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# **The Times, They Are A Changin': An Examination of Generational Differences and their Impact on Veterinary Practice**

**2010**

**Simmons Education Fund  
Business Aptitude Award  
Application Essay**

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## **The Times, They Are A Changin': An Examination of Generational Differences and Their Impact on Veterinary Practice**

Have you ever been forced to work closely and collaboratively with someone whose world view differed starkly from yours? With someone whose value system and priorities were influenced by different life experiences than yours? How would you approach working alongside someone quite different from you in age and outlook? Would you consider it a positive, a negative, or both? These are *not* hypothetical questions. These issues confront workplaces across the world on a daily basis. With people from all generations spending longer and longer periods in their profession and retiring at later ages, the issue of different generations learning to work side-by-side in a cohesive and productive fashion is one of ever-increasing importance. In this essay, I will examine some of the issues presented in a veterinary practice where a Baby Boomer works alongside a GenXer. I will further explore how we might apply a medical SOAP format in a different fashion and some potential tools that each generation can utilize in order to appreciate and work well with others.

A SOAP (subjective, objective, assessment and plan) is a method of documenting and approaching medical problems in an organized and consistent manner. After composing countless SOAPS on countless patients, I have realized the usefulness of SOAPing in solving any problem, including those that are not medically related. In fact, SOAPing can be applied beyond the typical medical case to treat real life issues. In order to troubleshoot and achieve positive outcomes in the work place described in the SEF scenario, I have applied an organized SOAP-like architecture to help understand and resolve the potential issues. Using this approach, I hope to provide structure to the analysis and offer my thought process behind the resolution of each potential conflict identified within the scenario. Below is a description of the components of medical SOAP, followed by a description of how this methodology will be applied to each problem identified within the SEF scenario.

Subjective: The subjective section lists, in narrative format, the history of the problems from the perspective of the medical patient, or in veterinary medicine, the owner. In this case, we will treat Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil as our patients, and will describe Dr. Fossil's and Dr. Newbie's thoughts and feelings regarding the problem from their personal, subjective perspectives.

Objective: The objective section lists relevant physical examination and diagnostic test findings. In this case, the objective section will include facts and evidence pertaining to the problems identified.

Assessment: The assessment section typically includes differential diagnoses and ranking of differentials based on clinical signs and diagnostics. In this case, the assessment will be the application of the facts and evidence to the problem.

Plan: The plan section describes the intended treatment of the problem based on the assessment, subjective and objective findings.

### **Problem 1 – The Clash of Generational Differences**

Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil have begun their work relationship with many generational differences, which can be both a hindrance and an asset. Many of the fresh thoughts, innovations and advances today can be attributed to our society's melting pot of culture and diversity. Each individual contributes their own unique perspectives, outlooks, and ideas to create new products and ideas for the betterment of all involved. Diversity in thought and practice can often lead to forward-thinking generation of fresh notions, and improved problem-solving, compared to groups of like-minded individuals. However, diversity of thought can also result in tension, controversy, and dispute. Despite the potential for good that can result from the melding of unique backgrounds and perspectives, clashes of opinion and thought can occur if not managed correctly, and can result in chaos, conflict and impasse in the work place. In particular, generational differences may result in serious discrepancies in expectations regarding work-life balance, hours in the clinic, compensation, feedback, the use of technology and more.

#### Subjective:

Dr Newbie is a new graduate about to begin her career as an associate in a small animal practice. She is 30 years old and one of the last "GenXers." She had a comfortable childhood, always got a trophy on her soccer team (win or lose), is socially responsible, technologically savvy, and fiercely wants a life outside of her career. Her parents are work-aholics. Her loyalty to her job is not nearly as important to her as it was to her parents, because she sees people being laid off in droves, with seemingly little loyalty from their employers. She likes a casual work environment, frequent praise and recognition, and is quite concerned about financial security, in light of her very large student debt.

The practice owner, Dr. Fossil, is a typical Baby Boomer. He graduated in 1978, is completely dedicated to his career, and thinks that a 40 hour work week is part-time. He believes in

the school of “hard knocks” and considers past failures to have been valuable learning experiences, thinks that diminished job loyalty is a mortal sin, and identifies himself FIRST as a veterinarian with everything else falling behind. He does not believe that external rewards should be necessary, but that intrinsic satisfaction in a job well-done is a sufficient. He thinks young people tend to be lazy, and are too tied to their cell phones, email and technology in general. He graduated with NO student debt, so he wonders why young people now are so irresponsible with their money.

