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WORDS THAT WORK

**Compassionate cancer-care communication
across the client journey**

BVA-Birmingham, June 2026. Dr. Roeland Wessels, St. Anna Advies B.V.



DISCLAIMER

In the upcoming time I'm not telling you the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It's just my personal and professional perception of things and some crazy ideas I'd like to share with you. Please feel free to disagree or have a different opinion.

I don't take any responsibility or liability for adverse, allergic or anaphylactic reactions in your brain, body or behavior, nor am I responsible for any feelings of inspiration, motivation or joy. You're participating totally on your own risk.

Good luck!

My apologies in advance for my straight-forward-approach and directness. I'm sorry...I'm Dutch

All my presentations are 100% eco-friendly and sustainable. No animals were harmed during the preparation of this presentation. Besides Rainforest Alliance certified coffee, only solar power is used in the production process.





ROELAND WESSELS, DVM





C.A. CLINIC ST. ANNA NIJMEGEN NETHERLANDS





VETERINARY COMMUNICATION CONSULTANCY



st.anna
advies
Human skills in animal health



VETERINARY COMMUNICATION CONSULTANCY





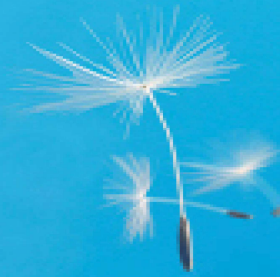
Universiteit Utrecht



UNIVERSITEIT
GENT



UNIVERSITY TEACHER IN PRACTICE COMMUNICATION



Roeland Wessels
Theo Lam
Jolanda Jansen

COMMUN IN PRAC

THE VET'S MANUAL ON CLI



COOK BOOK

30 recipes for the
veterinary practice



- ⇒ Roeland Wessels
- ⇒ Mark Huis in 't Veld
- ⇒ Danse Sonneveld
- ⇒ Tessa Plagis

for clienthusiasm

TAILS OF TERROR

Practical communication solutions for
challenging situations in veterinary practice



Jolanda Jansen, Roeland Wessels en Theo Lam
Edited by Tessa Plagis

POSITION OF THE ANIMAL CHANGES



1926



2026

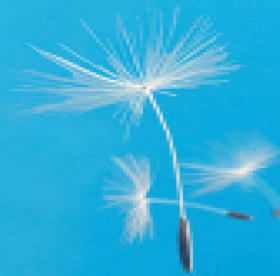


THE VETERINARY PROFESSION CHANGES



**PILLS, SHOTS &
SURGERY**

**HEALTH &
HAPPINESS**



THE VETERINARY PROFESSION CHANGES



ILLNESS

WELLNESS



WHAT'S OUR FUTURE ROLE?



**PROBLEM
SOLVER**



**PREVENTION
SUPPLIER**



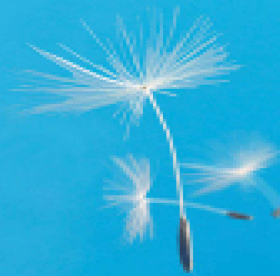
WHAT'S OUR FUTURE ROLE?



**REACTIVE
MINDSET**



**CREATIVE
MINDSET**



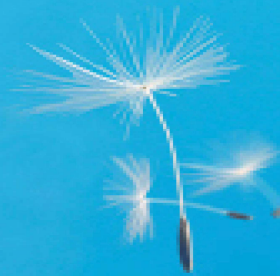
WHAT'S OUR FUTURE ROLE?



**REACTIVE
MINDSET**



**CREATIVE
MINDSET**



WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

EXPERIENCE $>$ EXPECTATION =



EXPERIENCE \approx EXPECTATION =



EXPERIENCE $<$ EXPECTATION =



HOW DO PET-OWNERS REACT?

