

PEER REVIEWED



Finding the Job of Your Dreams

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On the first day of fall football camp, athletes ranging from seasoned upperclassmen to wide-eyed freshmen were silent as they pondered the coach's question: *How do you want to be remembered?* Our answer was important, the coach said, because the decision we made that day and every day forward would determine how we would be remembered.

Whether you are an experienced veterinary professional or a student about to begin your veterinary career, the decisions made today define tomorrow.

How do you want to be remembered?

If you want the perfect job—not just any job—first answer this question. What kind of positive mark do you want to leave on the profession—as an excellent educator, practitioner, or practice manager? Is your goal to touch the lives of as many clients and patients as you can? Or to provide the highest level of care with the “gold standard” of general medicine or a specialty? When you have determined what you want to be remembered for, you know where to start investigating opportunities that align with your answer.

BENCHMARKS

Using Contacts

26% of WellMP associates found their most recent position through a referral from a colleague, classmate, or friend

23% found their most recent position by contacting the practice and asking if there was an opening

SOURCE: *Benchmarks 2017: A Study of Well-Managed Practices*. Columbus, OH: WMPB; 2017:133.

Finding Your “Why”

“Why do you get out of bed each morning . . . and why should anyone care?” asked Simon Sinek during his “How Great Leaders Inspire Action”¹ TED Talk about the importance of finding your “Why?” on both personal and professional levels.

On a personal level, your *Why* may be your role as a significant other, parent, friend, or philanthropist. On a professional level, which need not define you as a person, your *Why* is the secret to finding the right position and building a legacy.

An individual’s *Why* is often found hiding at the juncture of values and interests, so make one list of your personal and professional values and then a second list of your professional interests and skills. Use both lists to answer the question, *Why, professionally speaking, do I get out of bed each morning?*

This exercise is about more than self-reflection and identifying your motivation and drive. Even a job market that favors job seekers has limited opportunities, and “above average” careers are in even shorter supply no matter the field. Do not be fooled into thinking that because the job market is fairly strong there is no competition for the most sought-after positions.



BENCHMARKS

Top 5 Attractions

WellMP participants say the top 5 items that most attract potential candidates for an associate position are:

- Quality of medicine
- Practice owner and workplace culture
- Location and community
- Practice’s reputation in the community
- Compensation and benefits package

SOURCE: *Benchmarks 2017: A Study of Well-Managed Practices*. Columbus, OH: WMPB; 2017:131.

Look Where No One Else Does

Once you determine what you stand for and what you want to achieve, develop a strategy to reach employers. Preparing for a job search is like building a campaign—in this case, you are campaigning to potential employers who want what you can offer. Job search resources vary widely, from online resources to trade publications to third-party recruiters. (See **Job Search Resources**.) However, while job sites are valuable for helping you determine employers actively seeking to hire, many filled positions are never posted online.²

When teaching a class recently at the University of Tennessee’s College of Veterinary Medicine on this very topic, a student asked me if resumes are still useful or if most jobs are discovered through networking. I responded from my perspective as a current practice owner and a former veterinary recruiting firm owner that resumes absolutely still have a place in today’s job market. But the student had made an astute observation that whereas many of the most desirable positions may be posted online, they are more often filled through networking.²

Remember, if you look for jobs where everyone else does, you will find only what everyone else finds.

Who Do You Know?

Never overlook the value of networking, which you can do through many channels (eg, social media sites, association listservs, veterinary conferences, professional associations). The topic of effective networking is another article, but I believe Dale Carnegie summarizes it best in his book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*,³ with these 6 pivotal tips:

- Become genuinely interested in other people.
- Smile.
- Remember names.
- Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.
- Find common ground.

- Make the other person feel important—and do it sincerely. There is a difference between flattery and genuine appreciation.

Do not think of networking as striving to meet and know as many people as possible. It is not just who you know, but who knows you.

Your Time to Shine

Now it is time to investigate specific job opportunities. Because the veterinary industry is fraught with turnover,⁴ it is your prerogative as a job seeker to learn as much about a potential employer as the employer learns about you.

The job interview is your time to shine. Reflect back on how you want to be remembered and your *Why*. Use your answers to how you want to be remembered and your *Why* as your compass to navigate specific job opportunities. In addition to a strong résumé and cover letter, prepare a list of questions for your prospective employer, such as:

- *What level of medicine does he or she practice?*
- *What is the practice business model?*
- *What is his or her medical philosophy (eg, if a dog presents with vomiting and diarrhea, is he or she typically sent home with symptomatic treatment and a bland diet to “wait and see” versus running complete blood work, taking radiographs, and/or performing an ultrasound)?*
- *Are training, mentoring, and CE opportunities provided?*
- *What compensation and benefits will be offered?*

None of the answers to these questions will be important if the practice cannot financially support the new position. Veterinarians interested in a practice must conduct due diligence on basic practice finances, and those interested in opportunities outside of clinical practice should still understand their value as a veterinarian and how the value is assessed. (See **Assessing Potential**, page 24.)

