

VCI Seminars at Sea – August 21, 2014

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2 MENTORING YOUR MANAGERS AND MENTORING YOUR TEAM

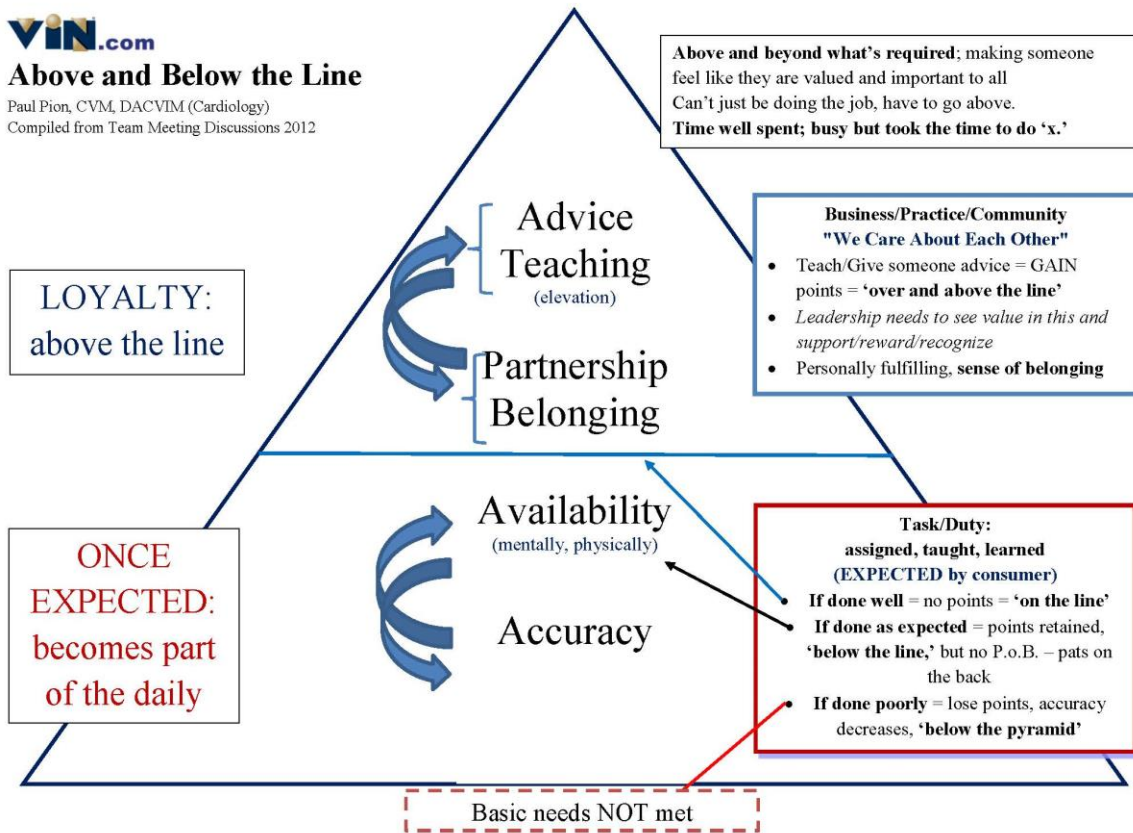
We've been talking about how to maintain the delicate inner structure of the pyramid. How to utilize the levels of the pyramid to work to the advantage of the practice allowing each level to reach new heights and hopefully spur on each individuals' personal desire to excel to the next level or somehow create that personal pinnacle of self-actualization. Reaching the lofty pinnacle should not mean you disengage and let your managers handle all of the team matters. As the pinnacle of the practice pyramid, **communication needs to be paramount** to stay connected with your team. Managers can do a great job in veterinary medicine of staying connected with their teams because they usually can identify with having been there once; they have risen through the ranks, and understand the need for feedback and connection. Unfortunately, what usually happens is these managers then get left to themselves to run their teams and their support network all but disappears. The managers are too busy managing their respective teams to work on cooperative managerial items or helpful discussions that should not be discussed with levels lower than their own. And worse yet, the upper levels completely disengage or choose only to engage when there is a problem creating a two-fold problem: lack of communication AND an air of negativity.

In many practices and businesses the pinnacle has deferred the management essentials to the mid-levels of our pyramid to handle the day-to-day of the staff, keep them happy, keep them trained, and take care of the problems. Some business models are even projecting to get rid of managers (Hamel, 2011). Given this is mostly because these managers have adopted the similar disengagement that the upper levels in our pyramid have among other things. Could this bad reputation be due to the support the mid-levels have for taking all this weight off of the pinnacle? Here is where the strength of the pyramid can cave from within. If the pinnacle does not take the time to listen to the mid-level management and truly assess, support, and mentor the mid-level needs, there is a loss of structure. The mid-level feels no support from superiors yet must answer questions from those they manage. The mid-levels have no authority to grant requests by the base levels for basic needs that may be required to keep the pyramid stable. To the base levels this appears the mid-level management does not care, does not hear, or is indifferent to the basic needs causing unrest or dissatisfaction or even mutiny. No amount of 'excuses' such as hiring freeze, economic downturn, or other buzzwords will suffice. Such words mean very little to those with basic needs, their needs must be met. Are you familiar with the phrase 'between a rock and a hard place?' This is where the mid-levels are left without support and communication with each other or with upper levels of our pyramid.

