Were you at the very first Veterinary Visionaries Changemakers event? We’ve pulled out takeaways and some of the most-quoted moments from our inaugural panelists and our wonderful moderator, Quincy Hawley, DVM, of Get MotiVETed. If you haven’t seen it yet, it’s not too late! Catch the recording through the first week of May at: matchboxvirtual.com/veterinary-visionaries-2021.

Here are the words that mattered most to you, as well as the most requested resources mentioned by our panelists.
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HACKS FROM THE 2020 TRENCHES

From the parking lot to the comfort room, crisis brought out the inner MacGyver in veterinary teams everywhere. This panel launched virtual classes for vet students, entertained schoolchildren on Facebook while educating about pet care, supported clients during challenging euthanasias, and pivoted teams to curbside in a matter of days.
“When I’m approaching a project, knowing that it doesn’t have to be perfect and that I can make changes is huge.”

“We already had a savings plan, so going into the pandemic I knew that if I got sick, and my husband got sick, we were going to be down for four weeks or more. I had a month’s worth of money and resources in case things went south.”
“None of us know how to do this perfectly. None of us know how to do life perfectly, but if we stick together, we’re going to do just fine.”

“We’re here to treat and not to judge. Let’s do what we can for the patient. There’s a human component here as well.”

MAGGIE CHRISTENSEN

CHANGEMAKER INSIGHTS | Hacks from the 2020 Trenches
“Surround yourself with laughter. For me, it’s the kids.”

“I tell myself, I’m going to do as much as I can, for as long as I can. Our clients are panicked about a lot of things, but it doesn’t have to be about their pet.”
Dr. Marshall’s “Cat Classes” reached veterinary students all over the country and the world with an all-volunteer corps of practitioners ready to fill in the gaps for students unable to be in clinics during the pandemic. He tapped into his professional network by following his own words of wisdom: “Never miss an opportunity to make a new connection. That goes for everything! Make friends, make connections.”
VETERINARY TEAM RESHUFFLE:
HOW 2020 CHANGED THE WAY WE WORK

Team members took on new skills and stepped out of their normal duties as the pandemic forced many to re-evaluate roles and responsibilities. Hear how unsung heroes quickly adapted with tools such as telehealth, and how hospitals are altering staff roles and getting creative to help staff not only survive, but thrive.
“We need to become a brick-and-click vet.” Being available online to help clients doesn’t take away from the in-person exam—in fact, it helps doctors have more time to work with pets in the clinic for that all-important hands-on component.

“We need to move away from phone lines. You can empower the staff to carry a lot of the heavy load and it can be much more collaborative [with telehealth technology]. It’s a win-win situation no matter how you look at it. It’s easier than you think.”
“It’s not all rainbows and sunshine. We have fired people in the past year because it wasn’t a good fit. They weren’t thriving in our environment. So, we freed them.”

“We just had a vet call us out of the blue and say, ‘I’m moving to Tennessee and I’d like to work for you.’ If we take care of our team, everything falls into place. It makes the other things easier to manage.”
“Time is that commodity that you never get enough of. By doing these changes, it enabled me to have time with my family. This is my career, but it’s not my life.”

“By increasing team numbers for my business, it allowed multiple appointments to be seen at once. My clients don’t wait. I’m working less, and making more than I ever have.”

Words to live by: Work smarter, not harder!
“The biggest challenge that we’re facing is the burnout that we’re feeling. Ethos has four social workers in the organization, which is huge to help our people and our clients.”

“The focus now is on recovery, moving forward, and keeping technicians engaged.”
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH:
HOW TO REIMAGINE A SUSTAINABLE CAREER IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

It’s no secret that despite passion for our work, veterinarians, technicians, and other team members struggle financially and emotionally with the strain of this career. This panel took the reins to face big problems, such as increasing diversity in the profession, building strong mentorship programs, creating a school for the children of staff during the pandemic, and impacting the newest generations of veterinary students.
“If a situation’s challenging for me, it’s probably challenging for my co-workers as well. I want people to know that I support them, and they can count on me.”

