# JOURNEY FOR TEAMS 3.0

## THRIVE Transforming Workplace Dynamics

## GUIDEBOOK
## Leveraging Multigenerational Strengths

Building a healthy workplace culture that leverages generational diversity to foster belonging, growth, and collaboration

AVMA Our Passion. Our Profession.

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# WELCOME

This workbook was created as both a mirror and a guide. It shines a light on subtle and often overlooked cultural disruptors, behaviors, attitudes, and assumptions that influence the culture of a veterinary workplace. By presenting real-world scenarios and challenges, it encourages readers to pause, recognize, and name forces that undermine belonging and trust.

Each scenario and activity pairs awareness with practical approaches, offering tools that leaders and teams can immediately apply. The purpose is not to provide perfect answers but to model a process: noticing disruptions, examining their impact, and responding with strategies that strengthen collaboration, well-being, and respect. Think of this workbook as a working companion. Use it in team discussions, leadership development, onboarding, or self-reflection. Engage with it honestly, ask the hard questions it surfaces, and adapt the tools to fit your environment. When used intentionally, it can help teams move from identifying problems to building a culture where every member feels valued, supported, and empowered to contribute.

In this module, participants explore how age-related stereotypes and expectations may show up in everyday interactions-not to assign blame, but to understand their impact. By learning how ageism shows up at work and practicing strategies to address it, veterinary teams can move from awareness to leveraging the strengths of multigenerational workplaces, increasing belonging, trust, and collaboration amongst their team.

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Describe what ageism is, and how it may appear in patterns of thought or workplace decisions, actions, and policies
- Recognize how stereotypes and habits impact your sense of self, and how disrupting assumptions can lead to self-acceptance, professional fulfilment, and belonging
- Build connection and strengthen intergenerational bonds through the language you choose
- Foster mutual respect and knowledge sharing across all age groups in the workplace, supporting a Culture of Care with age-inclusive teams
- Collaboratively develop ways of working that ensure all generations have equitable access to growth, contribution, and visibility

**Disclaimers**

- All examples and case study scenarios are based on real situations, but names (including hospitals) are pseudonyms.
- The inclusion of resources does not imply or constitute an endorsement by the American Veterinary Medical Association or the Veterinary Medical Association Executives.

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

# 3Rs

In order to strengthen veterinary workplace culture, teams can: **recognize** both the strengths and the dynamics that shape their environment and experiences; **reconsider** approaches or assumptions that may no longer serve them, while identifying opportunities to build on what works; and **re-evaluate** everyday decisions in ways that reinforce systems of collaboration, well-being, and respect.

## 1 Recognize

**Strengths and dynamics shaping culture**

## 2 Reconsider

**Patterns and assumptions to build on what works**

## 3 Re-evaluate

**Choices to reinforce collaboration and respect**

# RECOGNIZE

## WHAT IS AGEISM?

**Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or ourselves based on age or perceived age** (World Health Organization, 2021)**.**

## WHAT DOES AGEISM LOOK & SOUND LIKE IN THE VETERINARY WORKPLACE?

Ageism often shows up in everyday interactions through subtle comments, coded language, and assumptions that reduce people to their age rather than their strengths and abilities. This can include: stereotypes about tech skills, energy, or career goals; or social exclusion from relationship-building opportunities like lunches or after-work events.

**Older workers might hear:**

"*Are you sure you can handle this new system?*" or be excluded from innovative projects.

**Younger workers might hear:**

"*You'll understand once you've been here long enough,*" "*You don't have the experience for that task,*" or "*You don't have the skills to lead this case,*" with their ideas being dismissed as unsophisticated.

## HOW DOES AGEISM IMPACT YOUR SENSE OF SELF?

People with positive self-perception of aging live an average of 7.5 years longer than those who have a negative relationship with age (Levy, 2022). This is attributed to a variety of factors:

1. Increased chronic stress about aging releases more stress hormones, which influence serious health outcomes.
2. Greater positivity about aging/life may align with a greater purpose.
3. Increased focus on "old age" may result in reduced healthy exercise and eating habits, and even reluctance to seek medical care.

Negative ideas about aging may also show up as decreased self-esteem or confidence; feelings of hopelessness or depression; neglecting self-care or in self-talk:

- "I'm too old to wear that."
- "I'm too old to learn this technology."
- "It's too late to start a new career."

# RECONSIDER

## SELF-ACCEPTANCE & EMPOWERMENT

Flip the narrative by countering the ageist stereotypes that you hold against yourself.

