

# Resilience in the Workplace

For Veterinary Hospital  
Managers & Leaders



# Introduction



Why  
resilience matters  
in our workplace



Unique  
stressors in  
animal care



Actions you  
can take to  
manage stress

# So...how resilient are you?

 1 — Feeling overwhelmed

 2 — Struggling but managing

 3 — Holding steady

 4 — Handling challenges well

 5 — Thriving and adaptable



# What Is Workplace Resilience?

 Ability to adapt to  
challenges

 Maintaining wellbeing  
under pressure

 Critical in emotionally  
demanding vet settings

# Key Challenges in Veterinary Leadership



Highly emotional



Client expectations and dealing  
with difficult people



Compassion fatigue risks



Staffing issues, call outs,  
performance concerns

# Responses to stress and challenges



Fight



Flight



Freeze

# Reactions to stress and challenges

- Fight: reacting with urgency, frustration, or high energy
- Flight: avoiding tasks, withdrawing, feeling overwhelmed
- Freeze: shutting down, difficulty making decisions
- Over-functioning: taking on too much to regain control
- Under-functioning: reduced productivity or focus
- Emotional responses: irritability, sadness, anxiety
- Physical responses: fatigue, tension, headaches
- Communication shifts: short responses or withdrawal

# Core Skills for Building Resilience



Emotional  
regulation



Problem  
solving



Optimism  
& adaptability

# 3 resilient responses

## 1. Reframe

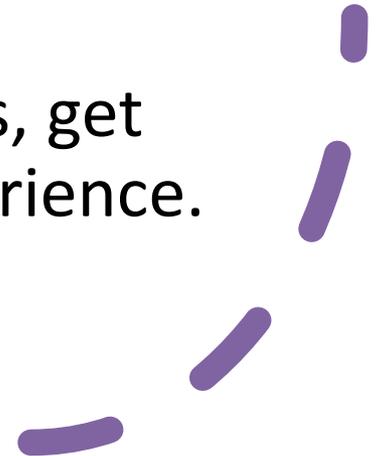
- Don't catastrophize, define the setback, gain perspective.

## 2. Gratitude

- Focus on the positive, think of things you are grateful for.

## 3. Reach out

- Connect with others, get support, share experience.







## **Don't Take Others' Behavior Personally**

- Clients' emotions often come from fear, grief, or stress – not from you.
- Team members may react from fatigue, overwhelm, or compassion fatigue, not intention.

## **Don't Absorb Others' Emotions**

- Offering empathy without taking on someone's emotional load.
- Visualiza a "clear emotional boundary" between your emotions.

# More Skills for Building Resilience



## Boundary Setting

Preserving emotional and mental bandwidth



## Effective Delegation

Reducing overload and empowering team members



## Mindfulness in Fast-Paced Settings

Staying centered during chaotic clinic moments



## Recovering Quickly from Setbacks



## Self-Care Breathing Exercises

- Box breathing
- Deep diaphragmagnetic breathing
- 2-minute reset breath



## Positive Thinking

- Replacing “I can’t handle this” with “I can handle this step.”
- Identifying what is going well during stressful moments



## Gratitude Practices

# Other Responses to Stress & Challenges

Pause & breathe intentionally

Take a brief walk or movement break

Use quick grounding techniques (5-4-3-2-1)

Humor or light distraction

Ask for help or delegate

Micro-breaks between appointments

Positive self-talk reset

Revisit priorities or adjust workload

# Breakout Activity: Case Scenario Challenge

 Pick one scenario from the five listed.

 Discuss your scenario as a group, focusing on:

- Key stressors
- Emotional and operational challenges
- What makes it difficult in a real clinic setting

 Apply resilience skills

- Emotional regulation
- Problem-solving
- Optimism & adaptability
- Boundary setting



Create 2-3 concrete actions to take in the moment

 Pick a spokesperson for your group • A quick huddle to reset roles

- 30-second grounding breath before re-engaging
- Delegating tasks during peak overload

# Breakout Group Discussion



## Scenario 1: The Chaotic Surgery Morning

A routine surgical day flips into chaos: two emergencies arrive, a tech calls out, and a client demands constant updates.

### Discuss:

-  Which resilience skills help the team stay grounded and effective?
-  What actions can the team take to manage stress in this scenario?
-  What barriers might make this challenging in your clinic?

Scenario 1: The Chaotic Surgery Morning

# Breakout Group Discussion



## Scenario 2: Emotional Euthanasia Appointment

A grieving family is upset, the team is stretched thin, and another client is growing impatient.

### Discuss:

-  How can your team support compassion, communication, and emotional resilience?
-  What actions support well-being for your team and clients in the moment?
-  What makes this an especially tough scenario?

Scenario 2: The Emotional Euthanasia Appointment

# Breakout Group Discussion



## Scenario 3: The Difficult Client

A client becomes upset and blames the hospital for their pet's worsening condition.

### Discuss:

-  Which skills support emotional regulation, de-escalation, and boundaries?
-  What approaches could help the client feel heard and validated?
-  What are some common challenges in difficult client interactions?

## Scenario 3: The Difficult Client

# Breakout Group Discussion



## Scenario 4: Overload at the Front Desk

Phones are ringing nonstop, multiple clients are waiting, and a new CSR is overwhelmed.

### Discuss:

-  How can the team use delegation, teamwork, and grounding strategies?
-  How might you mentor or support a new team member in this scenario?
-  What are some common challenges to recover from overload?

Scenario 4: Overload at the Front Desk

# Breakout Group Discussion



## Scenario 5: The Medical Mistake

A small medical error occurs, prompting guilt and tension among staff.

### Discuss:

-  How do you model resilience, accountability, and healthy recovery?
-  How could the team communicate effectively with each other and with clients after a mistake?
-  Which challenges and emotions might your team experience?

## Scenario 5: The Medical Mistake

# Supporting your teams

## Resilience is learned

- study and put techniques into practice
- teach your teams techniques and skills

## Lead by example

- As a leader, you are always on stage.

Normalize emotions

Debrief difficult cases

Support work–life  
balance

# Thank You!

Thank you for your time, energy, and dedication to veterinary medicine.