#### Objective:

Dr. Fossil and Dr. Newbie epitomize the characteristics of the Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and GenXer (born between 1965 and 1981) generations. The table below depicts some of the key characteristics noted among the different generations, and also helps to direct us

Key characteristics of the different generations in today's workplace\*

	Traditionalists (pre-1946)	Baby Boomers (1946–1964)	Generation X (1965–1981)	Millennials (Post-1981)
Generational “personality”	Loyal	Optimistic; competitive	Skeptical	Realistic
Management style	Chain of command	Change of command	Self-command	Collaboration
Career goals	Build a legacy	Build a stellar career	Build a portable career	Build parallel careers
Rewards	Satisfaction of a job well done	Money, title, recognition, the corner office	Freedom	Work that has meaning
Balance	Support me in shifting the balance.	Help me balance everyone else and find meaning myself.	Give me balance now, not when I'm 65.	Work isn't everything; I need flexibility so I can balance all my activities.
Job changing	Job changing carries a stigma.	Job changing puts you behind.	Job changing is necessary.	Job changing is part of my daily routine.
Training	I learned it the hard way; you can, too.	Train 'em too much and they'll leave.	The more they learn, the more they stay.	Continuous learning is a way of life.
Feedback	No news is good news	Feedback once a year, with lots of documentation	Sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing?	Feedback whenever I want it, at the push of a button

toward the primary areas of conflict between the GenXers and the Baby Boomers.<sup>1</sup> Potential areas of conflict for these two generational groups that may affect the work environment include differences in career goals, expectations, work-life balance, and feedback. Implications of these conflicts are extensive; practice efficiency, client compliance and satisfaction, employee morale, and clinic profitability can all be impacted. These are all elements that were addressed in the above scenario, and points that I will attend to within this essay, providing practical solutions to real life scenarios that are likely to be encountered.

#### Assessment:

Clearly, the scenario depicted here presents many potentially conflicting points of view between Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil. Their conflicts stem primarily from their differences in world

views. Dr. Fossil and Dr. Newbie differ in age, veterinary experience, and their perspectives on life are also shaped by the very different eras during which they were raised. The points of view represented here are manifestations of the experiences and historical events that occurred during each individual's upbringing. Historical events often play key roles in defining the generation that experiences them, uniting that generation with similar sentiments regarding life, work ethic, values, and beliefs. Although it is important to recognize that these are, in fact, generalizations that are affected by individual variations, these generalizations may be useful in comprehending the different values and perspectives generally held by each generational group. The above chart helps us to understand some of these characteristics.

For instance, Dr. Fossil is characterized as a Baby Boomer, progeny of the prosperous World War II generation who grew up during the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War era. He and his counterparts in this generation were infused with the optimism of their parents, believing that unlimited success could be achieved with hard work, dedication, and self-reliance. Their optimism was tempered by fears generated by the Cold War, and disillusionment following the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy. Some, influenced by the hippie movement and the unpopular Vietnam War, preferred to “tune in, turn on, and drop out,” but many, like Dr. Fossil, adopted their parents' beliefs, that there were no limits to success if one was willing to work hard and be self-reliant.<sup>1</sup>

Dr Fossil's childhood reinforced his self-reliance. He was free to roam the neighborhood, interacting with friends and neighbors, and learning to create his own fun. Sports were played with neighborhood children, competition, both in and out of school was keen, and praise was doled out only to the very deserving few.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Dr. Newbie is your typical “GenXer.” She is less convinced that hard work is all that is required for success and happiness. She has seen the beginnings of two wars in the Middle East and a breakdown in the economic system. Layoffs are commonplace, and a willingness to work hard no longer guarantees job security. She is the product of a very structured childhood, with every after school moment filled with dance, gymnastics, and sports. She learned that each child was a winner, and she was given prodigious amounts of praise for all of her accomplishments, both in school, and during her carefully-organized extracurricular activities. The availability of computers and cell phones has made her not only tech savvy and tech reliant, but also less patient and more accustomed to instant gratification.<sup>2</sup>

Plan:

COMMUNICATION IS KEY. Despite the many potential areas of conflict, GenXers and Baby Boomers still share some similar core values. In fact, when respondents were asked to rank the values of competence, wisdom, economic security, balance, achievement, happiness, self-respect, spirituality, integrity, love and family, the highest ranked values were consistently family, love and integrity within both generational groups.<sup>2</sup> Concentrating on similar interests and values may help to lessen the strain associated with all of the obvious differences Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil are likely to encounter as they build a relationship.

