

# Episode 23 | What Cannibalism Hides in Vet Med

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Cannibalism in Vet Med, what really drives our need to attack each other in this profession, and what's really driving those actions, that's what I'm talking about in Episode 23.

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 23. Today, I want to talk about Cannibalism in Vet Med. And what I'm talking about is that culture that we have within our profession of attacking our colleagues. This is both an internal and an external problem. We see this happening both within our veterinary facilities themselves, but then also in relation to other veterinary facilities, whether they be competitors, people we don't even know, or the specialists that we refer our cases to.

As I've seen this happen, time and time again, and experienced it myself throughout my two decades of veterinary medicine, I've become really curious as to why this happens.

Recently, I sent out a question to the people on my email list, so the veterinary professionals on my email list. And that question was asking, "What is it that is the single biggest challenge that keeps you from enjoying your life as a veterinary professional?" Thank you to all of you who sent in your answers. It was so helpful to help me to identify some areas where we can continue to build tools within Joyful DVM to help.

But one of the things I found very surprising was the length at which many of the responses went on and on and on about the other people in their lives that were causing their lives to be miserable. Now, I knew this was happening because I myself experienced the exact same thing. I definitely blamed the people around me, the circumstances, the toxic work environment, all of those things for why my job in veterinary medicine was so hard.

But what I really found striking in these responses was just how clearly it was articulated. All of the things that I had myself thought of to be able to see that repeated over and over and over again, in the words of our colleagues. I know they're not alone. I received hundreds and hundreds of responses to my question. And so many of them said the exact same things. So it got me really thinking about this concept of cannibalism.

Oftentimes we want to say that the thing that so hard in veterinary medicine is things like the euthanasias and the way the clients treat their pets and how they don't follow our advice. And for sure those things came up. Also, the things that we identify are often things like our pay and our work hours. And again, those things come up as well. Most of those things really led to a fundamental lack

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of work-life balance, which is absolutely something that we're going to address here at Joyful DVM.

But today, what we're going to talk about is the cause or what the believed cause is of that lack of work-life balance. And so often it came down to blaming the other people that we work with.

As I considered this and I thought about blame, I also recognize that oftentimes we deflect responsibility for the things that we've created for ourselves. It's much, much easier for us to blame somebody else for the way that our life has turned out than it is to take the time to inwardly look at ourselves and to see how our own choices created what we have. It makes perfect sense, especially in the world that we live in, where taking personal responsibility for our own outcomes is something that we're not very comfortable doing. It's just not modeled very often. We don't have a lot of people who've gone before us to show us that we actually have more control than we think.

How I find this showing up often in veterinary medicine is through self-righteousness. That's a term that kept coming up to me - self-righteousness. So, you know me, I had to take a moment to go and look it up to see exactly what did it mean. And here's how dictionary.com defined it - smugly moralistic and intolerant of the opinions and behaviors of others. I think that describes our behavior very, very well.

Now, before you go and get offended because I've just labeled us all as self-righteous, I really want to spend some time explaining why. Because I think it is a very unintentional self-righteousness. I don't think that our motives are bad, but what I do think is that we don't understand what's driving a lot of the behaviors that we are partaking in, day in and day out. And I don't think we understand that those behaviors actually contribute to creating the suffering that we experience.

So if we're looking at this term, self-righteousness - smugly moralistic - not so concerned about that one, but the intolerance of the opinions and behaviors of others. I guess they do really go hand in hand because oftentimes how this shows up for us is an extreme judgment of everybody else.

So extreme judgment of the clients and the choices that they make for their pets. You've heard me talk about this many times, but take a look for a second at how you judge the other people you work with. Your people on the same levels or your peer group, the people who are perhaps levels below you and levels above you, ownership of the hospital, then also your peer to peer colleagues and other hospital facilities. And then beyond that, referral hospitals, academic institutions, the whole nine yards.

We have a lot of judgment around those people. We are very intolerant of opinions that are not the same as ours. And I find this very fascinating, but I also completely understand why it's happening. It all comes down to our two greatest challenges in Vet Med. Our two greatest challenges are number

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one, the way we interact with our colleagues, and number two, the relationship we have with ourselves.

Every aspect of our dissatisfaction can really come back to those two things. Why do they occur? What is the actual fundamental reason that these two things are such a great challenge?

Well, here's why. There's an anchor cause. It's a fundamental lack of self-confidence and self-worth. When it all boils down to it, we don't in our own abilities and we also don't believe that we are worthy. Either one or both of those things working together have us showing up in a way that actually reflects self-righteousness. This is why I said it was not necessarily intentional self-righteousness, but from that place of not feeling like we're good enough and not feeling like we're worthy, we often show up and behave as if we're morally superior to other people. And we become very intolerant of their opinions and their behaviors.

