The Insider's Insight Benchmark Report is a publication provided by the Veterinary Hospital Managers Association (VHMA). The report tracks key economic indicators to determine how VHMA member practices are performing, as well as results from VHMA surveys on issues impacting the profession. There are over 600 VHMA member practices who contribute to the data for the key economic indicators. Data is representative of companion animal practices only.
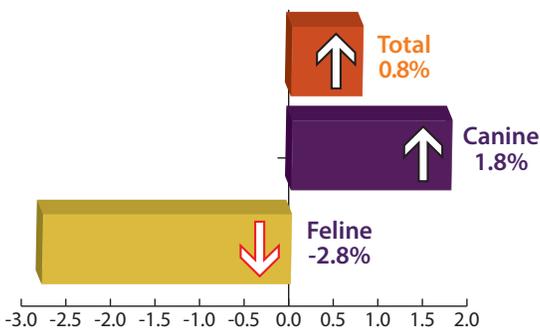
January, 2018 vs. January, 2017

Revenue Growth
January, 2018 compared to January, 2017
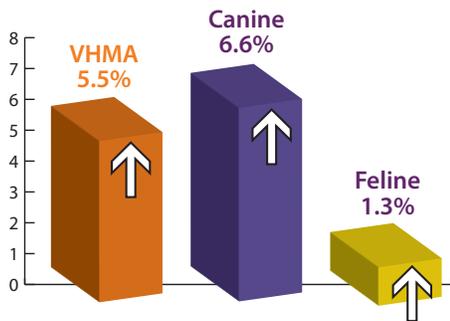
Revenue Growth

Companion animal practice revenue for the 612 VHMA practices included in this month's study showed a healthy growth of 5.5% from January, 2017 to January, 2018; however, there was one <u>more</u> workday in January, 2018 compared to 2017 which no doubt accounts for some of this month's growth. Canine revenue growth was 6.6% and feline revenue was 1.3%. This growth continues to be stronger than the overall growth seen in the U.S. economy.

Patient Visits
January, 2018 compared to January, 2017

Patient Visits

Total unique patient visits for the same period, January, 2018 compared to January, 2017 increased by just 0.8% with canine visits up by 1.8% and feline visits <u>down</u> by 2.8%. Remember there was one more workday in 2018 which accounts for at least some of the growth. (Note that the term "visits" is defined as unique purchases of either products or services for an individual pet.)

New Client Growth
January, 2018 compared to January, 2017
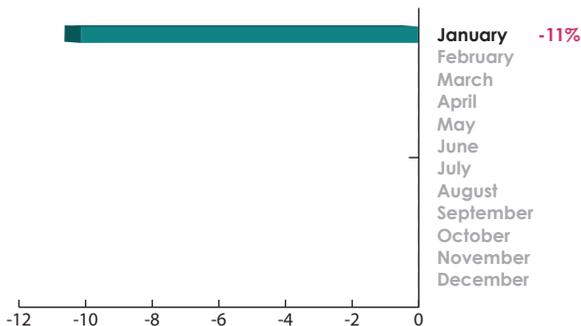
New Client Growth

New client numbers in January, 2018 compared to January, 2017 <u>declined</u> by 11%, in spite of the increased number of workdays in 2018. This continues to be a discouraging trend as these numbers have declined almost every month of the last three years.

Remember that the above figures represent averages across all the practices in the study; in order to understand what is going on in YOUR practice, you need to look not only at what your revenue growth was during these months (and going forward) but also at the drivers of growth in YOUR practice such as changes in invoices, visits, ATC, fee increases, new clients and client retention. This will give you the information to make intelligent decisions about where to focus your time and efforts to increase growth.

