Dealing with a bad-attitude boss

Although your boss sets the tone, you’re still responsible for your own attitude, says Dr. Karen E. Felsted, CPA, MS, CVPM, a consultant with Brakke Consulting in Dallas. “You only hurt yourself by becoming like the person with the chip on his or her shoulder,” Dr. Felsted says.

“You, your clients, and your coworkers will all feel better when you strive to maintain a positive attitude, despite the negative leadership. I know it’s hard to be cheery when you’re constantly battered by bad vibes, but the results are worth the effort.”

How can you stay positive around a negative boss? Dr. Felsted, a Veterinary Economics Editorial Advisory Board member, says to analyze your job, find the things you really like about it, then focus on them.

Of course, you should also consider what you can do to improve your situation, Dr. Felsted says. “Your success in changing your boss’s attitude depends on two main variables,” she says. “First, what is your boss’s personality? If he or she is basically a decent person but always grumping around, you’ll have more luck than you will with someone who’s hard-nosed and not good at listening. Second, your age, maturity, and work history at the practice will affect whether you’ll be able to approach the owner effectively.”

If you aren’t comfortable approaching your boss, you could talk to the office manager, if the practice has one, Dr. Felsted says. “I recommend saying, ‘This situation is really draining. I’m uncomfortable talking to the owner. Can you help?’ ” she says.

Another approach: Think about where your boss is coming from. For instance, is there a certain task, situation, or busy time of the month in which he or she gets more cranky? “Try to watch for these fluctuations and steer clear when the boss is in a bad mood,” Dr. Felsted says.

“A good part of getting along with people is knowing when to approach them—and knowing when to leave well enough alone. You could even ask your boss when and how he or she would prefer for you to bring up any issues you’d like to discuss. These simple steps may greatly improve your work life.”

The bottom line: You may have to leave if your leader is unwilling to change and you can’t learn to make the best of your work situation. “Ask yourself, ‘Am I better off with or without this practice?’ ” she says. “If the rest of the practice is great and you can get over this issue, great. If not, it’s probably time to move on.”

—By Sarah A. Moser, Associate Editor