

Episode 20| The Impact of Fear on Practicing Vet Med and Living Life - Part 1

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

The Joyful DVM PODCAST

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The origin of fear, how it shows up in our behaviors, and the opportunity it gives us to take back control of our lives, that's what we're talking about in Episode 20.

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 Vet Med, 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.

Hey, everybody. Welcome to Episode 20. Today, we're going to be talking about the impact of fear on practicing Vet Med and living life. This is part one of a two-part series. To start off, we have to understand what fear is. Fear is an emotion and it's an uncomfortable emotion.

Like any emotion, fear is created by the thoughts that we think. It is created in our own minds. The thing about fear though, is it's a quick draw emotion. It's very finely tuned by the processes in our brain. And so there's very little space between the things that happen in the world and our feeling of fear - our feeling of being afraid.

So why is that the case? Well, it's the case because it actually has a lot of value. Fear is actually very useful and was essential in keeping the human species alive when we were originally created. If we go back and we think that thousands and thousands of years ago when the human species was created, the lower primitive part of our brain utilized fear to keep us safe. It was the indicator of life-threatening danger.

Today, fear is a bit of a faulty indicator of life-threatening danger. This differentiation is so important because that is where we actually start to gain some of our power back when we understand what's actually happening underneath the surface. So fear is useful because it does keep us safe. But the problem with fear is that we often withdraw from situations that we aren't actually in danger of dying from. This is everything. It's that differentiation between real danger - something that's truly putting your life at risk - and perceived danger, which is simply an uncomfortable situation that we'd rather not experience. Perceived fear is created only in our own minds with our own thinking. It's unintentional and it's all created by that lower primitive brain. Now we don't need to judge that it exists. It's a normal function of our brain that will always be there, but being able to analyze what's actually happening will give us the power that we need to move forward. Fear is a powerful motivator. If we think about what happens when we're afraid, think about the way that it impacts our physiology. That sympathetic nervous system kicks in. Our adrenaline goes up. We have a fight or flight response. This is all intentional because the original purpose of fear, remember, was to save our lives. That fight or flight response often will result in that. However, that feeling of fear feels terrible. It feels so bad, in fact, that we avoid it at all costs. Not only do we avoid it at all costs, we also draw conclusions that we don't have any control when we're feeling afraid. That we are a victim of our

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circumstances when we're feeling afraid. So fear is very disempowering. To avoid feeling that way again, we, as humans, do all kinds of things.

So I already said, we're trying to avoid the fear, and as we're trying to avoid the fear, because we don't like the way that it feels, the way that we had tried to do that as humans is by trying to control everything around us. So trying to control the circumstances, but then also wallowing in the circumstances that we can't change. So when we can't change the circumstances, we actually tend to lean into that victim mentality and deflect responsibility for the way that we feel and blame it on the circumstances themselves. So we blame it on things outside of ourselves for how we feel. And we often find others who feel similarly and we have conversations about it and we commiserate about it and we complain about it. And we do feel a little better because misery loves company. And this is exactly why. If you can't change the circumstance to feel better, you at least feel better knowing that you're not alone in your misery. What's so fascinating about all of this is how much of it is actually just created in our own minds, in our own perspective.

Now, when it comes to circumstances that we can't control, I think one of the best examples that we can use at this time in the world is COVID-19. Definitely, something that we can't control. It's important for us to look at these concepts through something that we truly can't control because we're so used to trying to control all the things, in our day in and day out lives, that we are a lot of us believing that we do actually control more than we actually do. We're going to get to that next week in part two when we really dig into how this perception of control is impacting the way that we practice medicine, but before we get there, we need to understand the framework of what's actually happening. And I think COVID-19 gives us the perfect framework to do that.

So what happens when we really can't control the C? Here's the bottom line, when uncertainty is prominent, fear is even more present. So the more uncertain the situation, the more fear that exists with it. Our reaction to the fear does not just play out in relation to the uncertainty of a circumstance. So in COVID-19, there's so much uncertainty about the virus and about the ability to treat the virus and survive the virus and all of that. All of that uncertainty just creates more and more fear, but the way that we react to that fear doesn't play out only in relation to the virus itself. It bleeds into every other part of our lives. We see this in the increasing and blaming and pointing fingers that we are doing, not only in relation to COVID-19 but in relation to everything. We also often will find ourselves arguing more, trying to explain more, trying to get people to get on our side if you will more. It's a lot of arguing with reality, quite honestly. And in addition to that, there's a lot of commiserating. So a lot of complaining and commiserating about how terrible COVID-19 is and all of the consequences of COVID-19. All of those actions that we're taking, those behaviors are simply a reflection of our own fear, which is driven by the uncertainty of the situation.

