

Rick, Andy, Louis and me

Hello my droogs, the time has come for this year's column in English. So here goes.

Veterinarians are in general bright, intelligent, smart people who are able to do wonderful and often intricately complicated and difficult things for their patients. So how come they run a 4,63 times greater risk of committing suicide than people in general? Some ten odd years ago thoughts like these set a train in motion in Washington, USA. Somebody must have been "sleepless in Pullman" and started thinking why we veterinarians who are so good at our medicine are so poor at managing client relations and even our own lives. The sleepless person must have been a teacher at the college of veterinary medicine, as he/she also thought why we don't teach these skills at the colleges?

Out of these sleepless nights grew the VLE-concept (Veterinary Leadership Experience), which is now taught to every student at the Veterinary college of Washington State and is being offered as a five days workshop to international and domestic participants. I recently attended the first European VLE on the southernmost tip of Sweden 40 kilometres south of where Kurt Wallander lives and works, a suitable kind of flat landscape and open sea for soul-searching activities. In attendance were sixty colleagues and future colleagues from all over Europe and South-Africa, so one might say it was truly Pan-European!

During three days a motley crew of veterinarians went from suspiciously watchful colleagues, sitting on the edge of their chairs, to emerging teams getting better task for task. Given two weeks time and the use of Cape Canaveral we would have put an elephant, a whale, a cow and a kangaroo on the moon. Honing our self-awareness, self-manage-

ment, social awareness and our relational competence helped us rediscover things we already knew, but which the cross illumination revealed as quite different structures and textures. Although nothing under the sun is new of what we learned washed the dust from our eyes, i.e. what was left after several morning swims in the Baltic sea not yet frozen over. The methodology was didactic teaching, that is powerpoint slideshows, experimental tasks, i.e. playing or as the scientific community likes to call it, kinaesthetic imprints.



Equality of the team-members put teacher and student at the same starting line and the inevitably ensuing chaos and crisis was dismantled in a safe and controlled environment. Little by little the diversity and different strengths kicked in, encouraged risk taking. Slowly the chaos subsided and was replaced by trust, a common language, almost regular planning and a common methodology. Leaders emerged and stepped back for new leaders. I seldom, nay never, have heard sixty adults laugh and joke this much. The excellent personnel, who went to great measures to take care of us and feed us, took great delight in watching us frolic and often they laughed as well.

Veterinarians often are poor communicators, both within our teams and to our clients. We often fail in giving people what they want, clear and unequivocal directives to our co-workers, precise

and manageable recommendations and advice to our clients. Hence our teams don't do what we mean and our clients fall appallingly short on compliance. Good medicine is often about a proper flow of information, which has to be bidirectional. What goes in must come out and professionalism is achieved by awareness and attention, intentionality and reflective ability, leading to evidence based articulation. It's all about appreciative inquiry and open ended questions; "that must have been a very frightening situation, but please

tell me is there anything more You can tell me about Fluffy..."

Paradigm-shifts were in the forefront and focus and I cannot but finish by quoting Lewis Carroll:

The time has come
the walrus said
to talk of many things
of shoes — and ships
— and sealing wax
of cabbages and kings
of why the sea is boiling hot and
whether pigs have wings.

Ah but, who are Rick, Andy and Louis? They are my friends, who in a typological test are pushing the limits of extravetroy. One might say mega-extraveted-plus-plus-people, great fun to be around. As were all participants! I love them all. Thank you.

Leif Wikman