



National Veterinary Technician Week

Schedule a talk at a local school or 4-H group

Survey after survey shows that the general public is not aware of what a veterinary technician's role is in veterinary medicine is, or even that we are educated individuals. One of the ways to fix this is to do some self promotion. We need to get out into the public and talk about what it is we do.

ARRANGE TO SPEAK

You may be asking yourself “where or how do I do such a thing?” Every city that has a high school is going to have a career day at some point in time, or call any of the youth clubs, 4-H clubs, humane societies, or adoption/rescue groups and volunteer to talk about the profession of veterinary technology. The people that organize these groups will jump at the chance to have you as a speaker at their meetings or functions.

Unfortunately, statistics show, most of us would rather DIE than speak in public! Well, it can be a daunting experience especially if you don't know where to begin to put a presentation together. Hopefully this brief article will give you the main components of a presentation, show you how to work gestures and vocal variety into your presentation, and finally give you some tips on the use of graphics to enhance your presentation.

Every presentation should have three distinct parts: an opening, a body, and a closing. The opening sets the stage for your talk, the body informs the audience, and the conclusion ties everything together. The following are pointers for each of these areas.

1. The Opening:

The opening should tell the audience who you are and what you are going to share with them. One way to open a presentation is to answer this question; “What makes you an expert on the subject?” Answer that by talking a little bit about yourself. Explain how you became interested in veterinary medicine and why you chose to be a veterinary technician. Sharing a personal story allows your audience to get to know you, and for you to relax into your talk. You should also give a brief overview of the points you will cover in your presentation. An example of this is used in the second paragraph of this article.

2. The Body:

The body of the presentation will expand on the 3 to 4 points you told them you were going to cover in the opening. For example, if speaking to a career day audience, 1) cover the education involved in becoming a veterinary technician, 2) where can they find work in the field of veterinary medicine and 3) finally touch on the salary they can expect. You could also

include information on where veterinary technology programs are located across the country and how the job market looks or substitute this information for one of the other points.

When speaking to a younger group, you could explain what a day in the life of the veterinary medical team is like or explain the types of veterinary practices and the variety of animals seen in each. It is really up to you what's included in your presentation, but remember to keep it to 3 or 4 main points. If you have all of the information mentioned available you can tailor your talks to various audiences. For example, if your talk were to a humane society perhaps you would like to concentrate on the day in the life of the veterinary medical team. Use your morning duties, afternoon appointments, and emergency hours as your 3 main points.

3. The Conclusion:

Conclude your talk by briefly revisiting the 3-4 points covered in the body of your presentation with a one or two sentence description of each point. Then open the floor by inviting questions. It is usually better to say, "Do you have any questions about what we talked about today?" rather than asking for general questions. This will cut down on feeling obligated to advise people on their personal animal's problems. However this tactic doesn't often work with smaller children! So be ready to answer anything that may come out of their mouths!

After the question and answer period thank the audience for allowing you to talk with them and invite them to your business for a tour. This can encourage people to use your services and increase income for the practice. Be ready to hand out business cards and answer questions when the program is completely over. Most people are shy about asking questions in front of a crowd, and will descend upon you after the program.

Gestures and vocal variety:

Gestures and vocal variety are two key ingredients to keeping your audiences attentive. Gestures for the most part should be natural and relaxed. However, if you are talking to a large group of people you need to make those natural gestures large enough to be seen from the back of the room. For example, when using the gesture of holding your hands in front of you like you are cradling a small puppy or kitty, you usually have your hand close to your body and about waist high. For a large audience you need to bring that gesture up to your chest and away from your body so that everyone can see what you are doing.

Vocal variety is where we pitch our voice higher or lower, softer or louder, or vary the rate we speak. This lends drama to your talk and keeps the audience listening. You never want to speak in a monotone and drone on and on and on at the same rate. When that happens, 5 minute talks seem like 30 and your audience will show you that they are bored by fidgeting and rustling around.

Graphics:

Graphics are a great way to enhance your presentation. However, make sure that they are big enough to be seen in the back of the room. A rule of thumb for graphics if there are lines of text then use no more than 4-5 lines per frame. More than that and your graphics will

be too little to read and will be confusing to your audience.

NAVTA * has 2 great slide sets and a video that can be used for a number of presentations. The slide sets can be borrowed and the video purchased to keep and reuse as needed. There is also an informational brochure is available * for purchase, entitled "Veterinary Technology, A Career Dedicated to Quality Animal Care." This brochure can actually be the outline for your talk, giving your audience something to refer to during your presentation, and something to take home for future reference.

Graphics also include props such as an instrument, an anatomical model or even a live animal. They are extremely effective with small groups and young children. If you plan on using a prop, make sure it can withstand being passed around or handled and that it can't inadvertently injure your audience. A note about using a live animal as a prop, expect the unexpected. Have plenty of paper towel and disinfectant to clean up messes and a carrier where you can place the animal in case it gets nervous.

Hopefully, this has taken the mystery out of making a public presentation. By constructing your presentation with a definite opening, body, and conclusion you will better educate your audience and leave a lasting impression about veterinary technology and you as a professional. Plus, by having a set pattern to your core presentation you will be able to adjust to almost any speaking situation.

Good luck!! Take the challenge of speaking to the world about veterinary technology! Wouldn't you rather spend a few moments with knocking knees and extreme stress knowing that you have made a difference, than not being able to feel any of those things for all eternity!

Teresa Sonsthagen, BS, LVT - reprinted NAVTA news