

Good Veterinary Workplaces: Taking action

That's not OK – how do we handle racism, discrimination, and unacceptable behaviour?

Thank you for being involved in the most recent 'Good Veterinary Workplaces – Taking Action' webinar.

You are well on your way to knowing how best to approach change in your practice, however big or small. We hope you found the talks useful, inspirational, and interesting.

We want you to be able to take something from each talk and put it into action, even if it is just a slightly different mindset or viewpoint that helps in the future. So, along with the help of the speakers you saw earlier, we have put together some bits and pieces to bookend your experience.

There are some feedback questions too, so [please complete](#) the survey if you would like to see anything done differently next time – these sessions are led by, and created for, the veterinary community, so we value your input.

Speaker messages and take-home points

Thoughts from Dr Navaratnam Partheeban (Theeb)

- Theeb gave an example of a racist incident he had encountered on a farm callout, whereby a client used horrific racist and sexist language in a casual manner.
- Whilst this was an extreme example, Theeb pointed out that it is often the microaggressions in day-to-day experience that very much count and grate on you.
- Theeb didn't call the behaviour out immediately and went on to discuss how calling things out at the time is not always the most productive way to resolve these incidents. It can often feel scary and intimidating at the time. There is also the possibility that you would want to reflect on the situation to process it and think about whether you can challenge it on your own or if you need to find allies.
- Taking your time doesn't mean you will 'miss the boat' and lose an opportunity to air concerns - there is always time to explain your grievances and recorrect unacceptable behaviour.
- If you work with some trusted people, it can be good to discuss any incidents with them, work through resolutions together and explore more than one way of handling a scenario.
- When Daniella asked, 'What does good look like?' in relation to responding to a discriminatory situation, Theeb advised:
 - For those in management positions, **be aware that this happens** - educate yourselves on what it looks like when discriminative behaviour occurs.
 - Create an environment **where people can come to you** when something is wrong.
 - **Don't dismiss issues** when brought to you - acknowledge them and make people feel safe if they come to you, as you will lose trust if you cut them off or appear reductive.
 - **Don't put all resolution ideas with victim** - work with them but ask what their comfort levels are.
 - You need to create an environment where **team can support other colleagues** and say why things are uncomfortable if there are issues.

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- There should be a **confidential reporting mechanism** to assist with any examples of unacceptable behaviour both in work and from clients.
- If you are a witness to an unacceptable or discriminatory incident, use it as an opportunity to learn. It's ok if you don't do anything immediately but do tell the victim you didn't agree with that or think it was right. You can ask what you should do better, make sure you support them and any further action and emphasise that you are happy to back up their report.
- Finally, compassion and empathy are the most important thing when dealing with intolerable behaviour towards a colleague.

Thoughts from Daniella Dos Santos

- It's worth highlighting that what Theeb described is a fairly recent incident. Racism is still very much apparent (as is all discrimination). Whilst certain aspects have improved, we have a long way to go and everyone needs to take responsibility and not be in denial about these unacceptable situations occurring.
- It became clear through the conversation that there is no 'right way' to respond, and it can feel surprising to not respond how you might imagine. As Theeb highlighted above, it's OK to process and reflect, but it's never too late to bring it up with management or colleagues when you feel ready.
- For businesses, get the policies in place for dealing with these issues before they become a problem, don't just be reactive when a problem arises.
- Overt issues are easier to deflect, the minimal examples are harder to react to so treat yourself and colleagues with kindness when microaggressions are mentioned, and educate yourself and the team on what they can look like.

Additional information

You can read Dr Navaratnam Partheeban's blog on microaggressions [here](#).

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Don't forget, we are having a summer break, but our next and **final** Taking Action webinar is at **1pm on Wednesday, September 13th on the topic of recruitment and retention. Register [here](#).**

Click for more guidance around [BVA's Good Veterinary Workplace campaign](#), and of course if you are interested in becoming a BVA member, which gets you full access to the resources mentioned, then do check out different membership options: <https://www.bva.co.uk/join/>