Mentorship

The importance of mentorship has been widely discussed lately, particularly when talking about hiring and retaining young veterinarians. But, of course, it is equally important with management and other employees as well. These questions summarize what's going on with mentorship activities in veterinary practices.
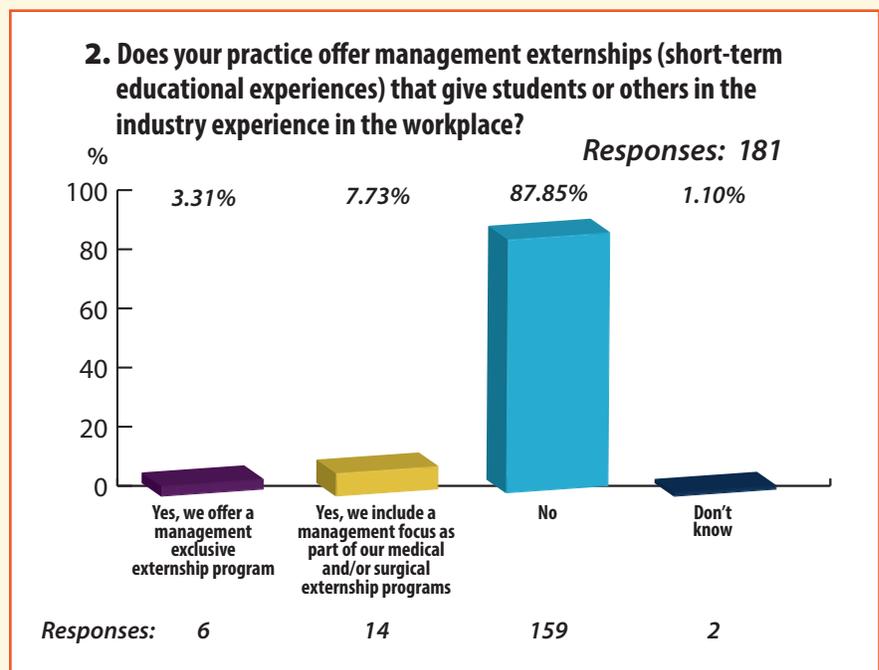
The first question asked: *"Please select the response that best describes mentoring (preparing staff to take on additional leadership/management responsibilities) in your practice:"*

1. Please select the response that best describes mentoring (preparing staff to take on additional leadership/management responsibilities) in your practice:

Responses: 180

	5.56%	31.67%	34.44%	27.22%	1.11%
	We have a formal program to develop the next generation of managers	Practice pairs staff with mentors, but there is no formal program and the mentor and mentee decide how the relationship works	Mentoring relationships do develop informally in the practice, but the practice is not involved in the pairing or the learning experience	No mentoring in the practice	Not sure
Responses:	10	57	62	49	2

Very few practices have a formal mentoring program in place but about 2/3 have some kind of informal mentoring going on. About 1/4 of the practices say there is no mentoring taking place. Most of the responses in the "other" section indicated that practices were involved in setting up more structured programs for developing management and leadership skills.

The next question asked: *"Does your practice offer management externships (short-term educational experiences) that give students or others in the industry experience in the workplace?"*

As can be seen in chart 2, very few practices offer management externships for those who don't work in the practice.

2. Does your practice offer management externships (short-term educational experiences) that give students or others in the industry experience in the workplace?

Responses: 181

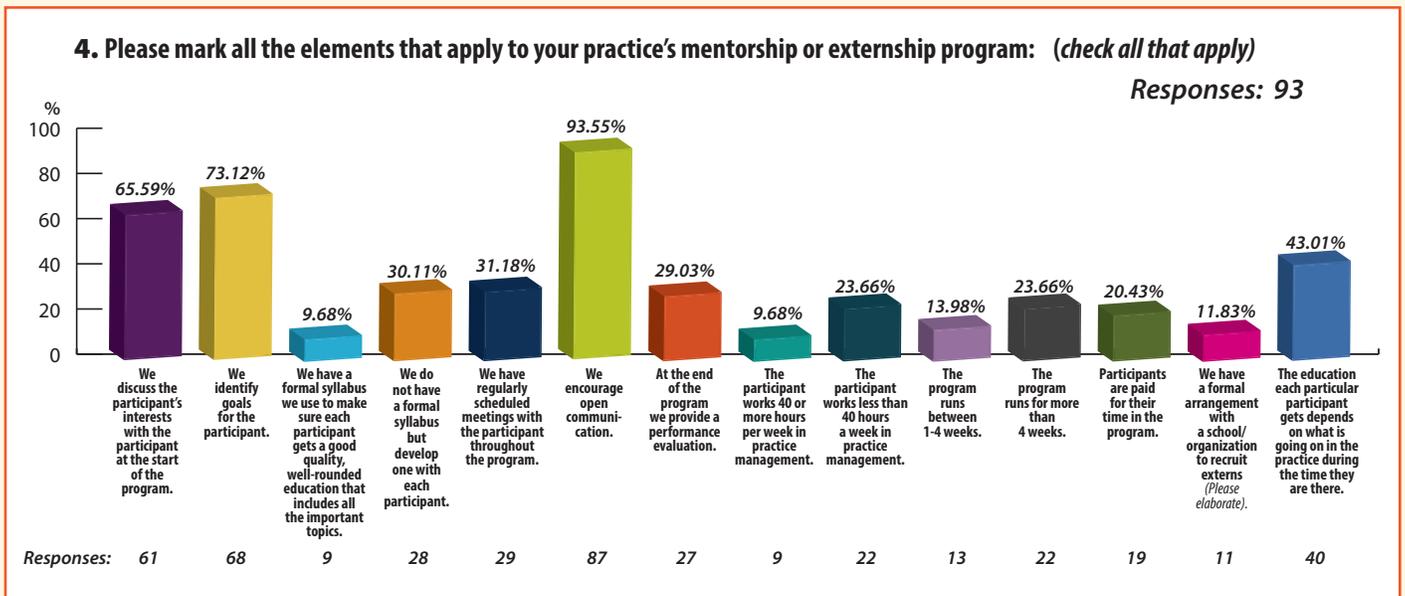|	3.31%	7.73%	87.85%	1.10%
	Yes, we offer a management exclusive externship program	Yes, we include a management focus as part of our medical and/or surgical externship programs	No	Don't know
Responses:	6	14	159	2

