

Episode 34 | Why Feeling Fear is Normal in Vet Med

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

The Joyful DVM PODCAST

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Fear, Vet Med, and how our resistance has us screwing up our own lives, that's what we're talking about in Episode 34.

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 34. By the time this podcast episode publishes, it's going to be the year 2021, and I have no idea what the world's going to be like when we actually get to this day. But I do know one thing: I know that a lot of us at the time that I'm recording this, a lot of us are feeling excited, and a lot of us are feeling a little bit scared. Both are completely normal, emotional reactions. So today, I wanted to spend some time talking about fear and specifically why feeling fear is totally normal in Veterinary Medicine. And more importantly, why resistance to fear is what gets us in the most trouble.

See, fear is the most primitive emotion that we experience. It had a whole lot of use thousands of years ago. So its usefulness, if you will, was probably thousands of years ago, because it was the mechanism by which the human species was able to stay alive. It's like any other animal species. When we feel fear, our sympathetic nervous system kicks in. You know, that fight or flight mechanism, they start to engage, and what happens with us physiologically feels like a life or death situation. This is super useful when predators are chasing you, but today, not so much.

Today, we are almost never in that type of danger. Almost never in imminent threat of death. Our minds and bodies, they don't know that though. When we feel afraid, our instinct is to retreat. Fight if we have to, but getting out of the situation even better. We don't like the way that it feels to experience fear, and here's what's fascinating. Most of us are actually completely unfamiliar with actual fear. What we are experiencing most of the time is the resistance to fear. Let me explain.

In the oldest areas of our brains, our lower brains, a relationship between fear and death exists. Fear was the signal that life-threatening danger was present. That signal set off what we know today to be the sympathetic nervous system - fight or flight - with the purpose of preserving life. The other way that life was preserved was to avoid dangerous situations. You know, those situations in which the emotion of fear was experienced.

Now let's fast forward to today and tack on Veterinary Medicine as another factor. When an animal doesn't respond, as we anticipate to treatment, we often fear we've handled the case the wrong way, or that we've missed something. When a client becomes belligerent or even flat out accuses us of misconduct, we fear they will smear us on social media or turn us into the board. When we do any

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procedures such as a dog's spay or cystotomy that we haven't done often enough to be confident in our psychomotor skills, we fear we've messed up, even though we have no evidence of a mistake in most cases. And when we spend in thoughts that replay how we handled a case or a situation, we fear we might have done something wrong. Without stopping to really consider what the actual fear means, our lower brains take it and run with it leading to this conclusion: fear means the risk of death, therefore something here needs to be fixed, solved, or avoided in the future. This is the subconscious thought process, but what we are consciously aware of in those situations is how terrible it feels in any of those cases. We consciously draw our own conclusions, which typically boil down to one of just two things: another human is doing something wrong, like the belligerent client, or more often, that we've done something wrong. We then often say things like, "I just can't take this. I can't do this." And what we really mean is that we don't want to feel that way again in the future. So we get to work trying to control all the things to make sure that we never end up in a situation like this one again.

Those situations are exactly the four causes of veterinary medical anxiety that I've shared before: Unexpected Outcomes, Personal Inexperience, Human Interactions, and Prior Decisions. Here's the truth: no matter what we do, we will never be able to control any of those things.

Unexpected Outcomes - you can't predict the future. You can only do your best with the information and resources available. How an animal responds to treatment is dependent on its own physiology and never on you.

Personal Inexperience - it takes three to five years in practice to establish your rhythm, to find your style, to identify your preferences and to perfect your techniques. Psychomotor skills improve with repetition. Everyone starts somewhere. Every case is a zebra until you manage it yourself for the first time. This is the practice of Veterinary Medicine. Your experience is what it is at any given moment. That changes over time, but you can't force it to be different in an instant. Give yourself grace and compassion to simply be human.

Human Interactions - you will never control the other humans. People get to say and do and choose whatever they want. It was never your job to make sure they made the right choices. The way people feel is not your responsibility. You can't make them feel bad any more than they can make you feel bad. Remember: Think, Feel, Act. What you think creates the way that you feel emotionally and those emotions drive your actions. Just focus on your part of the equation - providing a medical recommendation and following through with what they decide - all the rest of it, not your lane.

Prior Decisions - you can't predict the future. This means you can't determine with any degree of certainty that a different decision in the past would have resulted in a more desirable outcome today. Every time we say, "I should have", we are arguing with the truth of what is, and we are

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believing it would be different if we had acted or chosen differently before. We have zero evidence of this being true. It only serves to hurt our self-confidence.