In order to reach common ground, it would be beneficial to develop a common vision, mission and values for the practice. This will give structure to future conversations when trying to resolve conflict, and Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil will have a set of standards upon which to fall back upon when problems present themselves. For instance, the practice's vision, mission and values could be: "to set the standard of excellence for veterinary care," "be the premier veterinary practice that provides the highest quality care to patients and clients, while creating a pleasant working environment that cares for patients, clients, and staff with professionalism and respect," and values of "professionalism, integrity, communication, respect, compassion." By preemptively establishing common ground through a foundation of vision, mission and values, the practice will already have the basis upon which to address problems as they arise. Solutions to these problems can always be routed back to the vision, mission and values that were formerly agreed upon in order to resolve conflict in a manner that is amenable to the practice and all parties involved.

Generational differences presented in this scenario can be approached in a similar manner. When Dr. Fossil or Dr. Newbie begin to realize that there is a conflict in the way the practice is organized or run, they can first recognize that this conflict may be arising from their generational perspectives, and then return to the core of their mission as they solve these problems. However, at the heart of any conflict resolution lays an open flow of communication and an environment free of derision and bias that may inhibit open discussion. For this reason, Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil must first establish open lines of communication if they plan to overcome any obstacles within the practice, including those arising from generational differences, in addition to the day to day challenges that are certain to be encountered in any profession.

**Problem 2: Student Debt and Compensation**

Student debt is a growing problem for new grads and employers alike. With ever increasing debt loads, employers and grads must find a way to agree on a compensation package that allows for loan repayment, but does not break the bank.

Subjective:

It appears that Dr. Fossil believes the increased debt load carried by recent graduates is due to irresponsibility. In his opinion, if veterinary students worked harder to support themselves and were more frugal in their spending habits, they could have graduated debt free like himself. After all, he remembers the long hours he spent working after school, and the sacrifices he made to support himself and his family while he was in veterinary school. He does not believe Dr. Newbie's financial situation should influence how he compensates her in the new practice.

Dr. Newbie, on the other hand, is frustrated with Dr. Fossil's lack of sympathy to her financial issues. To her, high debt loads are commonplace, and a necessary and unavoidable evil that are inextricably tied to higher education. She believes that employers should be able to adequately compensate her to meet her living expenses and loan payments, and that Dr. Fossil should be empathetic to her fiscal needs. She also wants to overcome her debts and begin saving for retirement.

Objective:

Dr. Newbie's and Dr. Fossil's views regarding the cost of education are based on two very different times which are not comparable. The cost of education is increasing as state funding for veterinary institutions continues to decrease, leaving the burden of cost associated with a veterinary medical education lying, in large part, on the students. As state funding declines and the cost of higher education increases, students must pay the difference with student loans at interest rates often exceeding 6.8%.<sup>3</sup> In fact, 88.6% of graduates from American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) accredited veterinary schools graduated with student debt in 2009, with an average educational debt load of \$129,976, an 8.5% increase from 2008.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the debt to starting income ratio for newly graduated veterinarians has risen precipitously over the last few decades, averaging 1.12 in 1989, with student debt load being almost twice starting salaries in 2009 (debt to income ratio 1.99).<sup>3</sup> In the increasingly polarized economy, debt remains a very real obstacle facing the majority of students. With the exception of the fortunate few students whose families are able to subsidize their education, student loans are now a fact of life for most professional students.