Mentorship

There was a wide range of answers to the following question: *"Who serves as mentor to the staff member or student?"*

The vast majority of respondents who selected either one of the pre-determined answers or answered in the "other" section indicated that people who are generally thought of as part of the "leadership team" (practice owner, practice manager, hospital administrator, etc.) do most of the mentoring.

3. **Who serves as mentor to the staff member or student?**
(check all that apply)

Responses: 134

	Practice Owner	Manager	Leadership Team	Other *(please specify)*
	31.34%	61.94%	54.48%	21.64%
Responses:	42	83	73	29
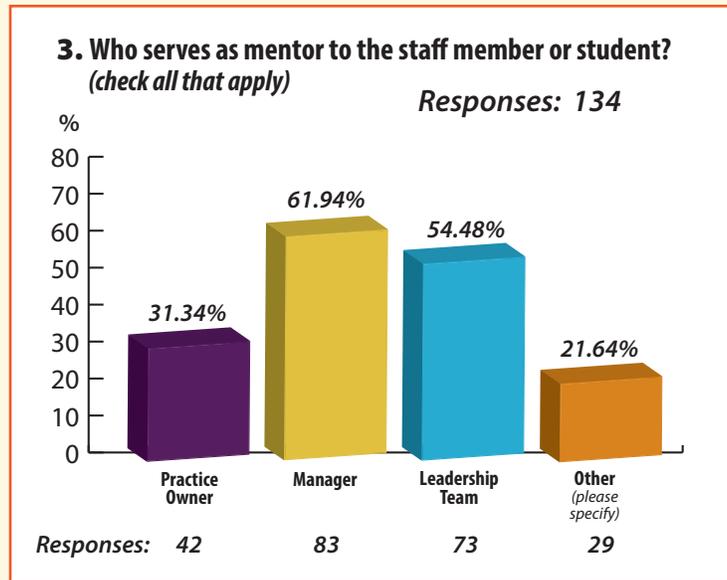
The next question asked looks at the components of the mentoring program: *"Please mark all the elements that apply to your practice's mentorship or externship program:"*

4. **Please mark all the elements that apply to your practice's mentorship or externship program:** *(check all that apply)*

