

Improving Veterinary Employee Retention with Flexible Benefits

Article by Heather Romano, Managing Director of Staff Development, iVET360



When we're hiring new employees in the veterinary field, we aren't just competing with other privately owned animal hospitals and larger, corporate practices. We're also competing with other industries altogether. Many of the best and brightest veterinary technicians around are currently in school so they can break into different fields. They often cite feeling underpaid as a primary reason for the switch.

What do employees really want?

Wages in the veterinary industry are fairly standard between hospitals so, to be more competitive, veterinary hospital owners and practice managers need to think about the employee benefits and perks they offer to their staff members. Benefits are what will draw employees to your

hospital and perks are what will keep them once you have them. Veterinary hospitals tend to struggle to provide benefits that are comparable to other fields. For instance, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, the average American professional employee sees a benefits package equaling 30 percent of their salary. But as we've found, in the veterinary field, benefits packages come in at 8 percent. Who can blame employees for wanting more?

On top of that, members of younger generations entering the job market tend to demand more from their employers. While they want to make a difference in the world through their careers, they still consider benefits and pay to be critically important. In fact, according to a Glassdoor

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employee confidence survey from 2015, 70 percent feel employer-paid health insurance is critical and 40 percent would prefer a healthcare plan, or a better plan than what they currently have, instead of a pay raise.

After health insurance, what employees want most depends heavily on the individual employee. Some people want family medical coverage, others want more paid time off and others want discounts on care for their own pets. When we offer "one size fits all" benefits packages in our veterinary practices, some employees end up with higher benefits. For example, if you offer pet care discounts, those who have pets receive more benefits than those who don't.

The benefits menu

There is a simple way to navigate these difficult waters. Giving your team a "menu" of benefits to choose from, along with a budget, allows each employee to get the benefits that matter to them and skip the ones they don't need. A veterinary technician may make \$33,280 annually, and you may cap their total pay, with benefits, to \$46,500. Instead of offering them the same benefits plan as everyone else, you could offer every employee three basic benefits: healthcare coverage, a retirement savings plan and one week of paid time off (PTO). If these benefits cost the hospital \$7,000 per year, this leaves the tech with \$6,220, or \$518 per month, to "shop" for other benefits.

From there, you would offer each employee a menu of benefits that lists the monthly cost of each available additional benefit. For instance, employees could receive pet care discounts for \$150 a month out of their benefits fund, employer contributions to family healthcare for \$500 per month and additional PTO days for \$150 per month per extra day. Other options could be tuition reimbursement at \$100 per month, paid parental leave at \$500 per month or a childcare subsidy at \$200 per month. With this, the tech could choose an additional three days of PTO, or maybe a pet discount and two more PTO days. Base benefits, such as PTO, would rise annually, and if money is tight but you

still want to reward employee growth, you could add more money to monthly shopping limits instead of providing raises.

Building a loyal team

This is significantly different from what we're used to when it comes to providing benefits in the veterinary industry. But imagine how much easier it will be to hire a licensed technician, or a rock star receptionist, or a fabulous doctor, when you can offer them exactly the benefits they want with none of the ones they don't. Giving your team what they want will help keep them loyal and, even better, it will keep your reputation strong as the employer of choice in your community.

iVET360's HR and training managers help our hospitals navigate and implement changes to benefits plans. To learn more about how our HR and training team works with veterinary hospitals, call 503.765.6360 or email info@ivet360.com.

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Heather Romano, managing director of staff development at iVET360, has over 20 years of veterinary hospital experience, including 14 years in veterinary management. She began her career as a kennel attendant in high school and, since then, she has held nearly every position found at veterinary practices. Just before she joined iVET360, she served as a regional multi-unit manager and private hospital management consultant. Her driving passion is helping practices create work environments that foster positive, patient-focused and service-oriented cultures. Heather has also become a sought-after speaker at veterinary groups for her unique perspective on leading and managing the many generations that are currently working at today's veterinary practices. Heather shares her home with Emily, the greatest (and laziest) cattle dog that has ever lived.