Job Search Resources

ONLINE

- Career Builder: careerbuilder.com/jobs-veterinary
- Federal government: usajobs.gov
- Glassdoor: glassdoor.com/Job/veterinarian-jobs-SRCH_KO0,12.htm
- Indeed: indeed.com/q-Veterinarian-jobs.html
- LinkedIn: linkedin.com/jobs/veterinarian-jobs
- Monster: monster.com/jobs/q-veterinarian-jobs.aspx
- Veterinary association websites: avma.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/Education/Specialties/Pages/default.aspx
- Veterinary Career Network: vcnnetwork.org
- VetQuest: vetquest.com
- Where Techs Connect: wheretechsconnect.com

TRADE PUBLICATIONS

- *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*
- *Veterinary Practice News*

THIRD-PARTY RECRUITERS

- The Vet Recruiter: thevetrecruiter.com
- My Veterinary Career: myveterinarycareer.com
- Veterinary Career Services: veterinarycareerservices.com
- VPN Staffing: vpnstaffing.com/veterinary-staff
- Vet Med Recruiter: vetmedrecruiters.com/wp/

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This list is a small sampling of job search resources and does not imply any recommendations.

TAKE ACTION

- 1 Always begin a job search by first determining how you want to contribute to, and be remembered by, the veterinary profession.
- 2 Treat the job search process as your most important sales job and prepare thoroughly to sell your potential to possible employers.
- 3 Know that a strong resume and cover letter are still important but that many jobs are found through networking.

Assessing Potential

As a potential team member, asking the right questions is critical in helping you understand not only your potential at the practice but also whether the practice's touted medical philosophy matches reality. At a minimum, consider asking about the following:

VETERINARIANS

- Medical
 - Medical protocols (eg, pain management, preventive care standards, anesthesia)
 - Potential ethical hot topics (eg, ear cropping, declawing)
 - Minimum medical standards (eg, does the practice have agreed-upon standards for how any veterinarian should approach common cases?)
 - Appointment times and types
 - The veterinarian's role versus the support team's role
- Financial
 - Annual gross revenue production per full-time equivalent (FTE) veterinarian in the practice
 - Average client transaction
 - Average charge per veterinarian transaction
 - Average number of active clients per FTE veterinarian
 - Practice model and price list

VETERINARY NURSES & OTHER TEAM MEMBERS

- Medical protocols
- Expectations for veterinary nurses versus veterinary assistants
- The support team's role, according to each team member's position (eg, making appointments, doing procedures, handling down times)
- Veterinarian-to-team-member ratio
- Team meetings, training methods, and CE opportunities

Closing the Sale

Sales has traditionally had a bad connotation in veterinary medicine. However, as a job seeker, your goal is to package and sell your experiences, interests, skills, and capabilities to a buyer (ie, the potential employer), so prepare for and approach the job search process as the most important sale you will make in your career. Whether you prefer to call it leadership, negotiation, or client education, veterinary professionals are, especially in the job search process, striving to complete one of the most important sales deals of their career—securing a job.

Conclusion

How do you want to be remembered? Coach's question has resurfaced many times throughout my veterinary career, as it should throughout yours, because how you will be remembered begins with the decisions you make today. ■

References

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2. Adler L. New survey reveals 85% of all jobs are filled via networking. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/new-survey-reveals-85-all-jobs-filled-via-networking-lou-adler>. Published February 29, 2016. Accessed December 10, 2017.
3. Carnegie D. *How to Win Friends & Influence People*. New York, NY: Pocket Books; 1936.
4. Zimlich R. Tackling turnover. *dvm360*. <http://veterinarynews.dvm360.com/tackling-turnover>. Published August 1, 2008. Accessed December 10, 2017.



STITH KEISER is CEO of Blue Heron Consulting, which he started in 2015. Stith and his team work to improve the lives of all practice owners and their team members, enhance client experience, build sustainable practice profitability, and elevate the quality of care for pets. In addition to consulting, his passion for veterinary management extends into his role as a partner in several veterinary practices. Stith also teaches veterinary students and lectures at veterinary conferences about how to acquire the business acumen and financial prowess required to fulfill their dreams in practice.

FUN FACT: In his free time, Stith enjoys spending time with his wife, a 4th-year veterinary student at Washington State University, their 2 dogs, and their horses. Every fall Stith swaps his seat on an airplane for a seat in the saddle and leads a "Wilderness CE" series for friends and colleagues.