

### **Giving Your Clients the Best Version of Yourself**

Often times, when we think of customer service, the notion of how we manage and interact with clients comes to mind. How polite are we to our clients? Do we handle our clients' concerns and complaints with understanding and compassion while still maintaining their dignity? By definition customer service means: "the action of helping or doing work for someone". Interestingly, the definition does not specifically say that the actions should be good or bad, but we can assume that offering "good service" is in the best interest of our clients. Also, the definition of customer service does not mention direct interaction with the client either.

We typically assume that customer service is exclusively about the interaction that we have with our clients, but how about the actual services we provide? Do we support our clients in the most positive and knowledgeable way possible, or do we do them a disservice? Often times, clients believe they know what they want and as professionals, we think that we are doing them a favor by following their instructions. What if the client asks for something that as a groomer you know may not be in the best interest of the pet? Almost every groomer I know has been asked to shave a lab or Pug, however, what if we shave them down and it does not grow back? Do you believe we have provided our client with the best customer service possible?

The best customer service we can offer is to be professional and refrain from any action that may potentially adversely affect the pets we care for. As a veterinarian, we take an oath when we graduate.

#### **Veterinary Creed**

Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge.

I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity, and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics. I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.

I strongly believe that in order to stand above the crowd and become respected professionals in the grooming world, we need to work as an industry to raise our standard. If your motives are based merely on making the next dollar, regardless of if your actions are right or wrong, you become an order taker, not a grooming professional.

As groomers, no one requires that you take an oath or adhere to any moral or ethical standards, so it is left up to the individuals to make those decisions. I passionately believe that most of the groomers I have met have their ethics in the right place. Our top priority should always be to provide the best care for the animal that we are entrusted with. I also believe that often life pulls us off center and we need to refocus on what our priority should be. For example, do you question your next move when clients ask for those questionable grooms? We should ask ourselves, "am I doing this for the pet's benefit and well-

being or just for the money?”. Making money is not a negative notion in itself, but if it is your motivating notion then “the cart maybe in front of the horse” as the old saying goes. Good customer service starts with providing the best care of the pets that is humanly possible.

As with the veterinary creed, it also involves a lifelong obligation for the continued improvement of professional knowledge and competence. Most industries are constantly changing and improving as new techniques, technology, and products become available. The vital question is what are you doing to keep current? Continued Education? Attending Tradeshows? Trying new products and equipment? Enhancing your grooming skills? Using the latest technology?

Here are a few things to consider when asking yourself if you are providing outstanding customer service:

- 1) Do you shave down dogs or cats that have a genetically predetermined hair coats? If you compromise the coat, you may be setting yourself up for a “shave down alopecia”.
- 2) Do you use dish soap, Murphy’s oil soap, vinegar, bleach, ketchup (yes, it was on Facebook), corn starch, and other products not designed for use in pets? Have you considered what your liability is if they have a reaction knowing there are so many products suitable for pets designed to do the same thing?
- 3) Do you pick your products because they are cheap? How would you feel if your hairdresser did that with you?
- 4) Are you correctly conditioning after every bath? If you are stripping the oils with shampoo and not replacing them, many of these dogs will end up at the veterinary for itchy skin. They will probably be diagnosed as “allergies” and put on several medications (often long term).
- 5) Is your goal for the day how many dogs you will groom or the quality of each one you do?
- 6) Can you explain the anatomy and physiology of the hair and skin and why skin issues occur to a client in detail?

Truly the best “service” we can provide is through our knowledge and expertise while still maintaining an ethical pathway in doing so. No one else can force these things on you, they are choices you make as a professional. Anyone can follow orders, but the true professional guides the process in a manner that is most beneficial for the pet. Are clients going to resist? Absolutely! Mainly because they do not know any better! If you can train and educate your clients on the “why” and “how”, most of the unwillingness goes away. Of course, you will still have a few that will fight with you, but at that point you should be asking yourself if that is really a client that you want to deal with long term. If you use the correct products and techniques to avoid skin issues most of these problems will subside. By always setting the pet’s health and well-being as first priority, a myriad of other issues will be eliminated. Ultimately, it is your decision whether you want to be the professional groomer or the order taker. The problems you set yourself up for are under your full control. So, do yourself “a service” and choose to remove as many of these pitfalls as possible! At the end of the day, customer service is taking care of business, doing what is best for the pet, avoiding issues, and of course being respectful to your clients!