

ACCES for Pet Health

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The 3 P's of our Bottom Line: Profit, People & Planet

By Beth Davidow, DVM DACVECC



I've learned a lot since starting [ACCES](#) five years ago. My training was all veterinary medicine with not a single business class during 8 years of college and veterinary school. Our business was started not because we wanted to be rich but because there was a huge void in Seattle for the services we offer.

Because I am a bit of an idealist, we spent the first 4 years not paying careful attention to the bottom line. My emphasis has always been to provide the best I could possibly manage to my employees, to offer the best medicine and service at a reasonable price to our clients and patients, and to provide education and information to the veterinarians and veterinary health students in our area. The current economy has been a wake up call that in order to continue to provide those things and stay in business, we must run a profitable business.

One thing many people don't realize, and I didn't when we opened, is that "profit" is not actually what owners get to take home in their pocket. Principal on your loans, taxes, and equipment purchases all come out of your profit. Thus, in order to pay down your loans, to purchase equipment needed to be a top notch facility, and to pay your taxes, your profit margin must be maintained at a certain level.

I've spent the last year and a half no longer reading mysteries or novels but reading business books instead. We've hired consultants and I have talked and questioned lots of people in the business world. I've learned a lot from what I have read but what resonated most to me was a statement made by a successful veterinary practice owner in San Francisco. He said, "When we look at our bottom line, we need to think about not one "P", but 3. Profit is important for your business to stay in existence but that if you ignore people and the planet, your profit will be unsustainable."

We've always tried to provide good benefits and a good work environment to our employees. I count part of our success at this as the 2-5 people each year who work for us and then get into veterinary school, the 3 veterinary technicians who have become boarded specialists during employment with us, and the MBA our office manager earned while working for us.

As committed Pacific Northwesterners, we are committed to the environment. We are a 5



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star [Envirostar](#) business. We recycle at work, support a bus pass program, are careful with chemicals and use recycled paper.

Although I am proud of what we have accomplished, I am humbled by how much more could be done. I recently finished, "[Let my people go surfing: the education of a reluctant businessman](#)" by Yvon Chouinard, who started [Patagonia](#). His story is the epitome of the 3 Ps and has been very inspirational for me to read. His company provides paid maternity and paternity leave, as well as on-site day care at their headquarters. Patagonia commits to giving 1% of all sales to environmental causes every year and analyzes all their actions

for their carbon contributions.

As food for thought, consider the following: In the mid-nineties, Patagonia packaged long underwear with a cardboard insert and a plastic bag. By getting rid of the packaging, and simply rolling the underwear, and placing a rubber band around it, Patagonia avoided use of twelve tons of material that would have probably ended up in landfills, and saved

\$150,000 in costs to the company each year. Consider the benefit to our planet if all companies considered the impact of packaging.

Our business is service, not product, based and we are much smaller than Patagonia so our challenges are different. However, I am inspired by what can be accomplished when one constantly remembers that people and planet are part of your bottom line.

What does that mean ultimately for ACCES and the veterinary community? I think that we need to examine each of our growth opportunities, thinking not only about the impact on our financials but also about its impact on our staff and on the environment. We are in the process of forming a "Green Team" in our hospital to help us look at each area of the hospital and how we can minimize our impact on the planet. I'm not yet sure where these changes will lead us – I'll update you in a few months time. . .



Patagonia Founder Yvon Chouinard

Posted by **Christina Ryan** at February 17, 2009 6:05 p.m.

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