When their

We felt that something was wrong with Socks. While this is difficult, it is a relief to

kid

If there are any treatment options available, we would like to pursue them. Socks means a lot to us and de

When their

We suspected that something was wrong with Socks. Deep

ade

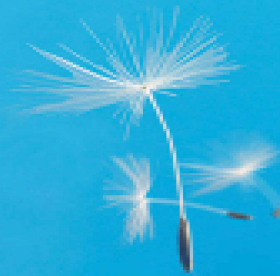
*We have already discussed this as a family and decided that if it turns out to be **cancer**, we do not want Socks to go through a prolonged period of suffering*



EXPECTATION MANAGEMENT = KEY



COMMUNICATION = KEY

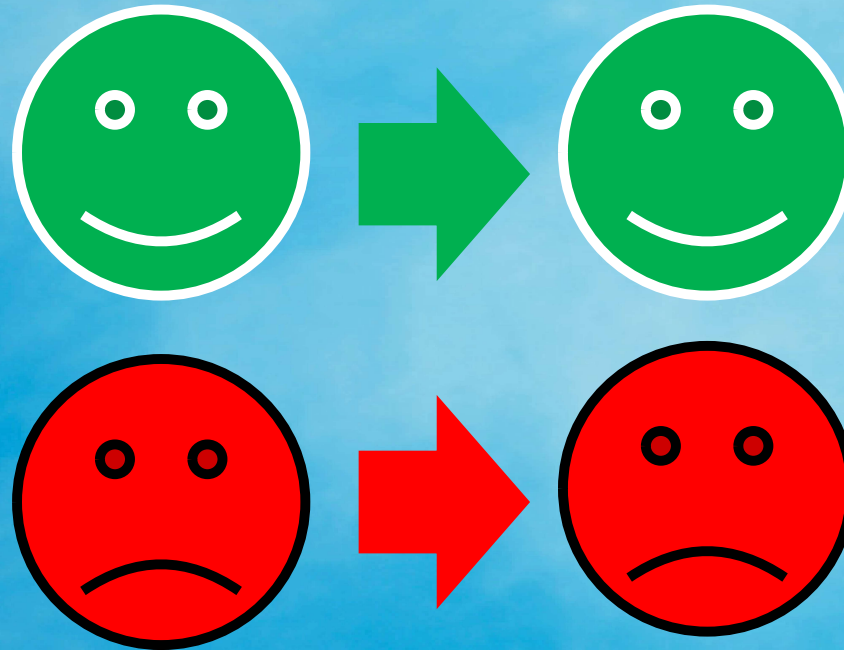


Proprietar-Proprietary

TWO IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES



RECIPROCITY PRINCIPLE



What you give, is what you'll get...



PARETO PRINCIPLE



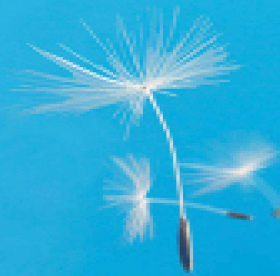
The "80-20 rule"



PARETO PRINCIPLE

SELECTIVE PERCEPTION

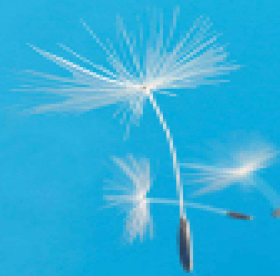
You see what you want to see...
You hear what you want to hear...
You feel what you want to feel...



PARETO PRINCIPLE

REPETITION
REPETITION
REPETITION

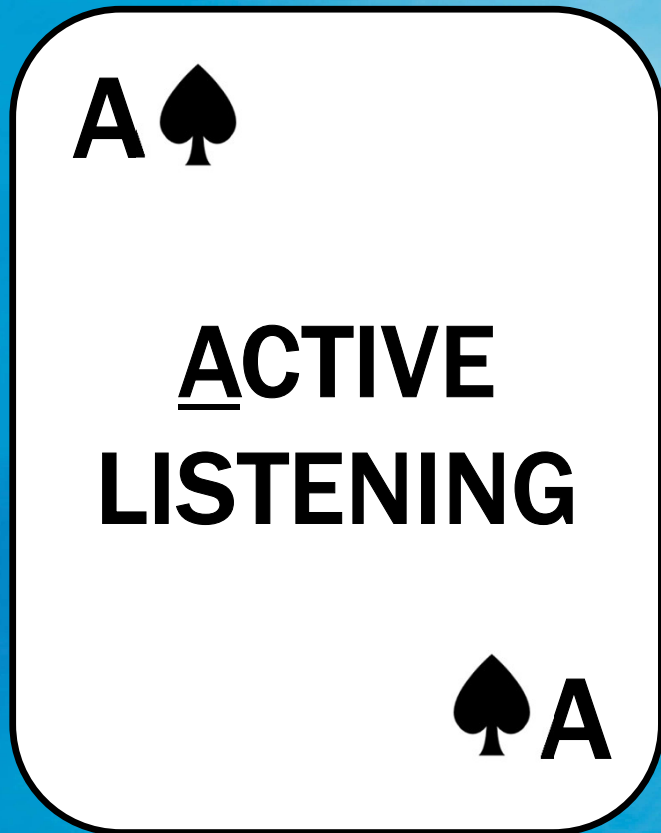
Repetition is the mother of all learning



