Episode 22 | The Unexpected Gifts Vet Med Perseverance Makes Possible

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

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The four gifts persevering in Vet Med gives you and a quick update on my Bluebirds, that's what we're talking about in Episode 22.

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 22. Today, we're going to be talking about the unexpected gifts that Vet Med perseverance makes possible. But before we dive into those unexpected gifts, I wanted to spend a few minutes sharing with you what got me to thinking about perseverance in the first place. For those of you who've been listening to the podcast for a while, you might remember back in episode 11 when I talked about the Eastern Bluebirds here on our farm. The title of that podcast episode was What's Really Holding You Back in Vet Med.

In that podcast episode, I talk about the dedication and focus of these Bluebirds and how they remained very driven to hatch eggs. So how they kept nesting and then things kept going wrong and how I kept trying to help. And then I kept making things worse. And I talked about that entire story back in episode 11. And that had a bit of a happy ending when it was all said and done. The final patch of eggs, actually they did end up as hatchlings, and then eventually they did leave the nest. So that all ended very well once we got to the end.

Jump forward now to where we are, the very, very end of September of the same year. Yesterday morning, as I was finishing up my coffee and gathering up my items to head back to my office, to work for the day, I happened to glance outside my glass doors, like I do every single day. Right outside those doors are that empty birdhouse where those last hatchlings left. And the Sparrow spooker and all this stuff are still there because I haven't gotten around to taking any of it down yet.

My summer flowers are still all along the banister of the deck. They're looking a little wither. The vincas aren't as nearly as pretty as they were several months ago. And it's just starting to be Fall. Well, as I glanced out there, something caught my eye. And now in this area, it's not unusual to have birds. We have lots of birds around our deck and I feed the birds with the bird feeder. So I usually at any given time can walk out and see, you know, four to 10 different species of birds hanging out there. But something really unusual caught my eye yesterday and what it was, it took me a moment to register what I was seeing as I was seeing the male Bluebird checking out his house. Now, this was exciting to me because I have not seen the Bluebirds since they left with their fledglings. It's been probably six weeks now since I've seen them. Now, I know they're still around because I can hear them, but I can't see where they're at. I think they're over in one of our cattle pastures and I just

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didn't go digging around looking for them because I knew they were still here. But I also assumed that I wouldn't see them again till next year. Now I hoped that sometime this winter that I might catch a sighting of the parents because last year they actually showed up in the middle of winter. Much to my dismay because I had taken down their house, their old house, the one that was decrepit and done for forever had I'd taken it down last fall when I cleaned up the deck and it wasn't there.

So last year I was kind of what started this story back in episode 11, last winter when they showed up and I didn't expect them to be there. Like I had a bit of a freak out because they didn't have a home. You can imagine how, how involved I got in these Bluebirds. So now here we are today. I didn't expect to see them. And there he was, he was like peeking his head into the house, kind of checking it out. And then I started to look around because it seemed like there was a lot of motion and I stepped up to the sliding glass door, and you won't believe what I saw. Not only was the father there - so that the male Bluebird was there - the mother Bluebird was sitting on a tree branch close by like she often did, but as I paid attention, all four of the hatchlings were on my deck. All four of them, they were sitting in different bird feeders. One of them was up on top of an umbrella. I was completely stunned. Like it took a minute for me to realize what I was seeing and sure enough, they had brought all four of the hatchlings back to my deck yesterday morning. They were there long enough for me to take some pictures and to watch them for a while. And they kind of played around a bit and then they flew off and I haven't seen them again since then. But as I thought about them and how grateful and thankful I was that I was able to see them, as you know, grown-up almost grown-up birds and knowing that they had actually made it through, like the rest of that part of their journey, I was just immensely grateful for the opportunity to have taken just a little bit of action in their story.

This really brought home to me the idea of perseverance: that you just never know what gifts will be granted if you just stick with something long enough. And as I thought about how the journey of the Bluebirds up until that point, when I recorded episode 11, how that so much mirrored what many of us go through, this was just yet another example of that. It's the gifts that we miss out on if we give up too soon.

So today I want to talk a little bit about the unexpected gifts of Vet Med perseverance. Let's start out and just define what perseverance actually is. It's the ability to keep doing something despite how hard it is and how long it takes to achieve success. Sound familiar.

So let me say that again. Perseverance is the ability to keep doing something despite how hard it is and how long it takes to achieve success. Now, when it comes to veterinary medicine, we've already been on a long journey to get all the way through veterinary school. And then we get out into our first jobs and it's hard. We also don't have a lot of actual reliable indicators of success, and I've talked

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about this many times. We put in false measures, things like patients that get better and clients that are happy, which are not indicators of success.

So please do not misunderstand. Those are not reliable indicators of success because they're not things that you can control. That all being said and done, we do try to measure ourselves in the veterinary profession with those types of things. And also we evaluate ourselves personally by comparing ourselves to other doctors and other professionals. What really trips us up in this area is that we often compare ourselves today as newer graduates, to those who have been in the field five, 10, 15 years or longer. We look at what they know and how they interact with cases and clients, and we believe that we are less than.

