Success Series, ten 1-hour modules offered over the course of 1 academic year); a series of workshops designed to enhance awareness of the inherent strengths in a diverse, inclusive culture; and a leadership library.

Texas A&M University CVM Center for Executive Leadership in Veterinary Medicine—The mission of the Center for Executive Leadership in Veterinary Medicine is to establish the CVM at Texas A&M University as a national leader in developing, training, and graduating the veterinary medical leaders of the future. Specific objectives of the center include the following: develop the nation's model leadership training program for DVM students; create collaborative research programs in veterinary student leadership development; provide career counseling to DVM students; secure funding support to enhance diverse student recruitment, selection, and educational processes; initiate and promote combined degree programs; publish articles and publicize CVM student leadership programs; and develop partnerships between the CVM and key decision makers in the veterinary profession.

As executive director of the center, Dr. E. Dean Gage reports to the dean of the college and works closely with an internal advisory committee whose membership includes the associate deans and key committee chairpersons from the college. In addition, the center has an external advisory committee comprised of leaders and executives from across the veterinary profession. The purpose of the external advisory committee, which was convened in June and October of 2005, is to provide counsel to the executive director on major issues and to help secure funding for center initiatives.

A number of key programs have been developed through the center. For example, a career center has been initiated to serve the needs of veterinary students, involving career counseling services, a seminar series on career development, and a Web site with links for career information. In addition, a number of combined degree programs have been developed, including 7 DVM-PhD programs in progress (as of the summer of 2006) and a DVM-MBA that has had 15 students over the period of 2004 to 2006. Another initiative originating with the center involved collaboration with Hill's Pet Nutrition Inc to study client compliance with nutritional recommendations originating in the veterinary medical teaching hospital. Numerous other initiatives are underway as well.

Other Veterinary Leadership Development Programs—Additional opportunities exist for enhancing leadership skills in the veterinary profession. These include individual university-based programs (not necessarily veterinary specific) that exist on the campuses of the colleges and schools of veterinary medicine. An example of 1 such program is the Executive Leadership Academy at MSU, which is designed for enhancing the leadership skills of academic and nonacademic executives across the university's broad array of administrative units.

Programs at individual universities complement several regional programs that exist. These include the Committee on Institutional Cooperation Leadership Fellows Program, an initiative involving a consortium of 12 research universities, including the 11 members of the Big Ten Conference and the University of Chicago. Other nonveterinary specific programs include the broad range of leadership development opportunities that exist in the private sector under the auspices of executive training programs. Foremost among these is the Center for Creative Leadership, which is known for programs that have achieved consistent international acclaim.

Additional AVMA leadership initiatives need to be adequately recognized. For years, the AVMA has conducted an annual leadership conference for purposes of enhancing the development of leaders in veterinary medicine. Key features of the leadership conference have consistently included sessions on current issues of importance to the veterinary profession along with methods of enhancing and leveraging the strengths of organized veterinary medicine. Additional AVMA leadership initiatives have included the leadership training conducted recently for the House of Delegates (modeling portions of the AVMA VLE discussed previously), the Personal Leadership Development Workshop conducted as part of the 2006 AVMA Annual Conference (also modeled after the AVMA VLE), and an online mentoring center (recently discontinued). Together, these initiatives speak clearly to the commitment of the AVMA to veterinary leadership development.

Discussion

Leadership, with all of its definitions, is recognized as an integral set of competencies and a body of knowledge that needs to be present at all levels of veterinary organizations.² Increasingly, applicants to the schools and colleges of veterinary medicine need to demonstrate leadership qualities for admission⁴ and throughout their veterinary medical education.⁵ Whether a graduate goes into clinical private practice, public practice, the military, research, graduate school, or any other allied veterinary medicine career, leadership traits are identified as some of the most important attributes for success.⁴

There are a limited number of leadership programs designed specifically for veterinary medical students and veterinarians. How do we know if those programs are making a difference or are successful? Documented outcome assessments for these programs do not exist to date. Skeptics will point to the lack of a large body of scientific data to support leadership programs in veterinary medicine. However, those types of studies exist

for other industries, and many of those industries consistently invest considerable resources into leadership training as a result. It is important to continually seek scientifically based research to support leadership training programs in veterinary medicine, but evidence from other sources, practical success, and anecdotes are also important indicators of success.

Veterinary medical students are highly influenced and mentored by faculty members and staff. For this reason, it is very important for high-quality leadership programs to be offered and accepted by faculty. With greater emphasis on leadership skills in academia and more leadership courses offered for faculty members, it is more likely that faculty will understand and accept the importance of having students learn and effectively demonstrate leadership skills.

There is no national veterinary medicine coordinating body, consortium, or umbrella organization focused on the lack of, and speaking about the need for, outcome-based veterinary medical leadership training programs. Lifelong continuing education for faculty and veterinarians should include opportunities for high-quality leadership training programs just as they include educational programs for technical skills and specific scientific disciplines.

Recommendations

Stemming from the discussion at this workshop, several recommendations have emerged:

- Leadership is recognized as a vital component of the SKAs from the 1999 KPMG study,⁶ and this precept is embraced by the NCVEI. A number of successful leadership development initiatives have been identified across the veterinary profession. Because there currently is not a national coordinating body to benchmark, inventory, and communicate existing veterinary leadership training programs, the NCVEI, which is composed of representatives of the AVMA, AAVMC, and AAHA, may be the logical choice for such a coordinating body. Another alternative would be for the AVMA, AAVMC, or AAHA to develop a veterinary leadership institute. As a

logical first step in coordinating leadership development initiatives, it will be critical to create a regular, national (or international) forum to enable an ongoing exchange of ideas and constructive dialogue on veterinary leadership development.

- There are a number of veterinary medical leadership training programs available to students and veterinarians and a blossoming of both curricular and extracurricular activities in the veterinary medical schools and colleges. There is a need to scientifically assess the outcomes of these programs so that quality programs will flourish and the needs of the profession will be met.
- Because veterinary medical college faculty serve as primary mentors for veterinary students and provide the most likely pool of candidates for veterinary medical college administrators, it is critical for faculty to have quality leadership training. Funding for leadership training programs should be a part of each college's faculty development budget. In addition, specific programs should be developed on the national, regional, and local levels to target leadership development for junior members of the veterinary faculty. The AAVMC should take the lead in this initiative.

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