Now, the solution to the fear is not making all the scary things go away. This would require us to

control the Cs. So the events that are happening in the world, other people, and in this case, we would have to be able to control COVID-19 in order to not feel afraid of it. If it was the circumstance that created the emotion in the first place. Fear only has power though, when it's left unexamined. So we have to take a look at the fear. Remember it is our emotion that drives our action. So it's our fear that drives our behaviors. And it's not the circumstance that creates the fear. It is our thoughts about the circumstance that do that. But if we don't take a moment to try to pull that all apart, what happens is we have emotion driving action and that emotion isn't examined. It's left unchecked and unchecked emotion drives unchecked action. We find ourselves reacting to the emotion rather than purposefully using emotion to drive purposeful action. How does this show up for us? It shows up externally and unchecked action and internally and unchecked action. So unchecked emotion, like the unchecked emotion of fear, is going to drive some external behaviors, like lashing out verbally at people, like destroying property, like buffering. So overeating, overdrinking, finding ways to cover up the way that we feel. It's also going to drive some internal action. The most common internal action that fear drives is withdrawal. We pull back from our lives. We pull back from communication with our friends and family. We stop engaging in activities. All of that. We withdraw; we internalize all of it. All of that though is just unchecked behavior. What we're really trying to achieve with all of these actions is not feeling afraid. And if we look at the external actions, particularly the lashing out, the arguing with people, the destroying property, all of those kinds of actions, what we're ultimately trying to achieve there is a universal belief system. We're believing, if we lash out, if we, and when I've been thinking about lashing out, right? We're just talking, we're trying to convince people to believe the same thing that we believe. We're trying to get people to take the actions that we believe are going to create a resolution of the situation. All of the reason that we do that like we're not even consciously recognizing this is what we're doing, but what the ultimate outcome that we're trying to get here is a universal belief system to lead to a universal emotion that drives a universal action that creates a predictable universal result.

The bottom line, if everybody would just get on the same page, then everything would be okay. But at end of the day, that's just a sentence. But if we peel everything apart, that's what a lot of us believe. If everybody would just understand this. If everybody would just get on the same page, then we would take the actions. We would do the things, whatever. And then ultimately all of those things would end up with the conclusion that everything would be okay. If everybody would believe the same thing, then everything would be okay. Why do we need it to be okay? This is what this really boils down to. Why do we want to believe that everything's going to be okay?

Well, if we believe that everything's going to be okay, then we don't have any reason to be afraid. So if we are all as humans on the same page, in our opinions and our approach to the circumstance, and in this case, I'm talking about COVID-19, but this could be any circumstance. If we're all on the same page, in our opinions and our approach to this circumstance, then we will all be okay. The solution that we are trying to achieve here is a universal belief in the same things so that we will be okay. And

if you recognize it, it becomes a little laughable because how realistic is it that we can get everybody to believe the same thing? It's impossible. It's just not possible at all. We can't even get universal belief within our own friend groups or family groups. Let alone across the entire world and especially about circumstances as big as COVID-19.

But here's the good news. We don't need everybody to believe the same thing to create the ultimate outcome that we want. The outcome that we want is to believe that everything is going to be okay because when we believe that everything's going to be okay, we don't feel afraid. The ultimate outcome here is to not feel afraid. This is magic because we don't need everybody to believe as we believe for us to still be able to believe that everything's going to be okay.

Let me break this down. If we have the same beliefs, then we take the same actions, then the outcome becomes predictable. If the outcome is predictable, then we can believe that everything's going to be okay. This is the skewed logic. So if everybody believes the same thing, then everybody does the same thing, then the outcome is going to be guaranteed and we can believe that everything's going to be okay. When we believe everything's going to be okay, we feel less afraid, and we feel more certain about the future. Makes a lot of sense. But what we're totally missing here is the only reason that we feel certain and comforted about the future and less afraid about the future, those are all emotions, right? Certainty, comfort, fear at a lesser level, all those emotions are only created by the thought, by the belief it's going to be okay. That thought, it's going to be okay, is not dependent on a circumstance. That thought is available immediately right now to each and every one of us. The predictability and certainty that we crave are only created by our thinking, created by our mindset, by our perspective.