Responses: 93

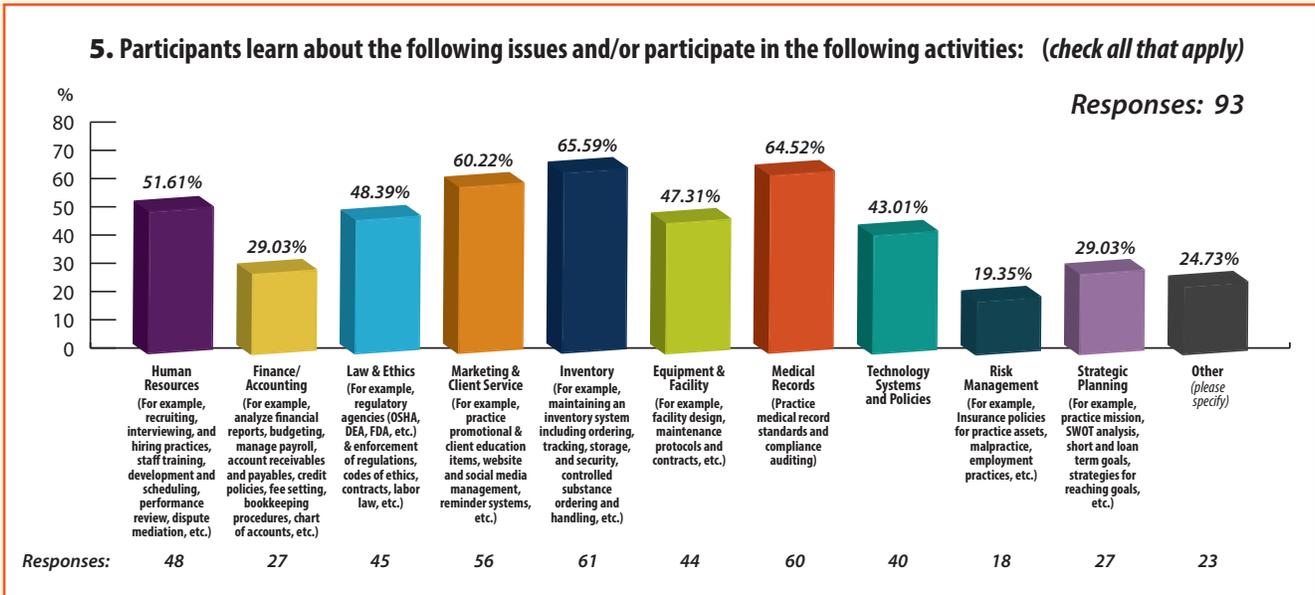|	We discuss the participant's interests with the participant at the start of the program.	We identify goals for the participant.	We have a formal syllabus we use to make sure each participant gets a good quality, well-rounded education that includes all the important topics.	We do not have a formal syllabus but develop one with each participant.	We have regularly scheduled meetings with the participant throughout the program.	We encourage open communi-cation.	At the end of the program we provide a performance evaluation.	The participant works 40 or more hours per week in practice management.	The participant works less than 40 hours a week in practice management.	The program runs between 1-4 weeks.	The program runs for more than 4 weeks.	Participants are paid for their time in the program.	We have a formal arrangement with a school/organization to recruit externs *(Please elaborate)*.	The education each particular participant gets depends on what is going on in the practice during the time they are there.
	65.59%	73.12%	9.68%	30.11%	31.18%	93.55%	29.03%	9.68%	23.66%	13.98%	23.66%	20.43%	11.83%	43.01%
Responses:	61	68	9	28	29	87	27	9	22	13	22	19	11	40

There is a wide variety in how programs are structured and what is included. Of note, only about 10% are based on a formal syllabus but almost all encourage open communication.

In the "other" comments section for both this question and the previous ones, there seems to be some confusion between mentoring and continuing education. (See page 4 for more discussion about what mentoring is and how to make it effective.)

Mentorship

The next question asked: *"Participants learn about the following issues and/or participate in the following activities"* and respondents were asked to check all that apply.

5. Participants learn about the following issues and/or participate in the following activities: *(check all that apply)*

Responses: 93

	Human Resources (For example, recruiting, interviewing, and hiring practices, staff training, development and scheduling, performance review, dispute mediation, etc.)	Finance/ Accounting (For example, analyze financial reports, budgeting, manage payroll, account receivables and payables, credit policies, fee setting, bookkeeping procedures, chart of accounts, etc.)	Law & Ethics (For example, regulatory agencies (OSHA, DEA, FDA, etc.) & enforcement of regulations, codes of ethics, contracts, labor law, etc.)	Marketing & Client Service (For example, practice promotional & client education items, website and social media management, reminder systems, etc.)	Inventory (For example, maintaining an inventory system including ordering, tracking, storage, and security, controlled substance ordering and handling, etc.)	Equipment & Facility (For example, facility design, maintenance protocols and contracts, etc.)	Medical Records (Practice medical record standards and compliance auditing)	Technology Systems and Policies	Risk Management (For example, Insurance policies for practice assets, malpractice, employment practices, etc.)	Strategic Planning (For example, practice mission, SWOT analysis, short and loan term goals, strategies for reaching goals, etc.)	Other (please specify)
%	51.61%	29.03%	48.39%	60.22%	65.59%	47.31%	64.52%	43.01%	19.35%	29.03%	24.73%
Responses:	48	27	45	56	61	44	60	40	18	27	23

Again, there is a very wide variety amongst practices in what areas their mentoring focuses on. In the "other" section, communication and leadership were also mentioned as topics covered.

The last question asked: *"How many staff or students"* **have gone through this program to date?"**

The vast majority of respondents answered in the 0-2 range.