**For younger individuals:**

- *Recognize your preparation and skills:* Your recent training and fresh knowledge are valuable.
- *Leverage your perspective:* Maintain your adaptability, bring new ideas forward.
- *Show initiative:* Take on projects and ask questions that demonstrate your commitment to growth.
- *Build confidence through your actions:* Experience comes from engaging, not waiting—each new endeavor adds to your expertise, including work with local groups outside the workplace.
- *Cultivate supportive connections:* Seek mentors who see your strengths and can help expand your opportunities.

**For older individuals:**

- *Recognize your depth of experience:* Your years of practice bring valuable perspective and pattern-recognition.
- *Leverage your relationships and networks:* Long-standing professional connections open doors and strengthen collaboration.
- *Show adaptability:* Demonstrate your willingness to learn new approaches and technology.
- *Build confidence through wisdom:* Lived experience provides context and foresight.
- *Cultivate opportunities to mentor:* Share knowledge to strengthen the next generation and reinforce your own impact.

# RECONSIDER

## THE VETERINARY WORKPLACE STATUS QUO

Workplaces across all industries are experiencing something unprecedented: for the first time in modern workforce history, four to five generations are working together at once. Veterinary teams are uniquely positioned to benefit from this moment.

Across the veterinary profession, this means seasoned professionals, early-career veterinarians, students, and technicians all bring distinct strengths shaped by different eras of training, technology, and lived experience. In many workplaces, these strengths operate side-by-side rather than in partnership. Building awareness of how age-related assumptions and habits can limit this exchange allows teams to more intentionally share insights, learn from one another, and tap into the full value of the multigenerational veterinary team.

**Become a positive disruptor:** Strengthening culture often means rethinking age-based hierarchies and assumptions. Cultural changemakers foster inclusion by questioning the status quo, raising thoughtful questions, and modeling behaviors that help everyone contribute fully. They may notice gaps, speak up when opportunities are overlooked, and suggest ways to broaden participation. These actions encourage reflection and shift workplaces from "we've always done it this way" toward "we can do this better." While hesitation or discomfort may arise, these moments are signs of growth and opportunities for learning.

***Practice Care-Filled Responses*** *offers tools for navigating such moments with respect and inclusion.*

## RE-EVALUATE

### 10-MINUTE CASE STUDY

*Read through the case study independently, or in pairs, and reflect on the discussion questions. Once all groups complete their review, discuss your thoughts and answers with the whole team.*

Valley Animal Hospital was struggling with high turnover and low morale. Due to staffing shortages, the practice divided out their assignments: veterinarians and techs aged 40-60+ that had been with the practice for many years handled cases from 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday. Veterinarians and techs who were newer to the practice and younger switched between 4pm-2am or 7pm-7am, Tuesday to Saturday. After two months of this new schedule, older staff began to feel that there was less opportunity for skill growth with daily routine cases. Younger staff felt that their energy was being taking advantage of—that they were made to sacrifice more work-life balance with this new schedule.

### BREAKING POINT

After month three, dissatisfaction about the new schedule was raised at the monthly clinic leadership meeting. One leader brought forward the concerns from the younger staff, to which some leaders bemoaned the lack of work ethic amongst new generations. This was the first meeting for the new practice manager.

The office administrator noted that some clients had moved their appointments between 9-5 to see the "more experienced" older veterinarians, or for the reassurance that a younger veterinarian would have oversight during those hours. There were comparatively fewer bookings for appointments between 5-8pm under the new schedule, typically a favorite time slot for busy clients.

### SENSE MAKING

This scenario illustrates:

- Reduced opportunities for mentorship and collaboration
- Expertise of all staff being devalued
- Workplace division amongst staff and colleagues
- Unclear and / or unsafe pathways for staff to address discrimination

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*(5 minutes)*

- What assumptions are at play in this case?
- If you were a manager at this practice, what might you do?
- What have you seen or experienced in your own workplace that may relate to this case study?

## RE-EVALUATE

### 10-MINUTE CASE STUDY

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### SOLUTION & APPROACH

The new manager recognized the age-based divisions and swiftly implemented cross-generational mentoring pairs that would rotate shifts Monday-Saturday on a pre-scheduled basis. Other age-diverse pairs, from all divisions of the animal hospital, were formed across the practice. All staff were trained to recognize and respond to ageism from clients by verbally reinforcing a staff member's qualifications, skills, and successes.

### RESULTS

Within six months, employee satisfaction scores improved 40%. Turnover dropped from 35% to 12%. Most importantly, patient care improved as teams combined knowledge, mentorship, and approaches. Client satisfaction improved as the clinic team promoted younger staff when client bias was identified.