FOUR IMPORTANT 'ACES'



REALLY, REALLY LISTEN



Not listening

Pretending

Selective



ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

A 

**ASKING
QUESTIONS**

 **A**

**OPEN ENDED
QUESTIONS**

**CLOSED ENDED
QUESTIONS**

**SUGGESTIVE
QUESTIONS**

**'SCALING'-
QUESTIONS**



ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

A ♦

ASKING
QUESTIONS

♦ A

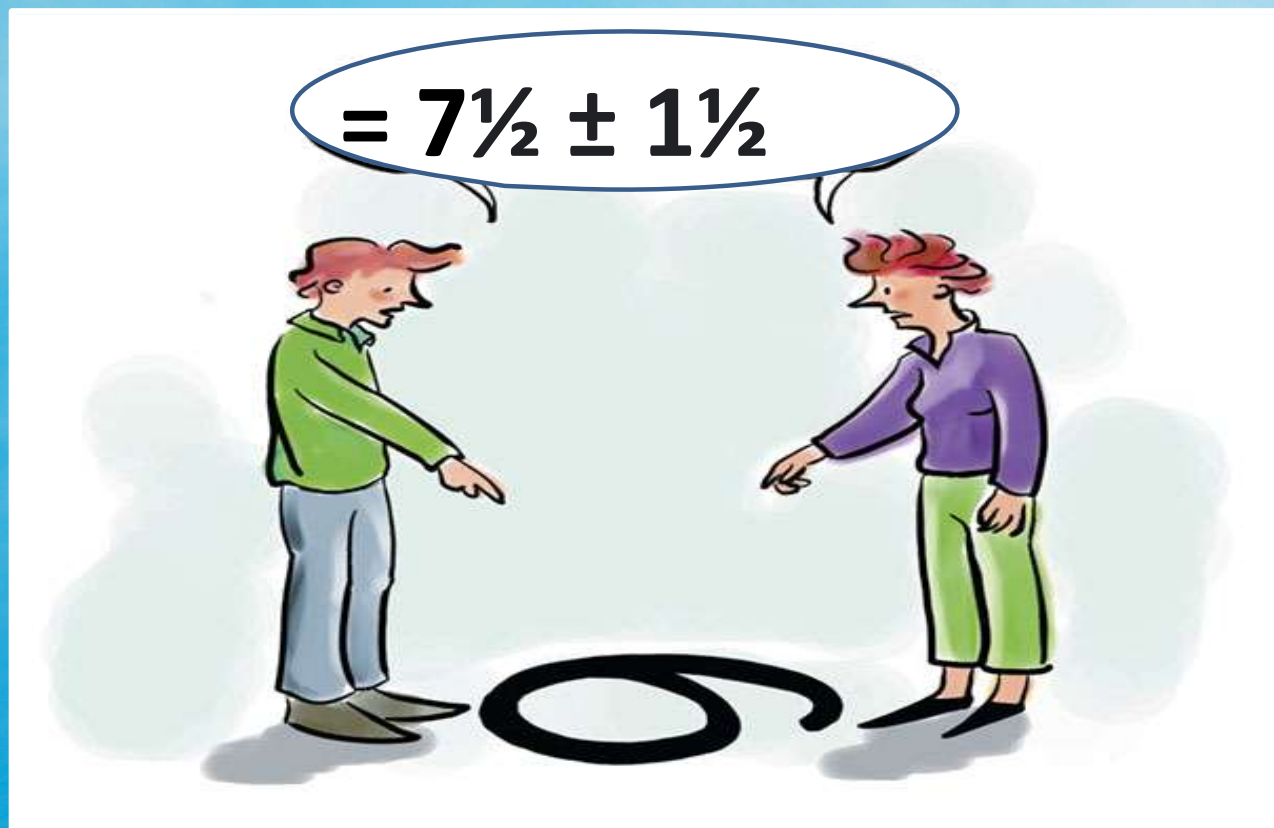
For most vet professionals
giving the right answers
is easier then asking
the right questions...

