Client retention is one of the most important components to a successful practice. As an industry, we devote a lot of time and money seeking new clients, and spend relatively little trying to keep existing clients. Every veterinary practice needs to know not only how to attract new clients, but also how to keep them for life, so they come back year after year, and pet after pet.

So what are the secrets to keeping your clients for life? Actually, a lasting client-doctor relationship is similar to a lasting friendship. So what is it about our long-term friends that make them friends for life? Why is it that even if you haven’t seen or talked with your friends in awhile, when you finally reconnect, it feels like no time has passed and your friendship is the same as it always has been. That's the type of relationship you want with your clients. Whether you see them once a year or more often, every visit should feel the way it feels when you’re with an old friend.

So what are the elements of a lasting friendship?

1. **Bond**
   The foundation to a good relationship is a strong bond. Take time to get to know your clients and develop a relationship. Find out about your clients. Ask about their human family, their hobbies, where they come from, etc. You might find out you have a lot in common with your clients if you take the time to get to know them.

2. **Trust**
   Trust is essential to all good relationships. Whether it's a friendship, marriage, or business relationship, trust is essential. Always be honest and admit any mistakes. It may not be easy to admit our mistakes, but by doing so, you are showing your clients that you care about honesty and value it above all else. In the end, most clients will respect and trust you.

3. **Reliable**
   Be there for your clients when they need you. Return their calls and emails in a timely fashion. No one likes to be ignored and clients are no different. It’s also important to be there for your clients during hard times. Make sure you reach out to your clients when they are dealing with family tragedies, and of course, when they lose a beloved animal friend. Just like long-term friends, clients will appreciate knowing that you are thinking of them during their time of need.

4. **Respect and feeling cared**
   Most good relationships are built on mutual respect. The same is true for doctor-client relationships. It’s important that you and your entire staff treat all your clients with respect. This starts the minute they call the clinic for an appointment, and continues until they leave the clinic. Likewise, make sure your clients know that you care about them. Send thank you notes to new clients, thank clients for their feedback and reviews, and communicate with your clients multiple times throughout the year so they know you are thinking about them and haven't forgotten them.

5. **Communication**
   Friends are people you can talk to and get advice from. Clients, like friends, need to feel that you are someone they can talk to and communicate their needs with. Just like people want their friends to be able to listen, they also want them to be able to communicate clearly and effectively. And obviously its imperative you speak the same language in order to be close to someone. The same holds true of good client-doctor relationships. You need to speak in a language you're your clients will understand and skip the detailed medical jargon.