Let's take a look at a pyramid effect that takes into account the 'above the line' and 'below the line' theory and applies it to the Robbins' Human Needs interpretation. The Veterinary Information Network™ model described by Paul Pion, CEO (2012) can be applied to the team hierarchy, the client/clinic relationship, and even the business hierarchy.

Above and Below the Line

Paul Pion, CVM, DACVIM (Cardiology)
Compiled from Team Meeting Discussions 2012



On each level there is an opportunity for the individual or team to be above or below the line just as the practice can be above or below the line.

- Think of some examples that would constitute going above the line at the
 - personal,
 - team, and
 - practice level.
- Next, think of how each of the situations above
 - benefits the pyramid structure,
 - how it might cause the structure to fail, and
 - how mentoring might provide stabilization to the structure.

The original above/below the line discussion that Paul presented to our teams was from Dennis Snow, a former Disney™ executive and now international lecturer on 'Creating Magical Customer Experiences.' Part of Mr. Snow's presentation was how to make the customer's experience positively memorable. When you make a good memory, you make an impact for life, be it a referral, a returning customer, or turning a 'B' customer into an 'A' customer. From the veterinary team member that 'A' client is the dream client: takes great care of his/her animals/pets, follows all veterinary recommendations, asks valid questions AND listens, refers good new clientele, and pays the bills! A win-win for everyone.

From within the practice, magical experiences are those that support the team. As each respective level of the hierarchy chooses to overlook and disregard someone they should be mentoring, the likelihood that person feels 'unimportant and therefore, invisible' increases. Snow talks about these employees verbalizing this as feeling unappreciated, not being valued, and 'I feel invisible (Snow, 2014).' Before you come down on your managers to ensure they are minimizing staff invisibility, consider this query from Snow as he talks about meetings between bosses and managers: How many times have you (the boss) take a phone call in the middle of your discussion? What is the other person supposed to do, stand there? Sit down? Signal that s/he should come back? The boss has just told the manager, "For the next few minutes, you are invisible." Recognizing a job well done, a thank you, or making that employee feel less invisible is paramount to communication and job satisfaction. "Employees are quietly looking for some signal of recognition and receiving none, feel invisible (Snow, 2014)." Going above the line doesn't have to instantly cause a \$100,000 income increase (although it doesn't hurt)! Sometimes, going above the line is as simple as saying a sincere thank you – with eye contact – for something someone did today that calls out a specific thing YOU noticed that day or that week. Maybe it's as simple as a quick check, sincerely, on someone's well-being. Invisibility can be a silent destructor from within. And there is a fine line between making someone feel invisible to the next level of cruelty (although rare) which includes yelling, screaming, slamming things, or firing on a whim or based on one-sided railroading by staff members who take advantage of a pinnacle leader unconnected with his/her staff.

The pinnacle who remembers that to retain the top spot, s/he must have a solid support and inspection of said support should be done occasionally to ensure all is well. This is not micromanagement. This is checking in to see how things are going, perhaps quarterly, to truly ask each person for input, outside of a formal evaluation. This is the chance to be the 'Mentor = wise advisor (Greek-*mentos*).' A true leader is not a dictator. A true leader supports and provides the tools and mentorship for his/her team members to enable them to do their job well (lest the leader end up doing the job instead). A true leader leads by allowing those in his/her team to be the example of excellence in what that person is best at. Sometimes this takes a few minutes of checking in to allow the person to take a step back to breathe and focus on him/herself for a moment to let that possibility out. If it is accompanied by a positive comment, all the better! "Leadership is based on inspiration, not domination; on cooperation, not intimidation (*William Arthur Wood*)."

Leadership is about caring for people and being a useful resource for them. It's about being present in mind and body, being at your best – able to focus on each person – this is NOT the time to multi-task. People need leaders, mentors, and reassurance that what they are doing is on track with the business. This doesn't mean they want to be told what to do or be dictated to, but rather affirmation their efforts are and will be advantageous to themselves, the practice, and the overall desired goals. Mentoring is part of leadership just as the skills of managing and motivating are. The mentor acts as the aid to help challenge for goal setting, new outlooks or ideas, exploration, or even career or life changes. In order to maintain the pinnacle as the executive or leadership role, this person works to create a place in which people can do good work and find rewarding meaning in that work-to them and to the company.

EXERCISE: Take a few moments to consider how many texts you take, instant messages you respond to, or other multitasking items you do when someone else is trying to talk to you about something, perhaps to receive some mentoring.

Snow (2014) recommends to make a 30-day commitment to actively focus on each person, regardless of his/her level, and make that experience magical. The commitment boils down to one word: Communication. This is the next step to creating stakeholders in your practice not just paycheck receivers.

REFERENCES

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