What drives this? It's simply fear. At the end of the day, the greatest emotion that's driving this kind of cannibalism in veterinary medicine, all boils down to fear.

Now fear is a very normal emotion. It has a very specific purpose in our lives. It is the most basic primordial emotion that we had it literally kept our species alive. But today, in this day and age, as we allow fear to take over our behaviors, it's not useful in creating what we actually want to create. It doesn't help us to move toward the goals and achievements that we want to create. That all being said and done, we're never going to be able to get rid of fear, but we do need to understand it. It doesn't have to be gone before we can make different choices.

So what are we afraid of?

First of all, we're just afraid of messing up. Many of us have a hyper responsibility when it comes to outcomes, about the outcomes for patients and outcomes for clients. We think that we're responsible for how the client feels when they're at our hospital. We think we're solely responsible for the outcome of a patient medically based on our choices. Neither of those things is true. What is true is that we always have the opportunity to do the best that we can with the information and resources that we have available at the time. We get a lot of confusion mentally around what those resources are. We think that we're going to be able to look into a crystal ball and be able to guess what the lab results would have been on a diagnostic test that the owner declined. And then we judge ourselves severely for not interpreting that lack of data correctly and guessing at the right treatment and having a patient not respond. That's not on us.

So it's this hyper responsibility for outcomes that contribute to this underlying fear of us not being good enough. Every time a patient doesn't get better, it reinforces that idea. When it comes to

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humans, when humans get angry, when the clients get angry, we use that again as further evidence of ourselves doing something wrong. What happens is that there becomes a very binary way of measure within ourselves. We're either doing it right, or we're doing it wrong. We're either good or we're bad. And that's just not the way that the world works. But if that's the way that we participate in our lives, then, of course, we're always going to be looking for who's doing it wrong.

We need to be right to feel good about ourselves and therefore the other people need to be wrong. This is where cannibalism is showing up. This is why we so often attack our coworkers and our competition if you will, our fellow veterinary hospitals, and even the specialist and why the specialists even attack us. All of that, because underneath it all, we all just want to be right, because if we're right, then we can believe in ourselves.

What we're missing is that the ability to believe in ourselves and our own abilities is something that's available to us at all times. And there is no achievement that's going to make that true for us. It simply is a belief pattern about ourselves.

When we live our lives through the fear of being found out for not being as good as we think that we should be, that's where impostor syndrome comes in. And when you're living your life believing that you're an imposter, believing that you shouldn't be in this job, believing that you kind of got here by accident, what happens is you start to identify all the areas where other people are screwing up because that makes you feel just a little bit better.

What also happens is the negative self-talk that you have going on in your mind about yourself continues to multiply. That actually just adds to the fear of being found out.

The problem with all this is not that it occurs. It's not a problem that we're afraid, as we interact, day in and day out in our lives because of course, we are. Fear is going to be part of the process. But the problem is when we believe it shouldn't be there and so we try to behave our way out of it. So we try to convince ourselves and everybody else of how good we are, of how right we are, of how competent we are. This doesn't show up with just us taking actions over things that we can control. Unfortunately, the place that shows up the most is it's us pointing out all the areas where the other people are doing it wrong. This becomes a very toxic type of environment. You've heard me say before, the toxic environment is simply a gap between expectation and reality. And I think this is absolutely true. I talked a lot about the toxic work environment back in episode seven. So if you didn't have a chance, go check that episode out.

But how we need to keep an eye on how this actually impacts us as far as cannibalism in veterinary medicine is to recognize that the reason that many of us behave the way that we do inside of the veterinary hospital, the reason why we nitpick at our colleagues, the reason why we're so judgmental

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of the choices that other people are making regarding their work schedule, regarding the way they write their records, regarding the way the appointments are scheduled, regarding the prices we charge, all of those things, the reasons that we're so judgmental is because when they're wrong, then we're right.

It's a binary Yes and No kind of situation. It's a completely false assumption as well, that either they're right or your right. Right? Only one of us can be right and the other must be wrong. Unfortunately, this is just kind of a way that we've grown up believing the world works - that if we're right, then somebody else must be wrong. And so therefore in order to feel better to be winning, if you will, then somebody else needs to be losing.

This is where that idea of self-righteousness comes in - the intolerance of the opinions and behaviors of other people. So when you find yourself really judging the behaviors of other people and then going on and taking it to that level of commiserating and complaining, and really starting to live your life as if you are a victim of the circumstances around you, what I want you to see is that you're going to create more of the same.

You're also going to vastly contribute to that toxic work environment that you so badly want to get away from. You think it's everybody else. But when all of us are behaving in this exact same way, believing that everybody else is doing it wrong, believing that everybody else's motives are terrible, when we're believing that and we're behaving and interacting with our environment in that way, we actually contribute to the problem. It doesn't give us the opportunity to consider that, maybe, just maybe what we really have going on in these veterinary hospitals is just a population of people who are terrified most of the time. That's just kind of the human condition, my friends. We're terrified a lot of the time.