DEBATE OR DIALOGUE?

A♣

ADJUST TO
THE OTHER

♣A



TRY TO BE NICE, EMPATHIC & CLEAR

A ♥

ALWAYS BE
N.E.C. 😊

♥ A



IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

A ♠

ACTIV
LISTENI

A ♦

ASKIN
QUESTIO

A ♣

ADJUST
THE OTH

A ♥

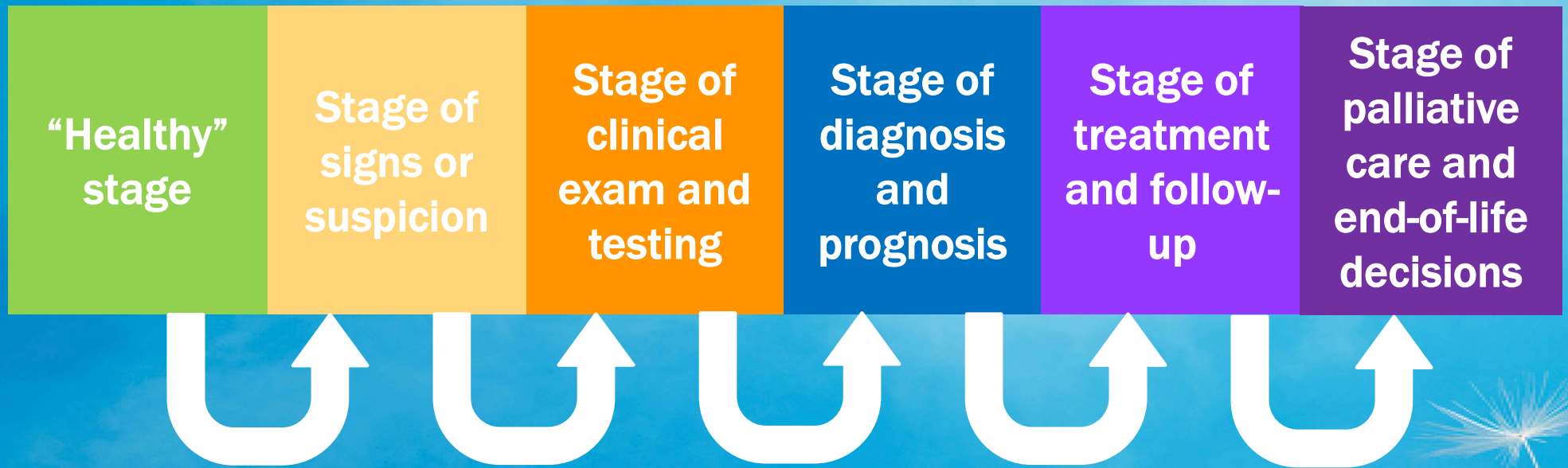
ALWAYS BE
N.E.C. 😊

♥ A

COMPASSIONATE CANCER-CARE COMMUNICATION



COMMUNICATION IN DIFFERENT STAGES



Focus communication on one stage ahead



YEARLY HEALTH CHECK

“Healthy”
stage

We know that most dogs of this breed eventually die from cancer. If not detected in time your dog could die. If you notice anything unusual, please let us know.

YEARLY HEALTH CHECK

“Healthy”
stage

We both want Bruno to remain healthy and fit for many years to come. To achieve that, I need your help. May I tell you more about the situations in which you should contact us?

START WITH CONNECTION, END WITH A QUESTION

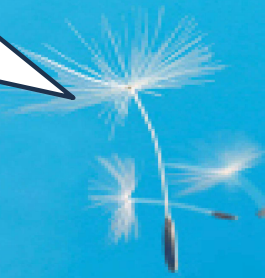
“Healthy”
stage

***We both** want Bruno to remain healthy and fit for many years to come. To achieve that, **I need your help. May I tell you** more about the situations in which you should contact us?*

”WE FOUND A LUMP...”

