



Notes from the Consultant's Corner

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It's a Bird, it's a plane... it's super Doc!

Can we talk? I'd better start out right here and now by admitting to you that I'm not a veterinarian. As a grief counselor however, I've worked with veterinarians for the past decade, I co-own a pet hospital, and I've been married to a veterinarian for the past 11 years. So the upshot is that I have a little insight into what makes you good folks tick. What I'm wondering is...why does the world think that you are super-human?

I know...you truly can leap tall buildings in a single bound— while talking to a client on the phone, placing a catheter in a fractious cat and reading a complex radiograph. But besides all that, why do people expect you to be all things to all people? Over the years I've noticed that there is a whole lot of stress heaped on you every day, and the worst part about is that you can never say “No.”

Why this is true I've never figured out. Perhaps it's just one of those absurd rules that spring forth from obscurity and pass from generation to generation like bad food recipes. Maybe it's because the general population views you as one of the most trustworthy professions out there. What I do know is that some of you *really, really* want to say “No” and I'd like to be the one to give you permission.

I suspect that many of you are drawn to your profession because you have these amazingly good hearts and a real rapport with animals and the people who love them. The trouble starts when you try to have a life outside of work. You see, because people just love you and think that you are the cat's meow (pun intended), that means you must always do what they want. You must always stay late when they show up 45 minutes after their appointment, and you must always accommodate their needs even if it flies in the face of what *you* need.

You are expected to work clients in at the last minute, be as flexible as a Gumby doll, and help a pet five minutes before closing with a problem that has been there for three weeks (all of course, for practically no charge). Who made up these cockeyed rules anyway? Well, I'm sure that you'd like to have a little “chat” with whoever that was. In the meantime, try something bold and daring...say “No!”

That's right, you *can* do it. Come on...you know you want to. Let's try saying it all together... “No, No, NO!” Feels good, doesn't it? Did you spontaneously combust? Is the earth still rotating?

Yes, you can and *should* say “No” to some clients in some situations. The desire to be all things to all people can take over your life if you let it. I believe that you need to say “No” in order to survive your difficult profession.

Case in point, my husband had a client the other day who wanted and expected to be seen even though he was an hour late for his appointment. Our seven year-old daughter was in a dance recital that evening and it was very important to her that we both attend. My husband had two choices; accommodate the client and disappoint our daughter (and me); or say “No” to the client and risk upsetting him where he could potentially spread some really bad word-of-mouth in our community.

Great choices huh? Well, long story short...he said “No” but did it in a professional, friendly manner and it all worked out somehow. I'm guessing that it worked because he acknowledged the client's frustration about not being seen that day. After all, I'm sure the client didn't intend to be late and life sometimes gets messed up. Then my husband followed up the emotional support by simply self-disclosing that he had something personal that evening. He probably then offered some kind of compromise like working the client in the next morning or something like that.

My husband once told me that it's hard to not get upset with clients when they expect the moon and the stars. I told him that it is important for the veterinarians to also set their boundaries and let clients know that they can't always “get away with it.” You know the old expression...“give them an inch, and they'll take your hospital.”

I'm guessing it's a little like parenting. If I don't set boundaries with my children, they expect absolutely everything I've got and never know any differently. What usually happens is then I start to feel resentful and think of my job as a Mom to be overwhelming. I do much better when I set my boundaries early on and teach all of us that saying “No” is acceptable and *expected* sometimes. It gives me such a sense of personal power.

I'm sure that there are still many situations when you want to say “No” but should not for whatever reason. But when you're having one of those days and you feel like you want to take a rabies pole to your overly demanding and unreasonable client, try saying “No” instead. It's okay...feel the power, and hang up your cape for just a little while.