What we've missed out on is the value of perseverance. If we can just go into our veterinary professions, realizing that it's going to take us three to five years to figure out this job, that I think that we could be a little bit easier on ourselves. Just because we finished our academic studies and just because we've passed the big test at the end, and we've been granted the license, doesn't mean that all of our self-confidence is absolute and very well present. We have a lot of insecurities. It's totally normal. If we can approach those first three to five years from a learner's perspective, I think it will help make everything a little bit easier. And there are gifts that we give ourselves as we persevere through those first three to five years of veterinary practice. I've identified four.

The first gift that we give ourselves by persevering is simply clarity. What you like, the areas of medicine that you enjoy practicing in, the type of facilities where you enjoy working, the types of clients you enjoy interacting with, the disciplines that bring you the most joy to pursue,those are the types of things that you can only learn by doing the job for a period of time. That clarity is critical as you move through the rest of your professional life. It is completely fine for us all to get into veterinary medicine and realize, "Hey, I'm not so interested in this area, but I really love another."

Let me give you an example of that from a personal perspective. I knew the day that I graduated from veterinary school, that I had zero interest in orthopedic surgery. None. Now, could I have figured out how to do it? Sure. Was I qualified to do it? Absolutely. We all are qualified to do it the day that we graduated from veterinary school, but I wasn't interested in it. Wasn't my cup of tea. I didn't want to do it and so I didn't do it. But do you know what I did love? I love dermatology. I love the grossest skin cases that had been to four vets before they ever got to me. Those were my favorite kinds of cases. And so those kinds of cases I really dug into. I enjoyed the research and learning more and CE and all of that. And so over the period of time, when I was in veterinary practice, I really cultivated a bit of a clientele with animals who had ongoing skin problems. It was a win-win situation for the other veterinarians in my practice because they didn't like those kinds of cases. So they'd send them to me. And do you know what I would do? I'd send them all my

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orthopedics. It was a bit of a perfect balance. They wouldn't have enjoyed their job as much if they were trying to fix all those skin cases. And I certainly wouldn't have enjoyed mine if I was focusing on trying to fix bones while I was trying to do all the other things that I wanted to do.

We forget that just because we're qualified to do all different disciplines of veterinary medicine, doesn't mean that we have to. And that clarity that you gain once you spend some time in general practice will be just the most valuable gift you can give yourself for then what you're going to do as you continue to move forward in your journey. For some of us, we're going to learn that veterinary practice, day in and day out, general practice isn't for us. And we're going to pursue other things. Like perhaps academia or perhaps industry. Perhaps a spay-neuter clinic. Those kinds of things. But that's the beautiful thing about a veterinary degree is that there are so many opportunities on what you can do with it. If you don't give yourself that opportunity to persevere as a student in your new career, for the first three to five years with a student's mindset, then you really block your own clarity because you're so caught up in judging your performance against other people who've been in the field longer. It's just not necessary.

The second gift that we give ourselves when we persevere is confidence. Yeah, confidence. We actually polish our skills. So again, we all graduate with a base level of knowledge and we've passed a test that tells us that we are qualified to do this job. But the psychomotor skills associated with this position are not something that we will fully create and establish and polish until we've actually practiced over and over and over again.

Another area that confidence comes into play is just within the organization itself. So you won't fully understand how your organization functions and how your role fits within that organization until you've given yourself the opportunity to be there for a while.

Many of us get into our new jobs. We start out all excited. Then we get a little tired. Then we start to get a little burnout about the whole thing. We start to notice the things that we aren't happy with. And within those first six to 12 months, we draw a conclusion that's kind of an absolute assumption of what it's like in this practice. What I want you to hear is that 12 months isn't long enough. You need to give yourself a little bit more time. Is it possible that you can keep going even though it's hard in order to achieve what you're actually there to learn? Those gifts you give yourself so far, clarity and confidence, are the first two. What you'll learn about yourself in some of the hardest situations will be the best gifts that you can give yourself and information that you'll use forever as you move forward.

The third gift that you'll give yourself is simply personal growth. When you commit to yourself for a finite period of time to stay in this particular job, and you remove the option to cut and run, it's

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amazing what you will learn about you. You're going to learn what you want because you're going to be able to basically compare the status of your life to how it is right now. And you'll give yourself that opportunity to consider, "If this isn't what I want, then what is it that I do want?" You can help define that thing for yourself.

You're also going to learn what you are capable of. If we cut and run every single time that it gets hard and every single time that we're uncomfortable, we never learn what we're capable of. And worse off, we start to believe that we're not capable of anything. That we can't handle it. That we're not cut out for this job. None of those things are true. You just haven't given yourself the opportunity to show up and show you what you can do.