### KEY TAKEAWAY

**Age diversity became the practice's competitive advantage, rather than a source of division.**

# RE-EVALUATE

## 10-MINUTE TEAM EXERCISE

*This exercise will help you practice interrupting biases and creating systemic change. Choose the scenario that best fits your workplace, discuss in a small group, then debrief as a larger team.*

### SCENARIO A:
Confronting Hiring Bias

Your veterinary clinic is short-staffed and needs a vet tech to be hired quickly. After posting the position, you receive very few applications. During a team meeting about next steps, you hear the hiring manager say, *"I don't want to hire someone older. They probably can't handle our computer systems or keep up with our fast pace. Honestly, I'm not sure they'd be able to move around quickly enough for what we need."*

### SCENARIO B:
The Project Assignment

Your veterinary hospital is launching a new electronic medical records system. During the implementation planning meeting, you hear the project manager say, "*Let's put Jessica and Hamza on the training team. They're younger vet techs, digital natives, and 'get' technology. We should probably keep the older vet techs on regular animal care and client education since this digital system might be too much for them, especially in the beginning. They definitely don't have the skills to help with tech training. Also, Dr. Martinez is probably thinking about retirement soon anyway, so why invest the training time?*"

**1. Small Group Discussion** *(6 minutes total, 3-5 team members per group)*

**Round 1** Bias Identification *(2 minutes)*
- What specific assumptions is the manager making?
- How do these assumptions connect ageism with ableism?
- What legitimate job requirements are being confused with stereotypes?

**Round 2** Real-Time Response *(2 minutes)*
- What would you say in that moment to challenge this bias?
- How might you reframe the conversation toward actual job skills?
- What questions might you ask to expose the biased thinking?

**Round 3** System Solutions *(2 minutes)*
- What hiring practices might prevent this bias?
- How would you restructure conversations to focus on abilities, not assumptions?
- What accountability measures might you implement?

**2. Full Team Debrief** *(2 minutes)*

Each small group shares one key insight and one concrete action step.

# RE-EVALUATE

## 6-MINUTE SELF-REFLECTION

*The following questions will help illuminate your own thoughts and feelings, as well as the norms at your place of work. Sharing your answers as a team is welcome and entirely optional.*

1. What age-related assumptions do I hold about my colleagues' abilities or potential?

2. When did I last learn something valuable from someone significantly older or younger than me? How did that impact me? How did I share my thanks with that person?

3. How might my veterinary workplace function differently if we valued people's contributions without letting age influence our expectations or decisions?

4. How might I interrupt my own ageism bias?

5. What steps might I take to mitigate internalized ageism?

**EXPLORE MORE**

Did you know that ageism bias is present in AI systems?

AI-generated photographs of "beautiful" women tend to repeat these 6 traits: thin, lighter skin, smooth skin, heavy make-up, designer clothes, and *youthful.*

Learn more in this Washington Post article:
**What AI thinks a beautiful woman looks like**

# CPR

Building a healthy veterinary workplace culture takes intention, effort, and practice. This section will help you identify actionable ways you can strengthen collaboration and inclusion individually or as a team using these three steps:

## 1 Cultivate Connection

**Practical ways to deepen trust, respect, and teamwork**

## 2 Practice Care-Filled Responses

**Proactive language and actions that encourage growth and mutual understanding**

## 3 Reinforce What Matters

**Tools and resources that sustain values, celebrate strengths, and support ongoing learning**

# CULTIVATE CONNECTION

## FORGING AHEAD AS A TEAM

*These actionable steps can help shift veterinary workplaces from a culture of tolerance to one of engagement and care. By doing so, we move closer to an environment that supports and strengthens the sense of value and connection across all members of the team.*

### 1 Implement cross-generational learning programs

Create formal mentoring pairs/reverse mentoring, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), and/or shadow board opportunities where vet techs, veterinarians, kennel workers, HR, IT, Finance, administration, and others of different ages teach each other skills, from clinical techniques to new technologies, fostering mutual respect and knowledge sharing. Rotating pairs at meetings can help expand relationships.

### 2 Establish age-inclusive teams

When assigning projects, training initiatives, speaking opportunities, or committee roles, focus on skills and interests rather than age-based assumptions. At the same time, be intentional about avoiding patterns that sideline certain age groups. By actively creating opportunities that include a mix of experience levels, teams can ensure all generations have equitable access to growth, contribution, and visibility.

### 3 Establish connection-building accountability

Encourage all staff to actively reach out across age groups to create multi-generational relationships, seek diverse perspectives in decision-making, and speak up when they notice age-based exclusion, making everyone responsible for strengthening intergenerational bonds.

