

Bonus Episode 5 | Measuring Success in VetMed

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT



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FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

| 1

Measuring success in VetMed, how most of us are doing it totally wrong, and the one opinion that actually matters. That's what we're gonna be talking about in episode five. Welcome to The Joyful DVM Podcast. I'm your host, veterinarian, and certified life coach, Cari Wise. Whether you're dealing with the challenges in VetMed, struggling with self-confidence, or you're just trying to figure out how to create a life and a career that you actually enjoy, you'll find encouragement, education, and empowering concepts you can apply right away. Let's get started.

Hello, my friends. Today we're gonna talk about measuring our success in VetMed. So how is it that you actually measure your success in VetMed? For most of us, it has to do with the way that we feel. When we feel uncomfortable, we believe that we're doing something wrong, but here's the deal. When we get out into the real world of veterinary medicine, whether we're practicing as a veterinarian or a veterinary technician, there are no markers to tell us that we're doing it right. It all feels very uncomfortable. And for those of us who are achievers, which is the vast majority of the population of VetMed professionals, this is very unsettling. So why is this a problem?

Well all along the way, as we've gone through our academic programs, we've had these indicators or these tangible means by which to evaluate if we're doing it right. You know the things, I've talked about them before, the test grades, the course grades, and then eventually the degree that gets earned. We've had those tangible measures of success all along. But once we get into the real world, the tangible measures of success are gone. There are no clear indicators that we can use to measure our success.

Unfortunately, in the real world, there are no clear indicators to tell us that we're doing it right or that we're doing it wrong. And in the absence of those indicators, our brain is just going to use the things around us to tell us "Yep, you've got it right," or "Nope, you don't have it right." Let's take a look at what it does. Evidence that we're doing it right. The brain provides this evidence in the means of clients who are happy and patients who get better. It uses those two things to tell us that we've done our job right in VetMed.

The downside though is that when it comes to patients getting better, we forget that we never can control physiology. We can make all the right decisions, we can make the right diagnosis, we can prescribe the right medication, and some patients still won't get better. We also can't control the client reactions. The way that clients interact with us is at the bottom of their think, feel, act cycle. Their words and actions come from their emotions, which are created by their thoughts. We can't control their thoughts, therefore we can't control their actions. Do you see the problem in this? When we use

Bonus Episode 5 | Measuring Success in VetMed

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

| 2

the client reaction as a measure of whether or not we're doing something right or wrong, we have literally created a situation where the measuring point or the indicator is dependent on something completely outside of us. We can never control their actions.

So when we use client interactions and patient responses as measures of success, when they are negative, like the patient isn't responding or the client is angry, we then feel like we've failed. The failure is the result of misplaced responsibility. You can't be responsible for what you can't control, but what we often miss is that success in this case is also the result of misplaced responsibility, because we never had control over what the client said or how the patient responded in those cases either.

So what about evidence that we're doing it wrong? We find evidence that we're doing it wrong in VetMed by comparing ourselves to what the other people are doing. Thing of it is the other people that we're often comparing ourselves to are our colleagues who have more real world experience than we do. What we miss is that them having more experience and more time in the profession does not mean that they are more qualified.

You have a license as a veterinarian or a veterinary technician. That means that you are qualified by the only measure that matters when it comes to this field. We somehow just tend to forget that. Instead, we look at the performance of our colleagues, we look at the words they say, we look at the knowledge that they are able to share with us, and we measure ourselves, we compare ourselves to that. We compare ourselves to them and their years of experience as if that should be equal to where we are, especially earlier in our careers. When we immediately know what to do with a case, we feel like we know how to do our job. But when we don't, we often think that we're failing. What we miss is that immediately knowing what to do only comes from experience and repetition.

All of the knowledge that we learned in our academic programs doesn't really become useful until we have the opportunity to apply it. And here's the thing, the first time that we encounter any case, we're going to feel like we don't know what we're doing. It's totally normal. So think about this for a second. Think back to the first time that you diagnosed a diabetic cat, that very first time when you made that diagnosis, you were able to determine yes it has diabetes. You ran the tests, it all came together. Yes, you've got that diagnosis, and now you've got to decide how to treat it. There are options. And the first time that you treat one, all of the options are available to you.

It feels a little bit overwhelming, and it's very common for us to look at ourselves managing this diabetic cat for the first time to seek the guidance of our more

experienced colleagues. And then when they list off exactly what to do in short order, what many of us do is we compare ourselves to them, where they are right now, and we believe that because we were not able to list off exactly how to go about managing this case, that we failed. What we miss completely is that the only reason that our colleagues are able to quickly list off how to manage a case is because they've done it many, many times before. You just aren't there yet. It's not a failure. It's completely normal.

The first time that you manage a diabetic case, you're probably gonna feel really uncomfortable, you're probably going to question your decisions. And as you work through it, you make the decisions and that case is managed, and then you're able to see the outcome of that to follow up on that case. The next time you diagnose a diabetic cat, you're gonna be two steps ahead, you're gonna have a better idea of how you want to go about managing that case.

The third time, it becomes really easy. In six or seven or eight times into it, you're gonna diagnose a diabetic animal and you're not even gonna have to question what you want to do next because you'll have the experience to back up the academic knowledge, and those two things together will help you to move forward more quickly and with more confidence.

It's not about getting it right. It's about giving yourself the opportunity to learn through your experiences. The academic knowledge is there, just believe that. The only tangible means of measuring whether or not you're qualified is a hurdle that you've already achieved. You've already got your license. That's the only one that matters when it comes to whether or not you're qualified. Now what matters is that you just keep going and experiencing different things, so that your confidence in managing those cases will increase.