We're actually here on common ground. We're here to serve clients and to treat patients. We're here because we care about animals and we care about people. Ultimately we want people to be happy. We want patients to get better. And of course, we do, but it's when we take on the responsibility for making those things happen, and then we start to recognize that we can't control it, then we have to blame other people for why it's not happening. It's just a fundamental misunderstanding of responsibility. It's a fundamental misunderstanding that fear is going to be there. It's not a problem that it exists. But if we think that we can make it go away, if other people just do things differently then we're left with no other option than to judge harshly and to attack all of those who aren't taking the actions that we would have taken in that situation. It's a very dangerous cycle.

One of the terms that we often use to describe ourselves, often jokingly, and end with a little bit of pride is perfectionistic. We say that we're perfectionists. We may even label ourselves as control freaks. And for those of you out there, I just want you to know that I'm right there with you, in this

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boat. I absolutely, for years and years, defined myself as a perfectionistic and a control freak. I allowed that to be the reason why I made the choices that I did, that I behave the way that I did. It was kind of an acceptable excuse if you will. But what I was completely missing, which is what you're completely missing is that the only thing perfectionism is is a really strong attempt to control all the things around you. And the reason that you want to control all of the things around you is because you're believing that if everything gets done correctly, then the outcome is guaranteed. The outcome is never guaranteed. Let me just say that, but let's take it one step further and decide why is it.

Why is it that we need the outcome to be guaranteed? Because if we can guarantee the outcome, then we feel better. If we can guarantee the outcome, then we aren't afraid. The truth of it, my friends, is that we can never guarantee the outcomes. We never know what's going to happen next in life. If 2020 has taught us nothing else, it has definitely taught us that. So we just don't know how everything's going to turn out, but we're not supposed to. That's the biggest take-home here - we are not supposed to.

We are not supposed to be able to predict what happens next as human beings. All we're supposed to do is just to try our best. If we just try our best and we know that, if we know our motives are good, that we're doing the best that we can with the information and resources that we have available at the time. And if we can keep in mind that all of our fellow humans are doing the exact same thing, then the need to judge the other people really starts to go away.

We can start to recognize and embrace the discomfort that we feel and realize that we're not the only ones who are afraid in these situations. We're not the only ones that are worrying about patients in these situations. But instead, our intolerance of fear has become so strong that we will try anything to make it not happen. We will cover it up in all the ways that we know how to.

And I want to tell you, my friends, anger is a very good cover for fear. So when you're very angry about something - you're angry about your schedule, you're angry about your pet, you're angry about a client decision, you're angry about the way that the referring veterinarian treated a case before you got it, you're angry about the way that the referring veterinarian talked to you when they told you about their findings, if you're angry about your student loans, if you're angry about your quality of life - just recognize that underneath all of that is likely some levels of fear.

There are things you're afraid of that you're just not considering. And if we leave those things that we're afraid of left unnamed, they grow. They grow; they become more powerful. They influence the way that you behave in the world. And I promise you, the way that you're behaving from anger is not the way that you want to show up. That is not the best version of you and you know this.

There's not really anybody in a veterinary facility, in my opinion, that's a bad egg. Right? There's not a

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bad seed. There there's not anybody that needs to be called from the team. Those are words that we use in this profession. Listen to us. We're trying to get rid of the bad apple? The bad apple is just showing us that we all have the opportunity to be more authentic of ourselves. That perhaps there's an opportunity to have a conversation around how things are unfolding, day in and day out, in our facilities.

If the overall culture of the hospital is anger and judgment toward clients, just recognize it's also anger and judgment toward each other. You might be biting your tongue and not saying a word when you're at the clinic, but I promise you, you're going home and you're spewing for hours to somebody about all the things that your coworkers did wrong that day. And if it wasn't your coworkers, it's probably going to be your clients. And if it wasn't your clients, it's probably going to be a drug company or it's going to probably be your landlord or something. It's going to be something.

All of that, as you find yourself, starting to do this, what I want you to consider is just one question, "What are you afraid of?" Left unnamed, it's only going to grow. And what's true is that the things that we're afraid of are often the unknown. It's the uncertainty. It's the very blatant, inability to control what happens next.

Here's a little bit of hope for you. You are perfectly equipped to handle whatever happens next. Again, if 2020 has shown us nothing, it has shown us this. You are resilient as a human being. You are resourceful as a human being. Your ability to become the best version of you is never dependent on the actions of other people. Never dependent on them.

This is so important to remember, because in the day and age that we live in, the most common dialogue out there, is how other people are responsible for our results. And that is never true. What you create in your life is solely your responsibility. That comes down to the hours that you work, to the pay that you make, to the type of life that you have, to the balance that you create for yourself. All of that, the only person that can create any of that for you is you.