Assessment:

With student debt reaching all-time highs, and low starting salaries that are still disproportionate compared to our counterparts in other health professions (dentists and medical doctors), veterinary students and established veterinarians alike should be concerned about practices being able to pay the salaries necessary to pay off student debt.<sup>4</sup> Increasing student debt affects nearly all aspects of our profession. So how do new graduates earn a salary commensurate with their needs and debt load? Based on the average new grad earnings of approximately \$60,000, new grads should gross approximately 5 times their salary (assuming a typical veterinary salary equivalent to approximately 20% gross income), or around \$300,000 during their first year out of school to ‘earn their keep.’<sup>6,7</sup> With debt load often exceeding \$100,000, new graduates need to understand the origin of their paycheck, and how to increase their earnings through sound business practices, especially during difficult economic times<sup>6</sup>. This requires knowledge of both business and personal finance. If a new grad wishes to increase their salary to hasten the loan repayment period, they will have to increase their gross earnings through the practice of efficient and productive high quality medicine. They may also begin to consider such things as client retention and other intangibles like communication, human resources, goodwill and client satisfaction. Clearly communicating with a client, and keeping technicians and receptionists happy may make a significant difference to the business, client, financial status of the business, and in the end, the take-home pay.

Plan:

**ANALYSIS AND COMPROMISE.** Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil should negotiate a compensation package that addresses the needs of both parties. For instance, a salary plus production (also referred to as “Pro-sal”) structure offers a base salary plus an additional amount based on Dr. Newbie’s income. This can be motivating to the newer generation of doctors who are willing to put in the extra effort and work harder to increase their revenue while concentrating on high quality patient care and efficiency. This salary method has the added incentive of encouraging hard work to increase both practice and personal income, and integrates the medical and business aspects of veterinary medicine. In this way, it is a structure for shared success for both the practice owner, Dr. Fossil, and the associate, Dr. Newbie.

This also provides a measureable way to evaluate the performance of the Dr. Newbie. The doctors may set performance and production goals that are constantly evaluated, and either rewarded or “punished” based on production performance. However, some doctors may be wary of this type of compensation package as it may over-emphasize the business side of veterinary medicine, increase

competition among associate veterinarians, be affected by inadequate case load, may dissuade collaboration among doctors, and deter doctors from engaging in veterinary practices that are not profitable or high money earners.<sup>6</sup>

Pro-sal compensation may be a viable option for Dr. Newbie. Similar to the previously mentioned example, if Dr. Newbie wishes to make a modest income of \$60,000 in her first year, she is expected to generate approximately \$300,000 of income. Under Pro-sal, she would be secured the \$60,000 regardless of what she grosses, but would also be rewarded for any profit she generates above the \$300,000 with a traditionally 20% return on additional income earned for the practice.<sup>6,8,9</sup> Because she lacks the experience of a seasoned veterinary practitioner, this method will provide a stable and secure income with the potential for growth and increased income while also improving performance and efficiency. This would also benefit Dr. Fossil as it motivates the new practitioner to be efficient and generate income on behalf of the practice. The remaining 80% of gross earnings could be used to pay the bills, reinvest into the practice, or do as the practice owner wishes. In addition, it may allow for a more flexible work week for both Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil. With efficiency and quality medicine, the doctors may be able to decrease their hours while still generating the same or even a higher income based on the number of clients seen and average client transaction.<sup>6,9</sup>

These types of production based salaries would be mutually beneficial to the practice owner and the associate. Both Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil can work together to grow the practice and increase revenues, and practice high quality medicine. With a successful practice, both can expect to turn a profit and do what they please with their additional income, whether it be investing toward retirement, vacation, or paying back student debt.

### **Problem 3: The 40 Hour Work Week - Full Time or Part Time?**

Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil have very different ideas of the typical work week and what constitutes full time, versus part time at the clinic.

#### Subjective:

Dr. Fossil is a die-hard worker who takes pride in the time he spends working at the practice. He has taken one vacation in the last five years, and has only used sick leave when he was “on his deathbed.” He worries that a lazy new-comer will not be willing to share the work load and may actually be a burden, creating even more work for his already hard pressed schedule. He has worked diligently to keep the practice up and running and offers extended weekend and weekday hours to accommodate his working clientele.

Dr. Newbie loves being a vet, but she likes keeping her social and professional life separate. To her, an ideal work week would be four 10 hour days, leaving 3-day weekends to spend with her family and friends. With a new baby on the way and a husband that plans to work long hours, she wants to make sure she can balance her professional and family life, leaving enough time to raise her child.