Our thinking is not dependent on what's happening around us. So it's not dependent on what happens day in and day out in our veterinary hospitals. It's not dependent on COVID-19. It's not dependent on our friends and family and clients. It's not dependent on things like the elections. Our thinking is not dependent on any of those things. The change in information then may alter some of our circumstances, but those changes do not have to alter what we believe about the circumstances. This is the real magic. The change in our perspective about the circumstances is always optional. So I walk through an example of this.

Let's go back to COVID-19. If we look at COVID-19, I want to point out like just three things that have happened. There are so many different things. There are so many circumstances we could pull, but I want to pull three, like factual things that have happened.

Number one, COVID-19, just the existence of it. The virus itself. It's been identified. It is a circumstance. So it is a fact. Now we also had a time when the CDC said that it wasn't spread by aerosol and masks weren't necessary. That the CDC said that that the message was communicated

as a fact. Does it make the context of the message true? No, that's not what we're looking at here. We're just looking at the message that was relayed. So we're going to call that message number one. So that was the message, that it was not spread by aerosol and that masks weren't necessary. Then we had message number two. Message number two was from the CDC that said, "It is spread by aerosol and masks are advised." So again, I'm not debating whether or not the context of what is communicated is true. The fact is that the message was conveyed. So message number two, message number one, and the existence of COVID-19, all just facts. All just circumstances that every single human being is experiencing.

Now, why, why is I'm so picky about this and why does it matter? Because we have to first in any situation, peel it apart, and let's just look at the universal facts. The things that everybody is experiencing the same way. So I'm not saying that the way I feel about it is the same as the way somebody else feels about it, that's different, cause that's dependent on my thoughts about the circumstance, but the existence of the circumstance is universal. COVID-19, message number one from the CDC, message number two from the CDC. Now instinctually, our first thoughts about those things, drive fear, always. So COVID-19, message one - not transmitted by aerosol, no masks needed, message number two - is transmitted by aerosol, masks needed, all three of those things, for many of us, the initial instinctual emotion that we feel is fear. It makes perfect sense that we feel that. So why do we feel it? Let's give ourselves the opportunity to understand it.

Number one, COVID-19, "We're all gonna die". That's the thought that pops in immediately. It makes perfect sense from a primitive brain, let's-protect-the-species, let's-keep-ourselves-alive, kind of perspective. COVID-19 - super uncertain, uncharted territory, primitive brain, the lower brain thinks we're all gonna die, we feel super afraid. It makes sense.

Number two: why do we feel afraid when we hear that it's not spread through aerosol, that it's like spread more through like contact and masks aren't needed? Well, along with that, we still have, "Oh, it's transmitted by surfaces. The things that I touch. It's going to be there forever". So these are the kinds of sentences our mind offers us, which drives, "Oh my gosh, we're all going to die". So it comes right back to that, right? I'm going to get it. I'm going to get up. We're all going to die.

Number three, the same thing, and now it's spread by aerosol, masks are advised, for a lot of us at this point, we're like, "They have no idea what they're talking about. We're all gonna die". So do you notice how all three of these ultimately end up in, "I'm gonna die. We're all gonna die"? We have all kinds of thoughts in between there, but the fear is coming from that baseline thought, "We're all gonna die or I'm going to die". That's creating fear. It's not a problem that that exists, my friends. That is just the instinctual, lower primitive brain doing its job. We've got an uncertain situation. We've got a situation that we cannot control, which creates more uncertainty. Uncertainty creates fear. It's going to drive that action that ultimately the reason that primitive lower brain offers us this is because it

wants to retract. Pull back. Don't go in there. You're going to, we're going to die. That is where it starts, but that's not where it has to stay. Because even though our lower primitive brain offers us this line of thinking initially, which creates fear, we still have the ability to decide for ourselves how we feel in the situation. We do that by deciding what we believe on purpose. We intentionally choose our perspective.

So what are some alternatives? So if we're thinking, on the one hand, the lower primitive brain, "We're all going to die", what else could I also be believing? Here are the ones that are just personal to me when it comes to COVID-19. Number one, I get to decide what I believe about COVID-19. Number two, I can always do my best to protect myself and my community in any situation. So I can always do my best. Number three, if I get COVID-19, I will know what to do. I've just decided that for myself - if I get it, I will know what to do. Number four, most people who get COVID-19 survive. That's what I believe about the virus at this point. Now, not everybody believes what I believe, but these are my beliefs. And when I go through these beliefs, particularly that first one, I always get to decide what I believe about COVID-19, I feel very empowered. Those thoughts help ease the fear. The fear is still there. I don't need to solve the fear. I just need to embrace that empowered thinking will beat fear a hundred percent of the time. And the actions that I will take in my life, the way I will show up, day in and day out, are going to be much more useful and creating the life and the life experience that I want, if I am taking those actions from empowerment, as opposed to if I'm taking actions from fear.

