

## Upping Your Tech Game: Being A Rock Star Tech

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### Introduction

This course focuses on where a veterinary technician is in their current role and explores possibilities, both within their current practice and looking outside of traditional practice, to increase job satisfaction, employer value, and retention in our profession.

The goals of this lecture are to review: 1) what career satisfaction looks like; 2) what going beyond an entry level technician can look like; 3) how to leverage your skills in your career.

### Career Goals

What do you want to do with your career? Where did you picture yourself when you were in tech school? Where do you see yourself in 5 years, 10 years? What amazing things do you want to do? Brainstorm and come up with things you might be interested in. Look within and outside of your current role to see what opportunities there may be. Can you include these ideas into your current practice? The world is your oyster!

Creating a career you love and that fills you with energy, happiness, and a sense of accomplishment helps you have a long and sustainable veterinary career. So, what contributes to career satisfaction? Things like:

- **Salary & compensation packages:** Are you making a living wage for life you want to have? Do you get health care benefits, continuing education allowances, pet care discounts, retirement benefits? What is important to you?
- **Work environment:** Do you work somewhere you feel like you contribute and make a difference in the lives of our clients and patients? Do you work in an intimate single veterinarian practice where you are a valuable member of the team? Do you work in a larger hospital where you utilize high level technician skills to help your patients live healthier lives?
- **Skill utilization:** Are you able to use the clinical skills you have learned? Do you use your skills to the highest level possible? Are you learning new skills?
- **Sense of fulfillment, well-being, and interest in work:** Do you feel your career aligns with your moral and ethical values? Do you have personal time to refill your well?

Now you have sense of what is important to help you create a career instead of just working a job. Taking the ideals you want in your life, let's look at how to get there. To figure out a path in a career you can love for a long time, you need to know where you are starting. You need a plan or a road map to get you there.

### Where You Are Now?

But first: where the heck are you? When you ask Google to get you directions to new restaurant you have a reservation at, in order to get a map you also have to include your starting location. Setting goals and mile markers require you to know where you are starting so you can get a general sense of the path you need to take to get to your desired location. To do that in your career you will need to assess where you are currently. Write down your strengths and weaknesses. What clinical skills do you have? What professional skills do you have? What skills do you already have? How much medical knowledge do you have? Can you learn more about the how's and why's of our profession? What subjects are you passionate about? (Zeltzman, 2010)

What habits do you have? What's your routine to start or end your day? How do you react in situations? Do you love being the tech to talk to clients about their pet's nutrition? Start a new habit to be proactive instead of reactive in your clinic.

What are your current coping skills?

- Do you have healthy ways to decompress from an intense day?
- Love to work out?

- Love reading?
- How do you handle the moral and ethical parts of our jobs?

Our profession is wrought with stressful situations and moral/ethical stressors. Being able to recognize when stress gets to you and learning new ways to manage yourself is crucial for a long and healthy career.

What are areas you can improve in?

### **Where Can You Go?**

Now we know where we are, what is our destination? This is where the brainstorming comes in. Options can include (Johnson, 2017):

- Professional Designation
  - Credentialed technician (RVT, CVT, LVT, LVMT, etc), specialty (NAVTA, n.d.)
- Degrees: Bachelor's, Master's Degree, Doctorate- DVM
- Certifications
  - Getting certifications to level up your tech game is a great idea. Different certifications include, but are definitely not limited to:
    - Fear Free Certification, (Fear Free, LLC, 2023)
    - Recover CPR Certification, (RECOVER Initiative, 2019)
    - Certified Veterinary Pain Practitioner, (IVAPM, 2022)
    - Practice Management, (Veterinary Hospital Managers Association, 2021)
    - Human Resources
      - Clinician's Brief has a good article to see a variety of different certifications called "Certifications for Veterinary Team Members". (Prendergast, 2017)
- Client communication specialist: someone who follows up with clients about questions and check in after new diagnosis or big procedures.

Another option is to become an expert in the profession. Starting a blog or writing articles can help you share your knowledge with clients or veterinary professionals. You can start with local organization or your hospitals blog. If you enjoy public speaking, giving lectures to your hospital, local conferences, national conferences, or even teaching at a veterinary technician program.

Being a representative for a drug company, distribution company, or labs can be another niche to get into. You add value with your veterinary experience and knowledge.

Have you thought of being your own boss? Would you be interested in running your own business such as at home vet tech services, a relief technician, pet sitting, sale of goods, or sale of other veterinary related services.

What is an area you are interested in? Explore it! This is the time to dream big.

### **How Do I Achieve Big Things?**

Let's start! We've got our starting point and our ending point, now how do we get there? With **SMART** Goals.

**SMART** stands for:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time

You don't have to start with **Specific**. Start with what you know and build from there. Do it as you get the ideas. It's a continuum. There's no right or wrong way. Don't let the acronym order hold you back. Be sure you give yourself grace and an out if you get new info and need to evolve/change your goals.

Let's start with a generic goal: "I want to be a Rock Star Tech".

Is this **Specific**? This is the mission statement for your goal. It is the “who, what, where, when, and why?” of your goal. What the heck does being a Rock Star Tech even mean? Being a Rock Star Tech can mean different things for each of us, so it’s not really **Specific**.

What if in this case, it means getting your VTS in Internal Medicine (pick your own thing here!)

So, we should change our goal to say “I want to be a Rock Star Tech by getting my VTS in Internal Medicine.”

