CONFIDENCE LOW AMONG VETS AND VNs – REPORT

A CRISIS of confidence is having a negative impact on the self-belief and well-being of veterinary teams, research has found.

The Veterinary Wellbeing Benchmark Report 2018 found veterinary teams suffer from an acute lack of belief compared to those in other sectors, including banking, the NHS, civil service and police.

Engage Coach International, which produced the report, analysed 518 employees from 12 practices that had won – or were highly commended – in the SPVS Wellbeing Awards 2016, in partnership with the RCVS Mind Matters Initiative.

Lack of self-belief and being less confident in social settings affected vets and the entire supporting team, including veterinary nurses and receptionists, the report said.

Employees within the veterinary sector were also found to be “quite cynical” when it came to the benefits of development compared to colleagues in other sectors.

Vets with low self-esteem are more likely to experience stress, the report said. As a result, such individuals often prefer working in smaller, more familiar surroundings, are less open to feedback and new ways of doing things, and have a more rigid approach to work.

They are also less inclined to put discretionary effort and generally feel less successful than those in other industries.

Elsewhere in the study, 92 per cent of respondents reported they have experienced stress and pressure from work relationships – in the form of unacceptable behaviour, conflict, bullying, lack of fairness, or a lack of systems, policies and procedures in place to sufficiently deal with such issues.

Vets’ resilience and ability to cope with pressure appeared to dip between the ages of 45 and 55. This group was also found to be more resistant to change, which could have significant consequences for well-being and growth.

However, these dynamics can be improved, according to Jodi O’Dell, psychologist and founder of Engage Coach International.

She said: “With the right support and development opportunities, self-confidence is something we can strengthen.

“When we build self-confidence, this increases our resilience to deal with pressure at work. The benefits to well-being cannot be underestimated.

“Our findings are really encouraging, as they demonstrate when practices address stress at source in parallel to empowering their teams to develop, this drives engagement, improves retention and has a positive impact on well-being.”

Vet nurses’ self-confidence was the lowest of all team members. In contrast, receptionists and the wider support team were more open to change, and had higher confidence, motivation and commitment levels.

Vets appeared to be less engaged, less open and felt they were having less impact overall, the report found.

The survey also put gender differences under the spotlight.

Female vets scored lower in self-belief, emotional commitment and external awareness compared to their male counterparts, but were ahead when it came to empathy and interpersonal skills.

92% of respondents have experienced stress and pressure from work relationships.

“Staff in veterinary practice are dealing with complex and uncertain situations on a regular basis, and we need to recognise this is the nature of our work – not a reflection on our ability.

“It is interesting staff in larger businesses scored higher. This may be because these businesses have more resources to support well-being, but it could also be staff have more opportunity to talk about their work and realise they are not alone.

“If this report helps raise the issue of self-confidence and encourage wider conversations about it, that alone would be very beneficial.

“SPVS knows many practices are experiencing difficulty recruiting veterinary surgeons, so it is vital we understand all the factors that may cause veterinary surgeons in particular to become disillusioned and leave the profession. We will be contributing to ongoing research in this area.”

Well-being guide

A lack of self-confidence, and traits such as imposter syndrome, are often associated with intelligent people working in high-pressure environments, according to Lizzie Lockett, director of the RCVS Mind Matters Initiative.

She said: “The good news is it is possible to change your set of beliefs. Techniques, such as mindfulness, can help people cope with the ever-increasing demands of life, and our recently published Mind Matters guide helps practices bolster their team’s well-being.

“Mind Matters is also running a session on changing mindset at BSAVA Congress.”