

VetPartners Board Policy on Receiving Gifts

Adopted September 2007 by the Board of Directors

- *The VetPartners Board and Committee members do not accept material gifts from companies that serve the veterinary community.*
- *Sponsors and other companies are asked not to distribute gifts to VetPartners Officials, nor to members as a group.*
- *If or when gifts are received, the company shall immediately (within 1 week) be informed of the policy by the VetPartners President.*

Background:

The VETPARTNERS Board and Committees have received material annual gifts from various companies. Many Board members are uncomfortable with receiving these gifts. At least one past and one current Board member have asked certain companies to stop sending gifts.

The VETPARTNERS vision is for “excellence in ethics,” and our strategic plan says that we are innovators in veterinary medicine. Innovation means that we step forward before others might, and excellence means that we hold out for the highest ideals.

There is increasing concern among customers of human health care about the influence of various companies, on health care providers regarding the decisions made for their patients and/or customers. Our customers and their clients (veterinarians and the pet owners they serve) need to know that we provide our consulting services with the highest integrity.

Whether or not we are actually influenced, the receipt of gifts is not as relevant as the fact that it allows for the perception of such influence. That perception tarnishes our ability to provide the most trusted service possible. As innovators, we should not wait for pressures and protests from others or in other industries to take a clear and ethical stand. The human medical community has adopted policies on a widespread basis after considerable outcry from health-care consumers. The same is true in the educational lending arena. As innovators, we have the opportunity to adopt this no-gift policy *not* as a reaction, but *as a proactive step*.

Definitions, Exceptions, Concerns

1 Definition “*Material*” is a commonly used legal term that means “sufficient to have a considerable impact.”

2 It is acknowledged that there may be fuzzy areas, such as deciding whether or not to keep a pen. Debate on such small items should not detract from the larger picture and should not allow us to dismiss the need for this policy.

3 Enforcement: It is not anticipated nor requested that the VETPARTNERS “police” this policy, other than to have Board members agree to it, and to have Officers take on the responsibility of notifying companies of the policy.

If gifts are received, the President shall notify the sender of the policy. Individuals who received the gift may decide whether to return it, give it away, or keep it. Should the same company send gifts a *second* time, then all gifts shall be returned, at VETPARTNERS expense for postage. This shows our ability to uphold our values.

4 Although individuals are encouraged to enact this policy for their own business, this policy applies specifically to gifts intended for Board & committee members as a group.

Desired outcome: Further loyalty and adherence to the VETPARTNERS vision and mission; clarity of purpose; clear consciences; appreciation by our members and the clients they serve. Reputation for excellence.