What about the thoughts about the other two circumstances? So I talked about COVID-19, but what about message number one? An optional thought there, I can protect myself and others with diligent hand-washing, always available. If I believe I can protect myself and others best if I just wash my hands a lot, that definitely feels a lot more empowering than that, like it's transmitted on surfaces that stays there forever and we're all gonna die. That creates a lot of fear. For the third one, is transmitted by aerosol, masks are advised. I can always think I can protect myself and others by washing my hands and wearing a mask. If I believe that, then I take those actions from that empowerment, so I feel empowered, I wash my hands, I wear a mask, I keep living my life. If I'm stuck in the fear - they have no idea how this works all wrong and I get all victimy and blamey about it - I'm going to withdraw. I'm going to pull back on my life. I'm going to be angry. I'm gonna be pointing fingers. That's not going to be a good life experience for me. Not going to be a good life experience for anybody else, either. Because then I'm in my like negative pity party of a world. I am a circumstance for them. They get to experience me in that way. I think that's useful.

So to really bring this home, when we think about fear, there are two main points. Number one: emotion is 50-50. So when it comes to the human experience, half the time, we're going to feel scared, half the time we're going to feel uncomfortable emotion, that's by design. We need that uncomfortable emotion. It's useful. We recognize, like from a historical perspective, why it was so necessary to keep us alive, but it's also intentional today. Because if we don't know the

uncomfortable emotions, we also don't know the comfortable ones. It's a 50-50 intentional balance. If you don't know happy, you don't know sad. If you don't know grief, you don't know love. So you can't know one side of the coin without having the opposite side of the coin to compare it against. If you don't have the opposite, then you don't have either. You wouldn't even realize there was a difference. So emotion, comfortable and uncomfortable, both completely intentional. They exist in the world in a 50-50 kind of balance, if you will. They're both necessary. It's good to know that because now that releases us from this need to solve for the fear. It's totally okay to be afraid. Not a problem to feel fear. It's a very useful emotion. It drives some useful action. Where it becomes a problem is when it dominates all the time and drives action that doesn't actually help move you to experience life the way that you want to. It brings us to point number two: empowerment will beat fear every single time. So every single time you're feeling afraid and you're starting to feel like you have no control and helpless and hopeless, and all of that, remember empowerment. The emotion of empowerment will trump that fear a hundred percent of the time. When you're feeling empowered, you will engage in your life in a way that's useful.

So there are five steps to transitioning from fear to empowerment. They are, number one: identify the circumstance for what it is. Find the fact there. Number two: remember, "I'm still me". So the person I am right at this moment is the exact same person I was two minutes before I learned of this circumstance. Number three: embrace the ability to always choose for yourself. So choose what you believe and choose your own actions. No matter what you always get to choose. So you want to remember that and embrace that ability as number three. Number four: decide if the circumstance warrants a change in our prior perspectives and beliefs. So as this, for example, with the COVID-19, COVID-19 is its own circumstance. Message number one is a new circumstance. Message number two is a new circumstance. So as new information becomes available, as new circumstances occur, do I need to change my perspective? Do I want to? Is there a benefit in changing my original perspective and belief around the circumstances as a whole? And then number five, once that's decided I just choose my perspective intentionally.

So I want to practice this with a completely made-up scenario to walk through these five steps. And I can't say it enough. This is a completely hypothetical, totally made-up scenario in relation to COVID-19. This is not true. This has not been said anywhere. Literally just made it up, sitting at my desk, writing out this podcast, because I think this is going to be a good example for us, but do not take this hypothetical circumstance as the truth. It is not the truth. Okay. But here we go. Let's just say, this is a hypothetical new circumstance that the CDC releases a message that says, "A vaccine cannot be made to protect humans from COVID-19". Just one more disclaimer: this has never been said, this is absolutely not true. We're just using it as an example. Okay. So let's just for a moment, just hypothetically say it's true. The CDC says, "A vaccination cannot be made to protect humans from COVID-19". How do you feel? Immediately, we're going to feel afraid. Totally normal. Why are we going to feel afraid? Because that unintentional instinctual thinking goes right back to, "We're all

going to die". It makes perfect sense. The primitive brain being like, um, we're back to uncertainty and I'm pretty sure we're going to die, and here's the fear. Makes sense. So what do we do? When we're feeling afraid, if this were to happen, if the CDC were to say, "A vaccination cannot be made to protect humans from COVID-19", we're going to feel afraid and what are we going to? How are we gonna behave? We're gonna lash out. We're probably going to attack the CDC, "Oh my gosh! They have no idea what they're doing. They change the messages all the time". We complained to our friends about it. We commiserate. We have a pity party. "Oh my gosh, I'm certainly going to die now". We would argue with reality. "If they only knew more, they would do something different. Or if I would have known this, to begin with, I would have done something different". This is a very normal type of behavior. That's driven by fear. It's not dependent on the circumstance.