“A workplace is so much more than just a place you show up and do your job. It’s your family, it’s your community, and especially as a practice owner, you have to really make that a place where it’s a work family if you want to retain employees.”

ASHLEE ANDREWS, DVM
“Say yes to shadowing—you’re a mentor just being in this role, and students need to see what the life of a veterinarian is like. Evaluate if you feel like they are right for the profession. Not everyone is.”

“Be a part of the change. If you love what you do, whatever is, find a way to share that with others.”

ALEXIS DE GALE, DVM, MS
“Use mentoring as a tool—you’re going to be a mentor whether you realize it or not, so you might as well be a good one. Be a mentor. Do it well.”

“90% of people who have mentors will turn around and mentor other people.

80—90% of people who are mentored find that relationship valuable.”

VALERIE MARCANO, DVM, PHD

pawsibilitiesvetmed.com
“In this world of information overload, we feel crowded, as if there’s not any space for the idea that we have. I encourage people to find that space. Make that space, and really sit in it. If you’re looking for a sign, this is it. I’m telling you to go do it. We need that innovation and that idea.”

TIERRA PRICE, DVM

blackdvmnetwork.com
Additional organizations mentioned in the chat during the panel:

pridevmc.org
latinxvma.org
aavmp.org
Changemakers wasn’t just about the panelists. Attendees shared thoughts and ideas in the chat and in separate Challenge Questions during the interactive event. Here’s some of what you had to say!
QUESTION 1:
How might we reduce patient waiting times and improve staff and patient experiences with telemedicine?
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“Many cases do not need to come into a practice. Telemedicine helps us triage cases and solve problems outside of the building. Clients are satisfied, patients are cared for, and only the people who need hands-on care should come to the office. This leverages our staff for the care that needs them and frees them from the services best handled online. Staff then has more available time to work with clients and patients in-house.”

“Encouraging completion of pet history forms online in advance (or at check-in if needed) to speed up history taking. Send to client at time appointment is made to encourage more immediate completion. Text check-in to decrease phone times.”
How might we reduce patient waiting times and improve staff and patient experiences with telemedicine?

“All clients can complete an intake form prior to an in-person or virtual consultation. Two-way messaging for clients on arrival smooths out the check-in process. Communication through a virtual platform allows for possible recording or transcripts of conversations to be kept so that veterinary staff do not need to repeat everything to the spouse/significant other who did not attend the consultation.”

“Using telemedicine to help prescreen patients to make sure they are scheduled into the right spots in the schedule with the right individual saves everyone time.”
“I do agree many cases do not need to come into the practice, however the culture of vet med has to change to meet this.”

“There is no reason ongoing cases, i.e., follow-up, can’t be managed with a combination of telemedicine and in-clinic visits to accommodate clients with limited availability or those with transportation challenges.”

“I would like to see all veterinary appointments begin via telemedicine. A doctor for medical concerns and an LVT for preventative care. It would allow us to narrow the scope of a medical concern by having a complete history prior to the on-site visit.”
QUESTION 2:
How might we create boundaries in our practices that improve the balance of work and life?
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“You must set the expectations upfront with clients. Inform them about the consequences of being late when the appointment is made. Push this notification out through email and other messages. Never blindside clients. They should know the rules from the initial visit, and WE must stick to the rules or we will be where we are now.”

“Practices do not perform time studies on service events, so they have a realistic expectation of how long these services really take. Doctors also need sufficient staff to be able to leverage them appropriately. When the appointment book is used as a time-management tool, then staff can get breaks, lunches, and go home at night.”
“Leverage staff to the extent possible to take advantage of their skill sets. Doctors should not be the ones drawing blood, positioning for radiographs, etc. Doctors should examine, diagnose, and treat. Other tasks should be delegated. No one should be expected to share their personal cell phone numbers or email addresses.”