If you never intentionally persevered in an environment that didn't stretch you and test your strength, you never would learn what you're capable of. And I think that is so important for us to remember. As we persevere through situations that we don't like, the situations that are hard, it does help us to develop as people. And it helps us to start to understand what's really important to us. Without those little triggers to push us to that next level, we accept the status quo as good enough, and we never become who we're supposed to be. So these times of personal growth, this gift of personal growth that comes along with persevering through difficulty, is vastly important to creating the future that you were meant to have.

Finally, gift number four from persevering in Vet Med is impact. Don't ever underestimate your impact. When you persevere, when you stay when it's hard, when you keep going and you keep focusing on what you believe in, as you stick it out and you gain that clarity and that confidence, and you go through that personal growth cycle, the other benefit that you will have is impact. Staying will give you the opportunity to experience what it's like to see your patients grow up. Those puppies and kittens that come in, that are so fun in those early stages, you'll get to see them as they grow up to be adults and seniors.

You'll also have the opportunity to establish friendships with your clients. We're so often worried about work-life balance, that we forget that our clients are simply humans too. And there will be clients along the way that you have more affection for. That's not a problem. This is still just a human experience. If you never give yourself the opportunity to stay in one place very long, then those human connections are going to be difficult to establish.

And finally, there's a couple of other things that we get as a gift of persevering. What about the thank you notes? We never know when they're coming, right? We have no idea when a client is going to send us a thank you note or a kind message, but gosh, it makes all the difference in the world. Doesn't it? It's those little unexpected bits of gratitude that kind of make our heart explode

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and make us remember one of the reasons why we chose this profession in the first place. There's no way that you can predict that those are coming, but if you cut and run every time the going gets tough, then you're going to miss out on getting that kind of feedback. Because they're just humans, just like you, and they're not always quick to remember to thank somebody at the moment.

And let's not forget about the holidays. We know a lot of times, we focus on what happens between Christmas and New Year in the veterinary profession, and for a lot of our hospitals, there's a lot of euthanasia that occurs there. But what else happens between Christmas and New Year? Our hospitals are typically flooded with all kinds of baked goods and candies and things like that. This is the time of the year our clients remember us and they bring things to us in gratitude. The rest of the year, we complain about them and then we love them for this short period of time when they show up. What I want us to recognize is that we have the opportunity to love them all the time. And just to remember that they're human, just like we are.

If instead every time we feel uncomfortable, every time it gets hard, if we decide to leave, if we decide to abandon ship if you will, we miss out on these gifts.

We miss out on clarity - what it is exactly that we love about this profession and what we're supposed to do within it.

We miss out on building confidence. We don't ever polish any skills in any given area.

We miss out on personal growth, which is the biggest miss, as far as I'm concerned. These areas of stretching what we think we're capable of are everything and helping us to understand and learn what we actually are capable of. This is how our self-confidence grows. It's not just skill-based confidence I'm talking about. I'm talking about your self-confidence that only comes through times when you're being stretched beyond what you think that you can do.

And finally, impact is huge. Believe it or not, you have a lasting impact on your clients. You're not going to get that immediate feedback to know that at the moment. It would be so nice if we did, right? We try to create it by drawing assumptions that if they're happy we're doing our job, right? But it's not even about that. It's when they come back to you unsolicited - with their thank you's, with their little gifts, with their stories about how you help their pet - years later when you don't even remember what they're talking about. That's when you can start to see that your perseverance was worth it. That you actually did make a difference. This requires us at the moment to just believe that what we do matters.

My question to you is, "How do you persevere?" You must be solid in your why. It all comes down to

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that. If you don't clearly know what your personal why is - what your personal reason is for doing this job - you'll have a really hard time persevering because you won't have a reason to fall back on. But when you know what's your why is, when you know the reason why you are in veterinary medicine, then it's easier to stick with it when it's hard and when those days are long and when things don't turn out the way that you want them to. What you believe about what you contribute is everything.

So how is Vet Med part of fulfilling your life's goals? It's a question that you want to ask yourself. At some point in the past, you had a reason for pursuing veterinary medicine. It's likely, along the way, as it's gotten hard, as time has passed, that you forgot what that reason was. But at one point in your life, that reason was strong, and it was strong enough to get you through the hardest academic programs that you had ever encountered.

I want you to remember that those reasons are still there and they maybe just a little bit different now. But only you get to decide what you believe about veterinary medicine. You are not required to adopt the negative perspective that so many of us experience when we go into our veterinary jobs. The people who are there before us may not be happy in their positions, but that does not mean that they have to drag you down. That does not mean that your perspective is wrong. They're not allowed to taint what you believe about veterinary medicine unless you allow it.

Persevering, just accepting that, "Yeah, sometimes it's going to be hard", and sometimes it's gonna take a long time before you're going to see success, if you just remembered that's part of the intentional journey, and allow yourself to experience it as you move forward, then I promise you, it does get easier.

And as these gifts begin to show themselves - the clarity, the confidence, the personal growth, and the impact - you'll be brought right back to your why and you'll have that evidence you've been seeking for why you ever started this journey in the first place.

Alright, my friends. Be well. Be happy. Remember why you're here. You are appreciated. I'll see you next week.

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