Great, but we need to get even **SMARTer**.

Next is **Measurable**. How or what are you going to measure if you have reached your goal? How do we measure if we met our goal? Let’s make it **Measurable**. So, instead: “I want to be a Rock Star Tech by getting my VTS in Internal Medicine. To achieve this, I will complete my application and pass my exam.”

Is this goal **Attainable** currently? The goal is meant to inspire motivation, not discourage. Do you already have some of the basics for this goal? If you’re a veterinary assistant, this would not be attainable for you right now. To get a VTS you need to have been a credentialed technician for at least three years. Have you been a credentialed technician in your state for at least three years? You have? Great, it’s attainable for you.

Is your goal **Relevant**? Is it relevant to what you know and what you are good at? Do you already work in internal medicine or is it a passion of yours? Yes? Awesome, next part of creating a **SMARTer** goal.

This is the one most people forget. **Time**. Make sure to set a deadline; a realistic one. To do this we’ll change our goal to “I want to be a Rock Star Tech by getting my VTS in Internal Medicine by 2024. To achieve this, I will complete my application in September 2023 and pass my exam in 2024.” Since it takes ~1.5 years from start of application process to sitting for your exam, this is an attainable, realistic timeline for this goal.

By the way, 18 months is a good career timeline to set. Look at what you can accomplish in the next year and a half.

Using SMART goal setting our “I want to be a Rock Star Tech” became: “I want to be a Rock Star Tech by getting my VTS in Internal Medicine by 2024. To achieve this, I will complete my application in September 2023 and pass my exam in 2024.” This new goal is **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant**, and has a **Time** line.

What is your **SMART** goal? Take a moment to think of your **SMART** goal. Reach out to someone for help if you need help to formulate your **SMARTer** goal.

## **Training**

Continuing education is the best way for veterinary professionals to up our skills. Talking to the representatives from companies your clinic uses is a good way to get CE for everyone in the clinic. Lunch and Learn’s are a great way to learn new information. Maybe the reps can help sponsor wet labs to hone hands on skills or learn new ones.

If you don’t already have a yearly CE allowance, this is a great time to see if your employer will offer aid for attending CE events. If you already have a CE allowance, maybe discuss an additional allowance for hands on courses/wet labs at conferences to attend and then bring that information and skills back to your clinic. Conferences are a great way to get a lot of information in a short period of time. You get the opportunity to learn from subject matter experts. Networking is a great way to meet people who are similar to you. Even if you’re introverted use a conference as a time to get out of your comfort zone and know many of the people there are similar to you. Look for events surrounding the conference you can attend. Introduce your self and keep track of people you might want to follow up with afterwards. And of course, be kind to yourself afterwards. It is very common, especially for introverts, to need time to recoup from days spent at a conference. Be selectively extraverted and get the most of your time then recoup!

Other ways of learning can include journal articles, listening to podcasts, online courses, case studies, and much more.

Whatever type of CE you choose to do, reflect on what you learned and find ways to incorporate it into your practice.

If finances are a problem, there are ways to get free or discounted CE. Consider volunteering for free admission to a local or national conference. There are also a lot of resources for free online CE or webinars. A great resource is your state vet tech association or VSPN. (Veterinary Information Network, Inc., 2023) Another option is going to another department in your clinic and see what you can learn there. If you work in a general practice but want some specialty knowledge, see if a local specialty/ER clinic is open to you shadowing or volunteering a few hours.

### **Challenge the Norms**

Challenge the norms of how “we’ve always done it that way.” **Why?** Can you research a new technique or standard of care? Once you know better, do better! Investigate new ways to perform common skills. Forums or social media groups can be beneficial for sharing new information or techniques. Articles in journals can challenge us to look at things differently and apply them in our practice.

Pick your doctors brains! Open discussions with your veterinarian about cases you are seeing in your clinic. Not only do they see your interest in growing, but you can show off some of your knowledge too. This can also give them the added benefit of bouncing ideas off of you for how they are managing cases. Sometimes talking it through allows them to think of things differently. Ask why they decided on the treatment plan they did. Finding articles related to the case can help come up with new ways to manage the case, including new ways to communicate to pet owners. Just remember to do your homework! Research and find out as much as you can to help understand it better.

Other ways to up your tech game can include becoming part of veterinary based memberships. This lets you level up your knowledge and skills with continuing education, list serves, and community interactions. This can be something you discuss with management since some of these memberships offer clinical memberships, or if that is not an option, see if you can use CE allowance toward joining.

Teaching others on skills we are good at is a win/win for everyone. We share our skills and knowledge with our coworkers and all of our skills level up. This can also lead to coaching newer technicians in your clinics or even in online forums. It’s a great way to get involved and keep elevating our profession.

Lastly, think outside the box. What other opportunities are there within our profession? Could you be part of an animal blood bank, work on physical rehabilitation, serve as a community outreach leader? What is something you are passionate about that you can translate into what you do for your career?

### **Conclusion**

Now that you’ve reviewed some of the potential options in your career, work to create your SMART career goals. Use these skills to continuously learn and create a career and profession you love and want to stay in for a long time. If you’d like an accountability partner, or you’d just like to share your SMARTer goals, we’d love you to join us. You can get a copy of these proceedings and a link to our Facebook post about SMARTer goals (Internal Medicine For Vet Techs, LLC, 2023). And, keep being a Rock Star Tech!

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