Preface

Communications Training: The Next Level

To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.

—Tony Robbins

Veterinary medicine has changed significantly since the Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice dedicated its first issue to the topic of communication in 2007. At that time, early adopters had recognized the importance of communication skills in veterinary practice, and their efforts contributed to the incorporation of communications training into the accreditation standards of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) for the veterinary curriculum. Now, veterinary students in AVMA accredited schools around the world are graduating with training in the use of core skills like reflective listening, open-ended questions, expression of empathy, and the use of nonverbal communication. The majority of veterinarians will also have had the opportunity to obtain training in specific topics, such as end-of-life decisions, financial discussions, conflict negotiation, and team building. With this background in mind, the current issue moves beyond the core techniques that have permeated the veterinary profession and presents timely guidance on how small animal practitioners can apply their growing communication skills to the important challenges that they face today. Readers will find pertinent information on generational communication, intercultural communication, valuing diversity, compassion fatigue, suicide warning signs and interventions, difficult performance evaluations, change management, clinical ethics, mentorship, and patient quality and safety.

Electric communication will never be a substitute for the face of someone who with their soul encourages another person to be brave and true.

—Charles Dickens
Another important change that had occurred since the last issue of *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice* was dedicated to communication is the widespread use of social media and electronic forms of communication. In the quotation above, Charles Dickens (1812-1870) showed incredible precognition of the problems that society would face when electronic communication superseded direct communication with another human being. While mass communication and social media have the potential to bring people together and to influence change, small animal practitioners will continue to need and use direct communication with clients, staff, and coworkers from different backgrounds. Our commitment to this idea is reflected not only in the topics of the articles in this issue but also in the diverse backgrounds of the authors that have shared their experiences and ideas. We look forward to seeing how our profession can unite in using excellent communication to meet the challenges of the next decade.

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