If you're using excuses to say why you're not creating these things that you want in your life, that's your opportunity to really take a look at where you may be contributing to your own results. At the end of the day, what you always have is choice.

There's not a single thing in this world that you have to do. And if you're believing that there are things that you have to do in this world, then you're going to become bitter and angry when what you're choosing to do is not aligned with ultimately what you want to create for yourself. In those moments, you will start to blame all the people and the circumstances around you, and when you do that you give away all of your power.

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Your power lies in your choices. Every action you take, every word that comes out of your mouth, it's all a choice. There's not a single thing in this world that somebody else can make you do.

I'm not telling you this to judge you. I'm telling you this because I've done it myself. I continue to do it. I'm just a human, living the human experience. But now, as I see myself showing up saying things that I'm not proud of later, taking actions that don't actually move me toward what I'm trying to create, now I'm willing to take a step back and say, "Okay, I didn't show up as my best version of me today. What's really going on here? What am I afraid of? What am I believing I can't control for myself? What could I do differently next time?" Those three questions give me all my power back. And they will give you all of your power back to.

My friends, when it's all said and done, you live one life. This is your life to live. You can either live it, believing that you are a victim of your circumstances. And through that victimization showing up in a way that has you judging others, that has you blaming others for what's happening in your life, that has you believing that if the other people would just do it differently that your life would be happier.

You can show up that way if you want to. Or you can decide that you always get to choose for you and you can get to work learning how to understand your own motives so that you can learn to generate the type of thinking and emotional power to make the choices that actually help move you forward toward exactly what you want to create.

Many, many of us, when it all comes down to it, we identify that we want some work-life balance. But if we don't understand what work really is, if we don't understand what life really is, if we don't understand what the concept of balance really is, we will never attain it. We will just blindly decide that work-life balance is never possible in veterinary medicine. And as a result, we will blame veterinary medicine for the state of our lives.

When it's all said and done, in my own opinion, veterinary medicine is the best catalyst that the world could have given us. It gives us so much information to work from to get to know ourselves. When we take the time to get to know ourselves at the deep level that veterinary medicine just brings up the opportunity to dig through, then we actually get so much power and clarity over what it is that we actually want.

So if you're finding yourself very much suffering in veterinary medicine right now, I just want you to recognize that this is your opportunity for growth. This is the situation that you needed to start to question everything as it exists right now.

Now don't roll over and just accept it as it is. That was never the purpose, at all. This world is always for your good. Instead, take that opportunity to get to know what you actually want and to identify

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where you actually can create that for yourself. This is exactly what we do inside of Vet Life Academy. And there's some really exciting stuff coming up really soon.

So if you want to get some help on figuring out how to get to know yourself, how to understand your own behavior patterns, how to start creating the life that you want on purpose. If you want a little bit of assistance in figuring out your authentic thoughts from your thought errors, from really starting to believe that maybe you're not living at the effect of what everything else that happens in the world, that maybe you have more power there.

And I know it's scary, guys. I know when you hear this, a lot of us we rebel and we're like, "Nope, absolutely not true!" Just recognize, the reason that we fight against this so much, just comes back to that idea of binary thinking - if I was wrong about this, then they had to have been right; if we were wrong, then we're doing it wrong. It's just more fear. We can't possibly even consider, a lot of us, that perhaps we contributed to our own present circumstance, because that would require us to believe that we were wrong about something, and we're not willing to be wrong.

This is the unintentional self-righteousness. We can't be wrong because if we're wrong, then our identity is completely not what we thought it was. Just recognize, it's a lot of judgment against yourself that's not necessary.

You can learn all about you and how to harness your own power to create the life that you want, with or without leaving veterinary medicine. That is completely your option. But I do want to warn you leaving veterinary medicine does not fix what's actually happening here.

Veterinary medicine is the catalyst for learning. So if you want that help, if you want that blueprint on how exactly you can create the work-life balance that you want, that you can pursue the things that you're really interested in, that you can get out of your own way and actually start to enjoy your life, then definitely jump over to [joyfuldvm.com/vetlifeacademy](http://joyfuldvm.com/vetlifeacademy), and sign up for the updates. There is some exciting stuff coming through the end of the year and in 2021. Some things we've never done before.

And this is your time - to take back control of your life, to stop telling yourself the story that going into this career was the worst decision ever, to stop believing that what happens next is dependent upon the limitations that your believing are in place because of the career that you've chosen - it's time to stop being a victim. It's time to stop from that victimization attacking everybody else in your facilities. Just recognize, we're all just humans. This is all just the journey. And it gets better one intentional decision at a time.

Alright, my friends, that's going to wrap it up for this week, and I'll see you next time.

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Thank you for listening to the Joyful DVM podcast. If you'd like to learn more about the concepts 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](https://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.

We can change what's possible in Vet Med together.