“We can also increase the use of technology tools like talk to text for medical charting, online appointment schedulers, text to pay, online refill requests. If our demand is still higher than our capacity, we need to not be concerned about increasing fees to slow the traffic.”
How might we create boundaries in our practices that improve the balance of work and life?

“We practice telling clients ‘No’ during our weekly team meetings. Developing a way to say no while conveying that you still care about the patient and client takes practice!”

“We understand when an employee ask for time off, they are not asking, they are telling you they need time off to balance their work and life. As leadership, we cannot be contacting our employees when they are off or asking them to join a meeting, or making demands on them. We need to respect their balance of work and life.”

“Understanding that everyone needs a break and respecting time off even for practice leadership helps create this balance.”
How might we create boundaries in our practices that improve the balance of work and life?

“Balancing within our own teams is hard enough. But we need to look at vet med on a larger scale, and how we create work-life balance across the field. I have no answers. This is a medical field, so we have to have ER access. But ER needs a break, too.”

“Lead by example! We try to host a monthly activity for the team where one day we buy lunch for everyone across the 24-hour shift or we have a craft in our lecture hall and employees take a few minutes to decompress off the floor doing something fun. We support everyone to notice when they need a day and to take it and refresh yourself.”
QUESTION 3:
How might we increase compensation for technicians while mitigating financial risk for practices?
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“By compensating based on a tier program, once tasks have been accomplished in one tier they move into the next tier and with that comes an automatic ‘raise’ in $/hour. This promotes self-motivation and helps with recognizing gaps in the current employee training manual.”

“Involve them in telemedicine in the practice!”
How might we increase compensation for technicians while mitigating financial risk for practices?

“Create a continuous learning culture that rewards individual growth and engagement. Each employee designs a goal/quarter that aligns with their purpose and hospital priorities. When the SMART goal is achieved, within the 3-month time frame, they receive a merit-based bonus.”

“Ask them for ideas of how to streamline and increase revenue. Every client can be offered a nail trim during the appointment. That’s a tech-driven fee that can go to techs!”
“Support your technicians to use their skills to do tasks that do not need to be done by DVMs. Investing in your team reduces turnover and saves your practice money. Hiring and training is super expensive, spend your money on the team you know and trust.”

“How might we increase compensation for technicians while mitigating financial risk for practices?

“Offer bonus structure—what incentive do techs have to work harder if they are paid the same regardless?”
How might we increase compensation for technicians while mitigating financial risk for practices?

“It’s all about revenue. Revenue solves everything.”

“Delegate all non-DVM duties to qualified paraprofessionals. Have a lead nurse and an office manager. Delegate all financial conversations to the ‘client-care coordinator.’”

“USE THEM for all appropriate services. DVMs are still performing too many tech tasks in 90% of the practices I visit. Elevate their status to clients so they will be OK seeing a tech instead of a vet when appropriate. Charge for tech time and tech appointments.”
“Utilize technicians for technician lead visits. Avoid missed charges and discounts for services and charge for services such as ear cleaning and education from techs.”

“Find ways to help the clients afford the care we know we can provide. For us, that was MORE insured pets. Increased care = increased revenue = I can pay them what they’re worth!”
ABOUT VETERINARY VISIONARIES

Veterinary Visionaries is a collaboration of veterinary associations bringing their collective memberships together to share ideas, co-create, and unify our industry’s approach to solving shared challenges.

WHY

We believe the members of veterinary associations share a variety of interests and challenges and, as such, are better served by a broad collaboration among our organizations rather than individual or piecemeal approaches.

HOW

Veterinary Visionaries will put our collective members at the center of identifying and tackling shared challenges via unique, valuable, and inclusive experiences.

Find out more and see what we are up to by visiting aaha.org/visionaries. You can also reach us at visionaries@aaha.org.
FOUNDERS
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