Objective:

At a busy practice, two doctors may realistically have to work 5-7 days per week to keep the practice up and running. However, it is important to be cognizant of the fact that overworked doctors are more likely to make more medical errors, have higher stress levels and decreased quality of professional and personal life.<sup>10, 11</sup>

Additionally, veterinary schools are now graduating approximately 80% women. With more women entering the veterinary work force, and an increase in dual-income households within our society, flexible scheduling has become a high priority to accommodate child care and work-life balance.<sup>12</sup>

Assessment:

In order to be a quality veterinarian, Dr. Newbie believes she needs a good quality of life, both professionally and personally. Although Dr. Fossil is completely engrossed in the clinic, he cannot expect his employees to sacrifice their families nor change their personal values. Dr. Fossil must recognize that giving his employees free time away from the hospital may actually increase efficiency of work and decrease medical errors. Additionally, having spare time to spend with family, friends and away from work may help to decrease stress, and create a more harmonious work environment. Forcing a GenXer into an inflexible, and in their mind “unreasonable,” work schedule will likely result in resentment and decreased morale within the workplace. Such feelings may precipitate problems in the clinic, affect staff and client relationships, and compromise the overall health of the clinic.

Likewise, it is unreasonable for a new graduate to expect regular 3 day weekends, short work hours, *and* to make a high income. As Dr. Fossil has shown us, running a successful practice requires devotion and sometimes undesirable work hours.

Plan :

COMPROMISE and DILIGENT PLANNING. Resolving tough issues like doctor scheduling and hours necessitates frequent, and in depth, conversations between all parties involved. Both Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil must first understand each other’s perspective before they can

openly discuss and come to an amicable decision regarding the work schedule. Dr. Newbie must take into consideration the overall health of the practice and the necessity of sometimes working long hours to accommodate valuable clientele. She also needs to be realistic about her expectations; it may not be reasonable to expect a 40 hour work week, regular 3 day weekends, *and* a high income. Similarly, Dr. Fossil needs to accept that Dr. Newbie needs time away from the practice to unwind from daily stresses and be with her family in order to be a quality and efficient clinician during her time at the clinic. If both are willing to make sacrifices, an agreeable compromise that both doctors can live with will likely ensue.

Dr. Newbie should make a concerted effort to plan any time off well in advance. This will allow Dr. Fossil adequate time to help to accommodate both of their schedules and know what to expect. Defining future vacations and daily work schedules well in advance will help to alleviate some conflict regarding scheduling in the future.

If Dr. Fossil is concerned that time spent away from the practice will decrease revenues and income, he may also want to consider other creative outlets for decreasing work hours while maintaining the practice's health. For instance, both doctors should consider community outreach efforts within their spare time. By engaging in community activities, the doctors can network on behalf of the clinic, potentially drawing a larger client base and creating good will within the community. Such activities outside of the work place may be even more useful than spending additional hours within the normal business operations.

#### **Problem 4: Mentorship vs. Productivity.**

While recent graduates are often looking for first jobs that will provide them with good learning experiences and strong mentorship, employers may resent the loss of extra time and decreased productivity that on-the-job training for new grads requires. Balancing the needs of both will be a challenge.

#### Subjective:

Dr. Fossil is very impressed with Dr. Newbie's resume and expects her to hit the ground running with great production starting from day one. He feels like four years of veterinary education prepared him well for his career, and that the newcomers should adapt quickly in the sink-or-swim environment of the practice.

Dr. Newbie is a fresh graduate that is eager to practice, but worries that she has not mastered some of the clinical skills necessary to be a high earning veterinarian. Like many new grads, she lacks confidence. Although she knew formal internship training was not for her, she still wants a

strong mentor-mentee relationship with her employer in order to become a more efficient and proficient veterinarian.

Objective:

With increasing research and knowledge gained in the scientific field, veterinary students are challenged with the tasks of learning a larger breadth of information compared to 30 years ago within the same amount of classroom time. Furthermore, today's veterinary students are also graduating with an increased desire for further clinical education post graduation, with 43.5% of graduates applying for post-graduation advanced education training in 2009.<sup>3</sup>

Assessment:

Dr. Fossil is a great teacher, but may not have the time to invest in his new hire if he wants to keep the clinic running profitably and efficiently. At the same time, Dr. Newbie truly wants to benefit from Dr. Fossil's immense experience, so that she too can be a productive doctor that practices high-quality medicine.