So how do we then use that five-step process to transition from the fear and the actions and behaviors that we take from that place to empowerment so we can actually be the ones in charge of our lives again?

Five-step process, number one, identify the C. So what is the circumstance here? The words spoken. The words spoken by the CDC is the circumstance. It does not make those words true. So important. Remember, it's not, we're not saying that the context of the words is factual, but that the words were communicated is the fact. So CDC says the vaccine cannot be made to protect humans from COVID-19, that is the fact. That it was said. That those words were spoken. That is the fact.

Number two, "I am still me". So before they said that to right now, I am the exact same person. I just need to remind myself of that in step two.

And step three, I also, as another reminder, remember, I always get to decide for myself how I approach COVID-19. Nothing has changed. I got to decide for myself before they released this new information. And now I get to decide for myself now. Nothing has changed there.

Number four, I asked myself a question. Does this new circumstance, in this case, this new information, does this new circumstance warrant a change in my belief and perspective about the circumstances as a whole? And then ultimately, does it change what I will do? The actions I will take? Well, let's take a look. If the CDC said, "A vaccine cannot be made to protect humans' from COVID-19", and I have decided that my empowered thought around COVID-19 is that I always get to decide what I believe about COVID-19, do I need to change that thought based on the new information? No, still totally useful and empowering. I get to decide what I believe. What about the thought, "I can always do my own best to protect myself and my community"? Does that thought still work? Yes. I still, even if they say, "Yeah, we cannot make a vaccine that will protect humans". I can still always do my best to protect myself, my family, my community. I can also, still believe that if I get COVID-19, I'm going to know what to do. And I can also still believe that most people who get COVID-19 are going

to survive. Those empowering thoughts that I intentionally chose around COVID-19 are not altered at all by new information. Not at all. They're still very empowering. So I can intentionally, in that case, decide to keep my perspective. I know that I'm going to keep these because I did a little bit of a test. We kind of worked through it right here.

So number five, you're intentionally choosing to keep your perspective or make a new one. If you're going to keep your old one, the way that you decide, if it's still gonna work is you go through your original perspective and you ask yourself, "Does this thought still create empowerment that trumps the fear? Does it still override fear?" If it does, keep it. New information is not often the reason to shake empowered thoughts that we have. It's just new information. We can just allow them to exist. We can recognize the fear that comes up with the surprise - the uncertainty of the new information. Uncertainty will breed fear. It's not a problem. Fear doesn't have to be solved for. The lower primitive brain can freak out every time new information comes up and it will, but we always get to choose our own empowered perspective and take our own actions from there.

The goal here my friends is not to not be afraid. It's not to eliminate fear. The goal is to allow the fear and to deliberately take back control of our thinking so that we can generate empowered emotion. When we generate empowered emotion on purpose, we get to keep living our lives through powerful intention and not fear-based reaction. This is a skill that we can develop one circumstance at a time.

Every time we feel afraid, we have the opportunity to use that five-step process to move from fear to empowerment. It really helps break down all of the belief systems we have around any given circumstance. And it takes back control of our own emotional wellbeing. When we really embrace the idea that it's not the things around us that create the way that we feel and that we are a hundred percent in control of our net emotional state or our mood in any given day in situation, and we have the tools to do it, then everything gets so much easier because being a victim of our own lives is no longer an option. We always get to decide for us.

I hope this helps. Tune in next week for part two of this series, where we're going to dig into how fear actually impacts the way that we practice veterinary medicine and how it makes our lives so much harder. See you next week.

Thank you for listening to the Joyful DVM Podcast. If you'd like to learn more about the concept and ideas discussed here, and how to apply them to your own life to create confidence and empowerment for yourself, you'll love Vet Life Academy. To check it out and learn more, visit joyfuldvm.com/vetlifeacademy. And if you're loving this podcast, I'd appreciate it if you'd share it with your friends and leave us a review on iTunes.