

Taking the Lead

Gaining commitment and co-ownership with your customer base.

“Leadership is the ability to gain wholehearted followers for a common course of action.”

Although much has been written about leadership, when you boil it down to the basics, a leader is the person with followers. You may consider yourself inspiring, but if you look around and nobody is coming with you, you are not a leader. Change the word follower to customer and leadership becomes a sales ability.

In previous articles I have stressed the importance of good communication. While that is an essential component, it is not leadership. So how do you inspire others beyond a logical agreement and into a wholehearted commitment to co-own the idea or course of action?

To better understand the process of inspiring others, let's look at a time when you reached a confident commitment to an idea. You may remember the following characters from my article "Inside Their Head" (*Vet-Advantage* Nov./Dec. 2010).

You probably started with openness to the idea (Neutral Nellie). Then you gathered data and facts and determined how the idea would work and what it might do (Studious Stephanie). At some point, the idea became truly interesting, so you delved deeper for more specific information. You considered the advantages and why this idea was functionally better (Interested Ida). Next, you actually imagined how the idea would work if implemented and visualized the outcomes or results (Enthused Ethel). Then, finally, you decided to go for it and take your idea public (Confident Connie).



By Patrick T. Malone

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So let's apply that process to a discussion of Merial's new flea and tick enhancement – Satisfaction Plus.

Rep: I believe Merial has come up with a way to maintain and enhance your flea and tick control business. I'd like to explain Satisfaction Plus so you can determine if it will help your practice. (Decision Goal)

DVM: OK, but I only have a few minutes. (Neutral)

Rep: Then let me be brief. (Acknowledge and raise to study) In essence, Satisfaction Plus provides your customers with a guarantee against fleas and ticks that is valued between \$300 and \$400. The requirements are simple and straightforward. Customers must purchase and correctly apply a three-month supply of Frontline for every dog and/or cat they own. If there is a break and an infestation, Merial will pay for Terminix to inspect the property to identify the source of the fleas and if necessary treat the customer's property. That could cost up to \$400. By the way, Satisfaction Plus is a Veterinary exclusive. It isn't available through the grocery stores, PetMed, WalMart or any other outlet other than veterinary practices.

DVM: That sounds good, but it will require time to educate my customers. (Aligns with study but has a concern, i.e. interested)

Rep: It will require more time (Acknowledge and address the concern) and Merial has considered that. First, they are running an extensive consumer advertising campaign to provide your customers with as much upfront information as possible. In fact, I think the campaign will cause some of your customers to ask you about Satisfaction Plus before

you raise the issue. Secondly, they are providing collateral material to make your conversation with your customer easier. Let me show you (review the collateral material). Do you have any other questions or concerns?

DVM: No, I think this information is great.

Rep: I thought you would appreciate the help. (Acknowledge and raise to Play.) The best part of this whole deal is the volume discount and delayed billing on Frontline. (Explain the details on delayed billing and volume discount.) Exciting idea, isn't it?

DVM: Well they seem to have thought of everything.

Rep: (Acknowledge and close) Yes, I believe they have, and I tried to do the same. Based on your history, here is my suggested initial order to get your clinic started to protecting your existing Frontline business as well as capturing additional business in this important category. (Now, it's the DVM's turn to talk. Wait and respond appropriately.)

All in

There will probably be more back and forth in your actual call, but at least you can recognize the skill of inspiring your clinics to a level of willing followership and that is the essence of sales leadership.

A word of caution – you cannot lead anyone any higher than your own point of view. So if you only think Satisfaction Plus is a good idea, you may get DVMs who think it is a good idea also, but nothing will happen – no results or output. In poker terms, a leader must be “all in”, head and heart, fully committed before she or he can inspire others to that same level of commitment. If you're not “all in”, contact your manager or your Merial rep for the additional information necessary for you to reach full confidence.

It's not easy. It takes a lot of practice to enhance these skills and then a great deal of patience with persistence to engage others. However, there is a huge difference in results between intellectual agreement and wholehearted commitment. And that difference makes it all worthwhile. ■