Realizing that there is an opportunity cost associated with everything that we do, investing time as a mentor to Dr. Newbie will decrease Dr. Fossil's opportunity to see and treat additional patients. As a result, he cannot practically afford to take the time to mentor and teach his newly-hired, less efficient associate if he plans to continue to operate within his current profit stream. Similarly, he cannot afford to pay Dr. Newbie her current salary if she is inefficient and he has to take time away from his day to train her.

New grads going straight into private practice are unlikely to be as productive as established veterinarians who have been practicing for many years and have the benefit of additional clinical experience. Although post-graduate internships may be a viable alternative for some new-grads, their extremely low pay is disagreeable to those bearing high student debt loads and with no desire to pursue post-internship specialty training. However, new-grads who follow the private practice track directly after veterinary school may lack the clinical expertise to be as productive and efficient as employers' desire, making them less desirable hires compared to seasoned veterinarians and post-internship applicants. So how can the new grad wishing to pursue a private practice job directly after veterinary school reconcile their lack of experience while making enough money to support themselves and pay back their debt?

Plan:

NEGOTIATION. Dr. Fossil and Dr. Newbie can combat the problems of compensation and mentorship at the same time. Both want a successful and efficient practice with high quality

medicine and great patient care. In order to be efficient, Dr. Fossil will need to use his years of experience and clinical expertise to train his new associate. But how can he do so without breaking the bank? Dr. Newbie wants to “hit the ground running” and is eager to use what she has learned to improve the lives of her patients, but she needs a little extra guidance to be productive enough to earn her keep. By negotiating a pay scale that is commensurate with the time Dr. Fossil has to invest in Dr. Newbie’s learning, both can satisfy their financial and educational goals. For instance, Dr. Newbie could be paid 65% percent of her salary for the first few months as Dr. Fossil takes the time away from his day to train and mentor her. As Dr. Newbie becomes more efficient and requires less time from Dr. Fossil, they can begin to increase her salary to the negotiated amount until she is being paid her normal doctor salary.<sup>6</sup> In this way, Dr. Fossil does not have to worry about the money lost from taking the time to train Dr. Newbie, and Dr. Newbie can gain the mentorship and experience she needs to be a proficient clinician without having to complete a year of formal internship training.

The doctors should also establish, within the employment contract, a clear statement describing the employee’s evaluation. For instance, it would be wise to include a clause stating that the Dr. Fossil will provide Dr. Newbie with clear information after a designated time period regarding her generated revenue, and average client transactions, in addition to guideline information from national and regional income studies for comparison. Such feedback will help the practice and the doctors determine how they are stacking up in terms of efficiency and production in relation to each other and other practices.<sup>13</sup>

### **Problem 5: The Technology Debacle**

Differing perspectives regarding the use of new technology can lead to discontent in the workplace.

#### Subjective:

Dr. Fossil thinks this technology gibberish is becoming too rampant and the youngsters too reliant on their everyday conveniences. Sure, he enjoys the occasional Google search on the sole computer in the practice, but he doesn’t see why all his young vet techs are constantly glued to their “finger messages” and emails. To him, it’s a silly waste of time that keeps them distracted from their work and from doing a good job. When he was their age, a call from the parents’ telephone or a well written note sufficed. Now this Dr. Newbie keeps asking him about digital radiography and says how she thinks it will improve the practice. Dr. Fossil still thinks his traditional x-ray unit takes good enough images and will keep costs low. He is not sure the practice can afford a large investment like

a new DR or CR radiology unit, and his lack of familiarity with the new technology makes him uncomfortable.

Dr. Newbie is technologically savvy. As a recent graduate, Dr. Newbie had the luxury of CT, MRI, digital radiographs, endoscopy, electronic medical records and ultrasound at her school. She hopes to have some of these modalities available to her at her new job, and to integrate the latest and greatest technology into her diagnostics, treatments, and record keeping.