Stage of
signs or
suspicion

*... that's a strange lump. It
could be cancer. We would
need to perform further tests to
find out. The question is
whether you would want to put
your dog through that.*



“WE FOUND A LUMP”

Stage of
signs or
suspicion

I'm glad you noticed this. To find out exactly what is going on, the best next step would be to perform a XYZ-test. This will help us gather more information about the lump and decide what, if any, further action is needed. How does that sound to you?

START WITH CONNECTION, END WITH A QUESTION

But

Can

*I understand your concerns, because you want answers just as much as I do. That's why it is important that **we** carry out this test. Let's wait for the results **together** and see what they tell **us**. In the meantime, **is there anything I can do to help ease your worries or answer any questions you may have now?***

IT'S A MALIGNANT TUMOR!

Stage of
diagnosis
and
prognosis

1) DELIVERING BAD / SAD NEWS

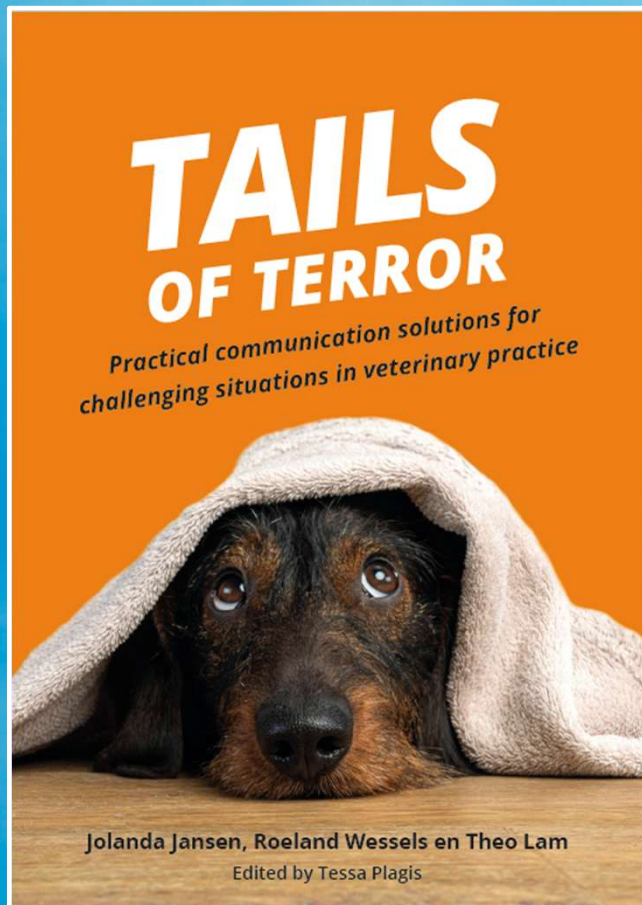
2) ANTICIPATING ON FIRST REACTION

3) EXPLORING NEXT STEPS



DELIVERING BAD / SAD NEWS

Stage of
diagnosis
and
prognosis



Communicate in a
N.E.C.-way...

Be SILENT

...and LISTEN!

..seek connection
and ask question

AS WE NOW KNOW OF THIS TUMOR...

Stage of
treatment
and follow-
up

What initial questions do you

To explore our options, may I

What is the most important to

What other things are also

What other things are also

*What other things are also
important to take into account?*



FILLING THE VALUE MATRIX!

Dr. Jason Coe, DVM, PhD et al.

**Relationship-Centered Veterinary Medicine
Ontario Veterinary College, Canada**

Watch the YouTube video!



FILLING THE VALUE MATRIX!

The Value Matrix is a visual aid designed to support Shared Decision-Making (SDM) and the practice of Spectrum of Care (SoC) in veterinary medicine. The tool enables veterinarians to present complex options to clients in a simple graphic that outlines the advantages, disadvantages and costs associated with each option.



FILLING THE **PRICE** MATRIX!

	Costs
Option A	100
Option B	250
Option C	1000



FILLING THE VALUE MATRIX!

	Patent #1	Client #1	Client benefit #2	Costs
Option A	CONTEXTUALIZED CARE			100
	ILLNESS		WELLNESS	
Option B	SHARED DECISION MAKING			50
Option C				1000



PLEASE, USE YOUR 'ACES'

A ♠

ACTIV

A ♦

ASKIN

A ♣

ADJUST

A ♥

ALWAYS BE

START WITH CONNECTION...
END WITH A QUESTION!

CONTACT IDEXX OR ME



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