Effective Mentoring in Your Practice

Mentors and mentees often do not work in the same organization but many businesses have recognized the benefits of these relationships and started setting up such programs within their companies. Before a practice can implement effective mentoring, however, the team needs to know what it is. There seems to be some confusion on this topic and the definition is a bit elusive. There are many definitions on the internet and elsewhere; here are a few that help define the term:

■ "Mentoring is most often defined as a **professional relationship** in which an experienced person (the mentor) assists another (the mentoree) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less-experienced person's professional and personal growth." (www.management-mentors.com)

■ "Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails **informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time**, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé)." (www.wikipedia.com)

■ "Mentoring is a **long-term relationship** where the focus is on supporting the growth and development of the mentee. The mentor **is a source of wisdom, teaching, and support, but not someone who observes and advises on specific actions or behavioral changes in daily work**." (www.thebalance.com)

Communication and the establishment of a relationship are clearly part of mentoring. And while it is clear that there is an educational component to mentoring, it is also clear that traditional veterinary continuing education (CE) or in-house training isn't the same as mentoring. CE is critical to team development and retention but mentoring offers something beyond that.

4

Effective Mentoring in Your Practice

Why establish a culture that promotes mentoring? There are many benefits for both practices and employees. Benefits to the practice include:

- ■ The creation of a more skilled and confident employee. Traditional CE can give employees the technical skills they need but mentoring can help with the non-technical skills that are so critical to the success of both an employee and the practice. Examples of these skills and attributes include:

    - Ability to work as part of a team
    - Judgment
    - Communication skills
    - Initiative
    - Critical thinking skills

- ■ Recruitment of talented employees who are eager to learn and grow

- ■ Retention of these same employees

- ■ Improved medical care, client service, revenue growth and profitability growth that is made possible by more highly skilled employees with a greater degree of non-technical competencies

Benefits to the employee are similar—the acquisition of skills that can further them in their career and in achieving their life goals.

Establishing an effective mentoring program and/or being a good mentor takes time and effort. This isn't an easy thing to do and the practice's leadership team needs to be committed to the program and the long-term benefits for it to succeed. The following issues need to be considered in the design of the program:

- ■ **Goals:** Not only does the practice need to determine what its goals for the program are, the mentor/mentee team need to do so as well. Obviously, all these goals need to be reasonably aligned and all parties need to feel there is a benefit to participating.

- ■ **Selecting mentors:** Not everyone would be a good mentor and even if you have people in your practice who would be good mentors; forcing someone to be a mentor never works. A good mentor has the following traits:

    - Is respected and liked in the practice; this person should act as a positive role model and be someone the practice would like to have everyone be like

    - Is willing and genuinely interested in being a mentor and sharing their skills, knowledge and expertise

    - Can communicate effectively about what he/she knows, is a good listener and can effectively help the mentee learn and grow

    - Is approachable and available

    - Is honest and objective in giving constructive feedback but diplomatic as well

    - Is enthusiastic about the veterinary profession and the practice

    - Values ongoing learning

- ■ **Selecting mentees:** In the same way that not everyone will be a good mentor, not everyone will be a good mentee either. Characteristics of good mentees include:

    - Eagerness to learn and grow

    - Willingness to take constructive feedback in a professional manner

    - Willingness and ability to work as a team player

    - Can make the time commitment to the relationship

    - Will benefit from the skills and expertise the mentor has to share

- ■ **Matching mentors and mentees:** Mentors and mentees must genuinely like (in a professional manner) and respect each other. They need to have communication styles that mesh and their values should be similar. Both need to have a common understanding of their roles. Generally, the mentor's role is to coach and advise the mentee but the mentor is not the mentee's work supervisor and won't interfere with that relationship. On the flip side, a mentee should be willing and open to considering all advice from the mentor but doesn't necessarily have to follow it.

- ■ **Time commitments:** This needs to be determined on all sides. A mentoring program won't be successful unless time is devoted to setting it up and maintaining it properly and both the mentor and the mentee need to make and be given time to meet. A structured schedule often works well; for example, the mentor and mentee may agree to have breakfast every other Wednesday before the practice opens. It is important to set a time that

Effective Mentoring in Your Practice

won't be constantly interrupted or changed because of other practice obligations. The mentor/mentee may meet more frequently in the early days and taper off as the mentee has less need for coaching and advice. The mentor must be willing to give a reasonable amount of time to the relationship and the mentee must be reasonable in their time expectations from the mentor.

■ Confidentiality is key to the relationship and the practice should not expect that the meetings between the mentor and mentee will necessarily be shared with the practice leadership team.

As with any new program, the practice needs to set goals for the program and regularly measure the success. Several common metrics include: long-term retention of employees, increase in team member skills and contributions to the practice and employee attitudes towards their jobs and the practice they work for. Obviously the satisfaction of the mentors and mentees with the program is an important measure as well but if the practice isn't seeing other benefits such as those described above, the success of the program needs to be relooked.