Objective:

Addition of new technology to the practice needs to be evaluated objectively from business, financial, and medical standpoints. Neither Dr. Fossil's reasoning that "this is the way it has always been done, so this is the way we will continue to do it," nor Dr. Newbie's desire for the same high-tech gadgets offered in the "ivory tower" teaching hospital is proper justification for integrating or declining new medical equipment. Instead, an objective break-even analysis and calculations of potential for profit and improvement of patient care should be evaluated.

Assessment:

Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil approach the addition of new technology from their own generational perspective. Dr. Newbie was trained at her veterinary school with digital radiography. She is comfortable with its use and understands the conveniences offered by the technology. Dr. Fossil is accustomed to his traditional x-ray unit and is resistant to change, especially those associated with high costs.

Dr. Newbie should be aware that Dr. Fossil may be intimidated by new technologies. Dr. Newbie should help him understand their benefits in a non-threatening way, which may make him more receptive to their implementation. Likewise, Dr. Fossil needs to recognize that there is more than one way to reach the same outcome, and new methods may offer unique advantages to the practice.

Plan:

**FINANCIAL CALCULATIONS.** Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil need to sit down and run the math. Once the practice is profitable, Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil can return to their vision, mission and values to determine if the addition of new technology will increase patient care while being financially feasible. For instance, an evaluation of digital radiography should consider the following points: digital radiography is much more forgiving than traditional film radiography in terms of technique and quality imagery; digital radiography takes less time and therefore costs less per image, but has a high up-front cost and a potentially long payback period. In order to determine if this

would be a good fit for the practice, Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil should first perform a break-even analysis to determine at what point in the future they can expect to turn a profit and gain a return on their investment and if this would in fact be profitable to the practice in the long term and improve patient care. Dr. Newbie and Dr. Fossil should thoroughly analyze and weigh the potential benefits to the practice and patient care against the cost and potential disadvantages of the new x-ray system.

Although Dr. Fossil may perceive Dr. Newbie's addiction to the internet and email as a distraction from work, her internet savvy may in fact prove useful to the clinic. Dr. Newbie may be able to offer her social networking and internet skills to improve clinic marketing, keep in touch with clients, and build a larger client base. Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace offer free, easily accessible web pages on which to advertise the clinic at essentially no cost. Similarly, the development of a hospital web page can help keep clients connected, informed, and may draw more clientele from increased Google hits and search engine optimization. Although this may require a small investment cost associated with web site creation, web site upkeep and management is relatively inexpensive in comparison to traditional methods of advertisement, like newspaper or phonebook ads. With Dr. Newbie's veterinary, internet, and computer knowledge, the practice could develop and then direct clients to informational brochures and client education materials on the site, potentially saving valuable doctor time and increasing client understanding and compliance. In this way, Dr. Newbie's generational differences may actually prove useful to the clinic in a way that Dr. Fossil likely did not consider. By investing a bit of personal time into such a project and proving a positive return on investment, Dr. Newbie may be able to "win-over" Dr. Fossil and make him more receptive to her practice development ideas in the future, including investing capital in new technologies.

### **Summary and Conclusions:**

Why should we care about generational differences in the work place? Aside from avoiding conflict and hard feelings, the differences have salient financial implications; monetary losses, decreased profitability, high employee turnover, and increased workplace stress are real and significant ramifications of inter-generational conflict in the work environment. These problems can be mitigated or avoided if recognized and dealt with from the beginning. The generational differences can also become an asset, if used to find innovative solutions to problems with the benefit of multiple perspectives in a diverse, multi-generational workforce. With the use of negotiation, compromise, planning, financial analysis, and most of all, open communication, solutions to problems regarding work life balance, institution of new technology, salary, and even generational differences can be resolved in an amicable and effective manner.

As challenges between generational ideologies emerge, much can also be gained during the resolution process. Traditionalists and the Baby Boomers can offer years of experience. GenXers, and now the Millennial “Generation Y”, can offer a fresh perspective and modern outlook. Both are absolutely necessary components to the constantly evolving veterinary field. By embracing not only generational differences, but all unique perspectives, a multi-modal approach to practice management and medicine can be forged. The melding of perspectives throughout the resolution process can foster not only creative solutions to everyday problems, but contribute to a symbiotic working relationship that benefits all. While the times may be a changin’, if the veterinary profession embraces and accommodates generational differences, the changes will better the profession.

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