# CULTIVATE CONNECTION

## MINDING YOUR LANGUAGE

*Be conscious of how your words impact others in the workplace. Many words and phrases commonly used in casual and business communication can be hurtful or reveal ignorance of other meanings, biased stereotypes, and lived human experiences. Using non-inclusive words can lead to "othering" or an "us vs. them" mentality.*

*Some suggested words to watch are outlined below. Practice substituting words that "other" with words that connect. Be kind to yourself in the process. If in your quest for change you misspeak, apologize and move on. Don't dwell on your mistake or expect absolution, accommodation, or forgiveness from others. This practical action can make a big difference in improving personal connections in the workplace.*

| WORDS THAT "OTHER" | WORDS THAT CONNECT |
|---|---|
| Avoid these common age-related terms:<br><br>Ancient, baby, biddy, blue-hair, Boomer/Gen Z (and all generational terms), brat, codger, coot, crone, dinosaur, elderly, failure to launch, geezer, geriatric (outside of medical use), gold-digger, jailbait, senior, elderly, "the aged," man-child, old fogey, "the old man," old-old, queen bee, senior, senior citizens, "senior moment," silver tsunami, spinster, youths | The following age-related terms are preferred by the American Medical Association, American Psychological Association, Associated Press, and the Gerontological Society of America:<br><br>Stating age directly, older person, older adults, young adults, younger people<br><br>Note:<br>If a study includes a specific age range of participants, it is acceptable to list the exact ages, such as "ages 74 to 82." |

**EXPLORE MORE**

More specific information can be found in this online article:

Age-Inclusive Language: Are you using it in your writing and everyday speech?

# PRACTICE CARE-FILLED RESPONSES

## REALIGNING RESISTANCE

*During the Thrive course, you may feel resistance internally, encounter it from fellow team members, or both.*

*What kinds of objections or rejections, internal or external, might you anticipate? How might you respond? First, pause to listen with curiosity, then consider if a care-filled response is needed. The following information may help.*

| DEFENSIVE STATEMENT | CARE-FILLED RESPONSE |
|---|---|
| **This role requires younger energy.** | Let's focus on the skills the role needs. Stamina, energy and enthusiasm can be found at all ages. |
| **It's ok to call out people by their generational terms. Everyone does it.** | Generational terms are built on assumptions and stereotypes. When we use those terms, it sets up "othering" and an "us vs. them" or "in-group vs. out-group" mentality. Let's make an agreement to stop using generational terms. They're hurtful. Let's discuss people as individuals, not stereotypes. |
| **But older workers are expensive, due to benefits and salaries.** | Let's look at the experience they could bring us, in addition to expertise with our mentoring program. I think it's a win-win. Plus, many studies show increased profitability with a multigenerational workplace. |
| **They're not a fit with our culture.** | What aspects of our culture are you concerned about? I believe that age-inclusive workplaces can bring diversity of thought and shared perspectives. |
| **I'm just being realistic about technology skills.** | Let's assess current tech skills, rather than assume based on age. You just might be surprised. |
| **Those younger workers just don't have a good work ethic.** | Let's evaluate everyone here based on their demonstrated skills and work production. It's not fair to group everyone of the same age together and make assumptions. |

# REINFORCE WHAT MATTERS

## CONTINUED LEARNING

*These recommended resources are excellent tools for learning more.*

### VODCASTS

Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) on Ageism
with guest speaker Shari Collins

### ONLINE ARTICLES

Mentorship and the Value of a Multigenerational Workforce
by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP.org)

Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce
by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD.org)

### BLOGS

The Harm of Workplace Labeling: How Generational Stereotypes Hold Us Back
by Work Institute

### BOOKS

*This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism* by Ashton Applewhite

*Breaking the Age Code: How Your Beliefs About Aging Determine How Well and How Long You Live* by Becca Levy, PhD

### FACT SHEETS

Skills Across Generations: The Realities of Younger and Older Workers
by the National Skills Coalition

# Leveraging Multigenerational Strengths

INSIGHTS & ACTIONS TO BUILD A CULTURE OF CARE

## STRENGTH IN EVERY AGE

Age-inclusive workplaces allow people of all ages to contribute their best. Modeling a culture of psychological safety is essential.

## SMALL, DAILY ACTIONS CREATE BIG CULTURAL CHANGE

The culture of a workplace can shift when everyone takes small actions every day like using inclusive language, building cross-generational connections, and by challenging age-based assumptions when you hear them.

## AGE DIVERSITY DRIVES INNOVATION & PERFORMANCE

Organizations that successfully blend generational perspectives retain talent longer, make better decisions, and solve problems more creatively than non age-inclusive teams.

## BREAKING AGE BARRIERS TOGETHER

When teams engage in cross-generational collaboration they strengthen institutional memory. Together, they can make decisions that honor what has worked in the past while responding to what the present moment requires.



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