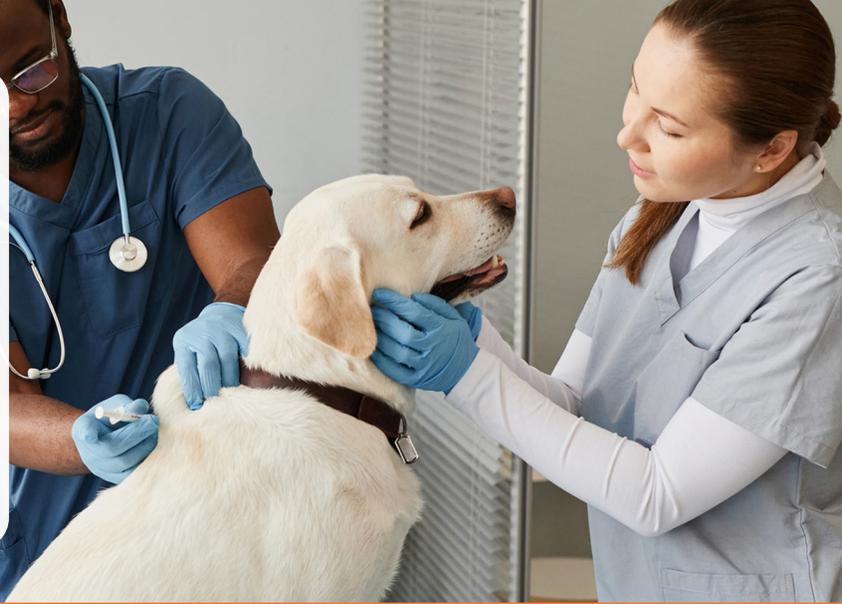




# Train Yourself to Trust Your Team

Written by **Kristie Buys, CVPM**



## I Want to Empower my Staff to Make Independent Decisions, But How Do I Get There?

What if I told you that you could empower your team to approach their work in an autonomous, proactive manner, while also keeping sight of the goals and values of your clinic? When staff members have the confidence and ability to act on their own, they'll be more engaged and productive. And if you've trained them in a way that they make decisions that benefit the business, everyone wins. Using clearly communicated boundaries, thoughtful coaching, and well-defined goals, you can create a culture of autonomy that leads to better outcomes for everyone. **Let's explore some of the tools you can use to make this happen.**

### It All Starts With Your Core Values

I cannot emphasize the importance of your clinic's core values in this process. They aren't just words that get thrown around in staff meetings and added to the bottom of memos; they are the foundation of good decision-making within your practice. If everyone aligns their actions and choices with these values, they will consistently achieve positive outcomes, even if the path to get there might look different than how you would have done things.



### TRY THIS TIP:

Take the time to review your core values regularly to ensure they still resonate and support your vision and goals.

Core values should be emphasized at every period of an employee's time with your company, from the initial interview, to onboarding, and throughout the tenure of their time on your team.

It is vital that you develop a culture that embodies your core values in such a way that your staff not only knows them, but truly believes in them. Without staff buy-in, your core values will not serve to better your vision and goals.

### Boundaries Are a Buoy, Not a Barrier

The ability for individuals to operate independently can be freeing for both leadership and staff alike, but without boundaries, it's easy for chaos to ensue. Let your team make decisions, but make sure they know where the limits are. For example, if you allow staff to offer courtesy discounts in order

to mitigate a difficult client situation, be specific about how much, how often, and under which circumstances. Setting clear boundaries and expectations keeps things structured while still allowing room for independent thinking.

## Critical Thinking Isn't Born, It's Raised

We're all familiar with the phrase, Common sense isn't so common. But what often isn't said is that, like any other skill, critical thinking in decision making can be taught. Utilizing role-playing exercises, case studies, and guidance from your leadership team can help employees develop and fine-tune their process. The more opportunities they have to learn and practice, the more they'll be able to fine-tune their skills and gain confidence.

## Never Underestimate the Power of Why



### TRY THESE TIPS:

- During staff meetings, have staff members walk their coworkers through the thought process behind how they arrived at a particular decision.
- Have your leadership team present on difficult decisions they've made and the factors that went into those decisions.
- Encourage your team to make connections to which core values guided their choices, and to be open about which choices they would make differently with the benefit of hindsight.

By expounding on how the why behind decisions is important, your team will learn

to approach problem solving in a holistic way. If your team understands how even small choices affect the big picture, they will be more likely to make decisions that align with your company's long-term goals.

## Accountability is the Flip Side of Autonomy

When your staff makes a decision, have them own it from start to finish. If their decision leads to a positive outcome, give them the credit! If it doesn't? They should be involved in making it right, especially when it involves apologizing to a client. Don't underestimate the value of accountability in this process; it is a crucial component in improving critical thinking skills.

## Celebrate the Wins

Who doesn't love being recognized for their good work? When a member of your team is able to put out a fire or brighten a client's day, celebrate it! Whether it's a shout-out in a meeting or a gold star on the break room wall, recognizing their accomplishments will reinforce smart, proactive decision making skills.

## Learn From the Losses

Mistakes will happen. But what if instead of approaching it from a punitive angle, you instead turn it into a coaching opportunity?



### TRY THIS TIP:

Ask them open-ended questions that will encourage them to reflect on their choices and work towards making better decisions next time. *How did you come to the conclusion you did? What could you have done differently in order to achieve a better outcome?*

Be open and receptive to their response. Your frontline staff will often approach a situation differently because they have a different perspective.

While it can be tempting to focus on where they might have misstepped, it is better to consider their point of view when explaining how to achieve better outcomes in the future. Remember, the goal is growth, not blame.

## Sometimes it is the Destination, Not the Journey

At the end of the day, it is important to remember that what really matters is the end result. While your staff might deviate from the route you would have taken, as long as it's consistent with the values and goals of your clinic, they are on the right path.



### TRY THIS TIP:

Encourage your staff to focus on results and empower them to explore different paths towards the end goal.

## When You're All Playing for the Same Team, Everyone Wins

When you give your team the tools, freedom, and support to make decisions that align

with your practice's goals and values, you're not just setting them up for success—you're setting up your entire organization for success.

Using a strong foundation of core values, conscientious coaching, and collaborative problem solving, you'll build a team of confident decision-makers who deliver great outcomes.



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### About the Author, **Kristie Buys, CVPM**

Kristie is the hospital administrator and partial owner of Balance Veterinary Center, an integrative veterinary clinic. With nearly two decades of experience in the veterinary field, she began her career as a technician working in both small animal and exotic medicine before transitioning into management.