Whenever we see a zebra case, you know those ones that are pretty unusual that we don't see before, I want you to think about those, because your most experienced colleague will still wonder what to do when they're faced with a zebra. It's just the way this goes. That's why we call them zebras. There's just a handful of diseases, processes, and conditions that we don't see very often. And when we see them, all of us go back, and we pull out the books, and we figure out what to do, because we don't have that memory and the immediate recall. It's totally normal.

But what's also really interesting about these is that once you've come across a zebra, because the experience is so unusual, we tend to hang on to that information pretty

quickly. It tends to stay at the forefront of our mind. And that experience, because it was so unique, that when we actually encounter it again, we're much more equipped to recognize it quickly. What's so interesting about this is that we forget that the zebra cases that we see are gonna be different than those of our colleagues, and oftentimes where we end up beating ourselves up for not doing a good enough job and not knowing enough is when we encounter one of these unusual cases that a colleague of ours has seen before. They immediately know what it is and we don't, and then we take that as evidence that we're doing it wrong, that we should have known.

We completely missed that they've just simply had the experience with that type of case, and they know where the other people around us may not have had any more of an idea of what was going on than we did. It wasn't a problem. We were still gonna figure it out. It was just gonna take us a little bit more time to analyze the information against the academic knowledge that we had. We would get there. It's just that we also had the benefit of a colleague who had seen it before. And because they were able to provide some input to get us to the answer more quickly, we automatically interpreted that as something being less than on our part, that if we'd have been doing it right, we would have automatically known.

I just want you to recognize that that's not how this works. The academic knowledge base is there. We already know that because you've already passed those tests to get your license. Now you've just got to give yourself the opportunity to let the experience catch up. You don't wanna judge yourself by comparing where you are today with experience of someone who is further along in their career. It is never going to help you. What you wanna remember is that you are equally qualified. Now imposter syndrome would tell you that you're not good enough, that you don't know enough, but I want you just now to recognize that that's not true.

Your brain is gonna gather evidence from every uncomfortable client interaction and undesirable case outcome to further that sneaky suspicion that you're not good enough. Just be on to what it's doing. Just because it's gathering information doesn't make it true. It's not a problem that our brain offers us this nonsense. We're only humans with human brains and it just does this. It only becomes a problem though when we fail to remember two things.

The first one, thinking something doesn't make it true. And number two, we have the power to decide what we want to believe in any situation. We always have the power to decide what we want to believe in any situation. If we can keep those two things in mind, then we can recognize that that seeking evidence to prove that we're doing it

Bonus Episode 5 | Measuring Success in VetMed

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

| 5

wrong is just all part of normal brain behavior, and it doesn't have to be believed. So we've taken a look at how we've been measuring our success and measuring our failures in VetMed the wrong way, so how do we do it the right way? If those things aren't the measuring tools, if they're not the actual indicators of success in VetMed, then what is? Let's start with the failures, because they are quick and easy. There are no failures. There's just lessons.

Let me say that again. You never fail, you just learn. If we can just accept that, then we can start practicing replacing the words I failed with the words what did I learn. That's the first step. You've got to just remember, guys. This is the practice of veterinary medicine. It is not the perfection of veterinary medicine.

This career requires us to keep learning and keep growing, because the knowledge base is ever evolving. When we try to turn it into the perfection of veterinary Medicine, then we lose 100% of the time. Shame and guilt will result because we are not able to be perfect. What is perfect anyway? It's something that we keep trying to achieve, but it's not achievable. And as we don't meet that unrealistic expectation, many of us feel shame, and guilt, and inadequacy. Those emotions will only create inaction. And when we are not taking action, we can't help anybody.

We need to stay in action, engaged in our jobs, and willing to experience all of it in order to practice veterinary medicine. The only way that we can do this is if we know why we wanna practice veterinary medicine in the first place. It comes back to understanding what motivates us. What's the intrinsic reason why we chose this career and why we wanted to do this in the first place? Without our why defined, we have no compass. We have nothing to turn to when it gets hard.

So what is your why? Why did you choose veterinary medicine? What impact were you hoping to make in the world and with the clients and patients that you serve? Have you written your personal mission statement? I definitely recommend that you write it down. For me, it comes down to two things. Excellent veterinary medicine and compassionate personalized customer service. Every single decision I make as a practicing veterinarian can come back to that as my compass. Excellent veterinary medicine and compassionate personalized customer service. I can evaluate my performance based on that as well.

That's the most important thing. When you know your why, when you know what you stand for, then that becomes the way that you evaluate your own personal performance. At the end of the day, all that any of us can do is only our best. We can

Bonus Episode 5 | Measuring Success in VetMed

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

| 6

only do the best that we can do. Now the best does not mean that clients are always happy and patients are always getting better. It means I did the best I could with the information and resources I had available. I approach the case in a way that supported my personal why. I let go of the things I couldn't control. I stayed open to learning all along the way, and I remained willing to feel uncomfortable because discomfort is the price of growth. T

he only one keeping score and your success in VetMed is you.

Today you can literally just decide that you are qualified, that you are willing, that you are enough.

Stay open to that, my friends.

Stop judging yourself so harshly.

And remember, the practice of veterinary medicine never expected you to be perfect. It just expects you to keep growing.

That's gonna wrap it up for this episode, and I'll see you next time. (upbeat music)
Thanks for listening to The Joyful DVM Podcast. To check out additional episodes or grab a copy of our latest free resources, please visit our website at joyfuldvm.com. And if you enjoyed this podcast, please consider leaving a review on iTunes and sharing it with your friends. We can change what's possible and VetMed together.