

RESHAPING YOUR PRACTICE

Being able to institute change in your practice is important, but it isn't easy. In this article you will get tips on how to make the change process work more smoothly.

By Kimberly S. Brown

How often have you *wanted* to change how your practice handles a specific task, problem or opportunity? The answer is probably "Every day!"

Kirk Eddleman, MS, MHA, is the managing partner and CEO of Equine Practice Management Group. He also has been CEO for Equine Sports Medicine and Surgery in Wetherford, Texas, since 2005, and was the former hospital administrator at Texas A&M University veterinary medical teaching hospital for 11 years. He has a Masters in Healthcare Administration, and said he was "raised in small business." During the 2013 AAEP Business meeting he discussed how to "reshape" your practice to be more open to positive change.

Why Worry About Change?

Eddleman said there are current trends in equine practice that make it important to look at your practice and make changes that can greatly influence your profitability. Some of the trends he mentioned that were shaping current veterinary practice are:

- Economy
- Regulatory changes
- Shrinking horse population

- Gender changes in the profession
- Generational differences
- Changes/advances in medical technology
- Changes/advances in medications
- Internet/social media
- Mobile computing
- Competition

"It's not the strongest that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to the change."—Darwin

Eddleman said you need to understand why change is important, why most transformation efforts fail, and how to better manage change.

"Leading change may be the ultimate test of a leader," he said. "But no business can survive long-term if it does not continually reinvent itself."

Change leaders will be the people who are stakeholders in your business. And the pieces of the successful change puzzle are:

- 10% process
- 10% subject matter



Courtesy Kirk Eddleman

Presenter Kirk Eddleman, MS, MHA, said that there are current trends in equine practice that make it important to look at your practice and make changes that can greatly influence your profitability.

- 80% people

The last-named he said is the most dif-

ficult. It involves successfully getting the people involved in the business on the side of the transformation efforts. “If you can do this, everything else is easy,” said Eddleman.

He recommended a book entitled *Who Moved My Cheese* by Spenser Johnson, MD. He also recommended you watch a short video on YouTube that was created from the book’s premise: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=p4mb-x8uwra

Why Most Change Efforts Fail

Most change processes go through a series of phases and take a considerable length of time, meaning it can take months to years to complete the change.

“Skipping steps may create the illusion of speed, but that will never produce satisfactory long-term effects,” he said. “Critical mistakes in any of the phases can have devastating impact to the change effort.”

Eddleman said leaders who lack training or experience in change management can doom the process to failure.

The “stages” of change usually seen are:

- Denial
- Resistance
- Exploration
- Commitment

The common errors of the leaders who try to effect change include:

- not establishing a sense of urgency
- not creating a powerful enough coalition
- not creating a compelling vision
- under-communicating the vision
- not removing obstacles
- failing to create short-term wins
- declaring victory too soon
- failure to anchor the changes within the corporate culture

One of the common changes that is seen in many veterinary practices is changing software or going paperless in the practice, said Eddleman.

Sense of Urgency: In creating the sense of urgency in this scenario, he said you should identify the realities (“Face the brutal facts, but never lose faith”) of economy, expenses, competition, etc. Then identify opportunities that the new software could provide.

Create a Coalition: He said forming a power coalition to guide the change will



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Be prepared to handle conflict in the office that might arise from change, and try to be a good change leader in your practice to avoid as much of the conflict as possible.



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help you be successful in the change effort. "Assemble a group with enough power to lead the change effort," he said. That would include employees, vendors, consultants and others.

"Encourage them to work together as a team, and give them time and incentives to work together," he added.

Create a Vision: "Begin with the end in mind," advised Eddleman. "Develop a vision of what the change will look like when it is finished; then develop strategies for achieving the vision."

Communicate the Vision: Use every vehicle possible to communicate the new vision to those involved, advised Eddleman. That might include:

- Meetings
- One-to-one
- Visuals
- Written plans

You want to model and teach new behaviors that go along with the successful change.

Empower Others to Act: In order to get rid of obstacle to changes, you need to remove systems or processes that can undermine the vision, Eddleman said. "Encourage risk taking and trying new ideas/processes," he advised.

Plan For and Create Short-Term Wins: Eddleman said you should plan for visible performance improvements, report those improvements and recognize and reward those employees involved in those improvements.

Consolidate Improvements and Produce Still More Changes: Use your increased credibility to change even more systems, structures and policies, said Eddleman. "Hire, promote and develop employees who can implement the vision; then keep the process going with new projects and new change agents."

Institutionalize New Processes and Behaviors: Articulate the connections between the new behaviors and practice success, advised Eddleman. "Institute means to ensure leadership development and succession," he said.

Take-Home Message

It's important to understand that even successful transformations can be messy and full of surprises, said Eddleman. "The key to success is to minimize the errors and follow a plan toward an inspired vision," he concluded.

In summary, he said to remember that change is constant, managing change is critical, change doesn't have to be hard, and change is about people and leadership.

Q & A

Q: If there is a naysayer, who is it typically?

Eddleman: Usually it is a "legacy" employee (someone who has been there awhile) and this change is threatening to them. Sometimes there are multiple people who feel this way.

Q: What happens when you institute a major change and someone quits?

Eddleman: That's fine. Anytime someone leaves it opens an opportunity. Usually the most negative people in practice are the ones who leave.

Comment from James E. Guenther, DVM, MBA, MHA, CVPM, AVA, from the audience: It's pretty universal when you start [the] change process that you will lose one employee. The end result is usually better productivity. They were a "cancer" in the practice.

Comment from Monty McInturff, DVM, in the audience: I had an employee like what you are talking about. When I changed my software, one of my people came in and said the job was affecting their health. That person quit. That employee was trying to manipulate the business, and I didn't want that person to leave, but that person was making everybody miserable. That person leaving was good for the business in the long run.