Disarming an angry client

Listening and taking your time should be the first considerations when dealing with an intimidating client

A report published by the BVA at the start of October found that 85 percent of vets have reported that either they or a member of their team has been left feeling intimidated by a client’s actions or language. While it’s understandable – clients treasure their pets – it doesn’t make abuse right and it leaves vets and practice staff having to find strategies to cope.

There are a number of steps that practice staff can use to lengthen the fuse of irate clients. No matter what your approach, one thing is certain – your actions will either make a friend or an enemy out of the client – so tread carefully.

Customers are allowed to be angry

We’re all human and so while never deliberate, mistakes do happen. But when mistakes come to light, clients will make a point of bringing it to the practice’s attention. Whoever is on the receiving end of the complaint is probably going to want to take a stand, deflect the complaint or settle it quickly – all on the hop while the client is still talking. Contrary to what some might say, the advice here is to start from a position of assuming that the client has every right to be angry.

Maybe they thought the vet was rude and didn’t listen to their concerns, or the treatment didn’t do what was promised. It’s entirely possible that the client is continuing with a previous issue they have had with the practice. Alternatively, they are angry and emotional because they are tired and the pet needs treatment at a time (and cost) when it is inconvenient. But no matter the reason or whether they’re right or wrong, you need to make a point of letting them vent their spleen. In doing this you will let them express the root cause of the complaint, which you can deal with.

Listen carefully

Listen to what is being said and how it’s being expressed. Are there any key phrases that keep being repeated that will give you a clue as to the real issue? Is it technical or personal? Fixing a problem with, say, a booking system, won’t do much for harmony if the client has a real issue with the personnel administrating the booking system over the phone.

Whatever you do, never respond with any form of emotion. A client is not angry at the person they are talking to, but rather the practice or something within it.

Allow time

Rarely will a client say everything in one go – they will seek attention, start talking, ramble and move into other areas before coming back to the main point. The worst thing you