

Client Communications Training: Enhancing Client Engagement

Paired or group exercises:

1. Asking clients open-ended questions

Purpose: For team members to learn the value of using open-ended questions to build trust and rapport with clients. This exercise helps employees understand the difference between close-ended and open-ended questions. By practicing asking open-ended questions, team members can gain insight about how they can use these questions to learn more information and connect with pet owners..

Description: Ideally, pair team members together who don't know each other well for this exercise. Start the exercise by having each team member ask their co-worker an open-ended question to get to know the other person better. Examples: "Tell me about your last vacation" or "How do you like to spend your spare time?" Allow no more than two minutes for this exercise so everyone understands asking open-ended questions doesn't take substantially more time than close-ended questions.

Debrief as a team: Share what questions participants asked each other and what they learned about their co-worker. Verify that questions were truly open-ended questions. Sometimes team members ask close-ended questions such as "How many pets do you have?" Their co-worker may tell them about all their pets because they want to engage in dialogue. However, this is a closed-ended question that could be answered with a one-word response. There isn't anything wrong with asking closed-ended questions, but the team needs to appreciate that open-ended questions are more engaging.

Next ask participants to ask each other an open-ended question that they might ask a client. Examples: "What kind of activities does Gidget like?" or "Tell me a little bit about Cooper's lifestyle."

Debrief again as a team to see what interesting questions the team came up with. In addition, brainstorm relevant questions to ask new clients or those clients team members don't know well. This is much harder than asking questions of an established client. Examples: "Why did you name your cat Penelope?" or "How did you decide to choose our practice?"

2. Understanding nonverbal communications

Purpose: Clients' body language often conveys information about their thoughts and feelings. Team members who are mindful of observing clients' non-verbal communication and know how to respond can build stronger connections with pet owners. This exercise helps team members understand the value of being aware of nonverbal communication and effective ways to connect with clients who may be exhibiting emotions such as anger, frustration, fear, concern, sadness, or grief.

Description: Have team members work in pairs or as a small group. Each team member takes a turn stating a client's non-verbal communication that they might observe. Their partner or another member of the group then states what message they think is conveyed by the non-verbal and how they would respond to the client.

Example One team member says they observe non-verbal communication of a client looking at a cell phone. Their co-worker responds that the message conveyed by the client might be that they're bored, disinterested, in a hurry, or waiting on an important message. An excellent response to the client would be to say "Mrs. Smith, I noticed you looking at your cell phone. Do you need some time to take care of your messages or are you in a hurry?" By responding to the non-verbal message, the team member confirms the client's feelings and hopefully politely conveys the need to engage in dialogue about their pet.

