



Bellwether Magazine

Volume 1
Number 66 *Spring 2007*

Article 7

4-1-2007

The Business of Veterinary Medicine: VBMA Teaches Students It's Not Dog Eat Dog

Michael Jennings
University of Pennsylvania

Deirdre Weissman
University of Pennsylvania

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. <http://repository.upenn.edu/bellwether/vol1/iss66/7>
For more information, please contact libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu.

The Business of Veterinary Medicine

VBMA Teaches Students It's Not Dog Eat Dog

BY MICHAEL JENNINGS, V'10, AND DEIRDRE WEISSMAN, V'07

The Veterinary Business Management Association (VBMA) is a student-driven organization dedicated to advancing the veterinary profession through increasing business knowledge, creating networking opportunities and empowering students to achieve their personal and professional goals. The VBMA was created in 2002 by Penn Vet students who expanded it into a national organization currently boasting 22 chapters at veterinary schools across the country. The VBMA organizes speaker events designed to open students' eyes to those aspects of veterinary medicine that get little attention in veterinary school yet play a large role in a veterinarian's daily life, such as communication, team building, leadership, personal financial skills, key practice performance indicators, accounting skills, marketing and branding, to name a few.

In 2003, the Penn VBMA developed a Business Certificate Program soon endorsed by the School. Sixty percent of Penn Vet students are currently enrolled in the Penn Vet–VBMA Business Certificate Program, paying additional tuition and sacrificing precious evenings and weekends to be educated by very sought-after speakers, which have included Dr. Jim Wilson (founder of Priority Veterinary Management Consultants), Shawn McVey (CEO of Eye Care for Animals), Gary Glassman (a CPA who counsels veterinarians in financial matters) and Dr. Gary Burge (owner of the National PetCare Centers). In 2005, the Penn VBMA also created the Commerce Bank–VBMA Speaker Series, which hosts successful business visionaries from outside the veterinary industry such as Richard Teerlink, former chairman of Harley-Davidson, and Jim Rudolph, CEO of Rita's Water Ice, to shed light on how they revolutionized their industry and to inspire veterinary students to think about how we can do the same for our profession.

In our monthly lunch talks, the VBMA has worked to bring relevant topics to the Penn Vet community. Highlights of the past year included a presentation by renowned dog trainer Brian Kilcommons to more than 160 students about animal behavior and the effect of the animal–human bond on veterinarians. Through personal anecdotes, examples and advice, he addressed how pet behavior problems will be a major issue we deal with as veterinarians, not only with the potential to damage the relationship among client, pet and veterinarian, but also negatively affect the practice's bottom line. Mr. Kilcommons shared training tips on how to handle “prob-

lem” animals, and how handling behavior concerns early with clients can more than 80 students returned (some with their animals) for a live demonstration showing how to handle animals to nurture the relationship among veterinarian, pet and client.

In addition, earlier this spring, **Dr. Anthony DeCarlo**, V'82, CEO of Red Bank Veterinary Hospital, spoke to a full house on “Medicine is the Easy Part,” during which he shared insights about challenges he faced starting and building his practice into the country's largest privately



Dr. Tony DeCarlo, V'82, shares his insights on running a veterinary clinic with Penn Vet students.

owned veterinary hospital. He stressed quality care of patients and client satisfaction; as those in a service industry, it's crucial for veterinarians to always put the patient and owner first. He invigorated students with his stories and approaches to business, and provided many useful tips on being a smart manager and great leader by hiring, keeping and supporting great employees. Dr. DeCarlo's commitment to helping the next generation of veterinarians was evident, and the VBMA looks forward to welcoming him back.

The Penn VBMA is already busy making plans for next year, continuing its goal of finding unique ways to educate and prepare the next generation of veterinarians so that we can be successful and the profession can keep thriving. ■