So, do you see the solution to all of those from a lower brain perspective? Control or Retreat. Over time we learn that we can't control, but instead of recognizing our ability to control these things is not an extension of our value or our capability as a veterinary professional, we conclude that we are bad at this job or not cut out for this job and so we retreat or quit. We also miss a very important piece of information. We are capable of feeling the emotion of fear. We have survived over and over again, and we can and do intentionally choose to engage in situations where we may feel fear and when we choose this it's because it's worth it to us on some level.

What causes us the most suffering is not actually experiencing the fear, it's resisting it. It's trying to keep it from happening. It is by making the presence of fear mean more than it actually does. So we feel afraid sometimes. So what? Are we in life-threatening danger? A quick look around helps us to conclude not in most situations. So then what's the worst that can happen? A client gets angry and takes action in some way. A patient dies. You make a human mistake. These things can happen, but they have always been a potential consequence in a medical practice of any kind. This is why it's called practice. This is why we have liability insurance when our humanness shows up.

These things aren't happening because you are a bad Vet or a bad Vet Tech. These things wouldn't be eliminated if you were a good Vet or a good Vet Tech. This is just part of the profession that we chose, and those types of fears are not limited to medicine. Electricians, Mechanics, Plumbers - they all worry about these types of things too. They all worry that they've done something within the realm of their job that's put another human at risk or cause another human to be angry.

The greatest gift that we can give ourselves is to accept that fear is part of the human experience. The impact of fear actually dissipates when we become familiar with how it feels. We do this by allowing it to exist. As we allow it, we can start to recognize how the presence or absence of fear plays no role in determining what we are capable of doing in our lives and the impact we are capable of making in the world. It's the resistance to the fear that messes everything up for us.

Resisting fear. Pushing it away. Believing it wouldn't exist if we were better. All of these things amplify the experience of fear. Resisting fear makes it grow. It makes it worse. The human experience is 50-50 positive and negative. We can fight the 50% negative; allow its existence to mean that we are flawed, withdraw from our lives and to save isolation. Or we can choose where we get to experience our negative 50.

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Vet Med exists to serve clients and treat patients. Half the time, it will feel uncomfortable and nearly all of that will come from fear. Fear is not a problem. Fear is just an emotion. It is a vibration that we feel in our bodies. It is only created by our thinking. Our lower brain, which is interpreting our environment is dangerous only because it is constantly in unfamiliar territory, brings fear to the surface. Our higher brain allows us to see that we are not in danger. Our higher brain allows us to engage in the reason why we are here and allows us to remember that no matter the outcome, we always do the best we can with the information and resources available at the time. That is our only job - to do our best. When we learn to let fear come along for the ride and stop resisting it and blaming it on all the things we'll never control, then we truly begin to experience the untouchable joys, not only of Vet Med but the entire life experience.

Okay, friends, if this message leaves you feeling a little helpful, you should really consider joining us at [Vet Life Academy](#). This is what we do there. We learn about the real reasons why we feel the way we do; why we make the choices we make; and how to start living our lives and participating in our careers in a way that has us deliberately creating instead of existing as passengers in a world without choices. It's more important now than ever for us to recognize our authority and our ability to choose for ourselves.

There are no victims in Vet Med. Vet Med is simply the catalyst that opens our eyes to our opportunity to be in living our lives on our own terms. We become open to change when our current reality becomes intolerable. The path to burnout and career regret has been clearly marked by those who've gone before us; by those who speak out in anger about the consequences of this career; but share no solutions.

So I ask, who are you listening to? Who are your influences? Guard your mind. Broaden your perspective. If your sources of information only paint a dismal picture of life and Vet Med careers in the future; if they constantly bitch and complain about the reality of what is; and if they blame others for the state of their lives without considering the impact of their own choices and how that has actually created what exists for them today, then I'm going to be really frank. You need a new influence. You will create for yourself that what you spend the most time thinking about.

In [Vet Life Academy](#), you learn the skills and have access to tools to help you master intentional thinking. You're not broken. You've done the best you can with what you understood about yourself and the world up until this point in time. You recognize on some level that this is not enough. You want something more. You want something different.

Here's the bad news: changing jobs or careers won't solve this for you.

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Now, here's the very best news: you have total power to begin changing it immediately for yourself. You're powerful. You are capable. You have unlimited potential. If you want to learn more about all of that, Vet Life Academy is a great place to start. To learn more, check out my latest webinar over joyfuldvm.com/webinar.

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

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. 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.