

Episode 41 | What if Vet Med Was Never Supposed To Be Your Long-Term Purpose?

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Considering the possibility that practicing Vet Med was never supposed to be your long-term thing, that's what we're talking about in Episode 41.

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 41. Today, I want to talk a little bit about purpose and as we get kind of closer to the weekend, for me what this is, is a movement closer to another birthday. The older that I get, the more important I recognize it is to really understand your purpose and to continue to work to find it for yourself.

As I've gone through my career in Veterinary Medicine, I think one thing has become very, very clear and this is that Veterinary Medicine isn't the long-term answer for everybody. This may not be a very popular conversation. Oftentimes once we get into this profession, we kind of feel anchored to it indefinitely. Almost for some of us like a bit of a ball and chain. What I want to explore a little bit today is the idea of maybe you weren't supposed to stay in Veterinary Medicine. What if that's true?

I think the way that our culture is that a lot of us pursue a career. So for us, we're talking about Veterinary Medicine, but this happens, I think, all across, in all kinds of different professions. We pursue a profession. We make that choice. We invest the money. We go through all the school. We invest all the time and the years and all of that. As we do that, as we get out into the real world, as I like to call it, and we experience that, we feel a little bit restless. We feel a little bit uncentered, unbalanced. We feel frustrated. Quite honestly, a lot of us feel frustrated. As we feel this way, we tend to compare ourselves to other people in our job, in our profession and a lot of us just conclude that the problem is us. That if there weren't something wrong with us, then we would be happy like everybody else in the job.

It's so funny because when you actually start to talk to people about the way that they feel in the profession, this profession or whatever profession they're in, where they're comparing themselves to somebody else, what those people will share with you is that they are also struggling. Many people struggle. Many people haven't found that balance. They haven't found that purpose if you will. I don't think that's a problem. I don't think that it means that we made a mistake, but that is what our mind would have us believe. That's what actually compounds this and makes it so much worse.

See guys, what happens is when we're younger, we make these decisions about our careers and we pursue those careers wholeheartedly. It was a really good decision at the time. Always a very good decision. We've invested the time. We've invested the money. We've gotten out into the real world.

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We've engaged in the profession. We've gained some experience. We've grown and we've come to know ourselves a little bit more. This is where the trick is. This is where the catches if you will.

For some of us, Veterinary Medicine and all that it encompasses was our purpose. It was really the bigger umbrella of our entire purpose. For the rest of us, Veterinary Medicine was like I have said before that stepping-off point. The piece of your journey that just supplied information that you needed to be able to become more of who you actually are. This is where it gets tricky because of the way that our culture is and the way that society has kind of brought us up and the way that even our parents grew up, the right way to do life is to get a job and work that job. You know, keep going, get a retirement, build up your savings, and have that kind of traditional life. But here and where we live, in this day and age, that's just not all that common and it's also not necessary. It also, for many of us, goes completely against the nature of who we are and that is what we recognize. That is where the struggle comes from. That is where the frustration comes from.

A lot of us though, don't recognize. We don't understand that perhaps the reason that we can't figure out where we fit in Vet Med is not because there's something wrong with us, but because Vet Med isn't the right fit. We can't figure that out though. We can't even entertain that idea. We don't give ourselves permission to consider it because it goes against what all the rules are that everybody in our lives has told us up until this point. Then you add on to that some of the like money drama, "Oh my gosh. But I spent so much money" or the time drama, "I've already invested so much time." We take those things that we've already invested and we use them as evidence of how this decision needs to be the decision. How we can't even consider that maybe adjusting course just slightly to either pursue an alternative career within the realm of Veterinary Medicine or to maybe investigate and pursue something completely outside of it. We don't even give ourselves permission to consider that because of what our minds would tell us. It would mean about the decisions that we made; the time that we spent; the money that we invested already. That is powerful stuff, guys. The pressure that we put on ourselves over the time and the money that we've already invested and the fear that we don't necessarily recognize it right off as being overt fear, but the fear of being judged if we actually pursue something different.

So the conversation I want to start having more of is the one where you allow yourself to just consider maybe Vet Med wasn't ever supposed to be the long-term thing for you. I, 100% believe that starting in Veterinary Medicine was absolutely the right choice for all of us. Absolutely, myself included, 100% believe that. But if we limit ourselves to the possibilities of only what we see we're capable of and have opportunities to pursue within the bucket of Vet Med, for a lot of us, we will completely miss out on the entire point of pursuing it in the first place. It's as we try to conform to the tradition of what these careers are that many of us feel this pressure. We feel this pulling. Well, it becomes hopelessness because we keep trying to make it work and what we miss is that these efforts to make it work are not for nothing. It's simply more data points for us to consider as we decide what comes next.

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As we gather data though, many of us just won't give ourselves permission to even consider that this is an option. You may have somebody in your ear that's chiming right along with the same thing "If you fail in the Veterinary Medicine, what are you going to do? But you invested all that money. But you've already spent all that time. But Dr. so-and-so seems to have a great life and they own a practice. Maybe you need to go own a practice. Maybe you just need to work at a different location. Maybe you need to just pursue a different interest. Maybe you should have specialized." Right?

Everybody's got an opinion about your life, but none of it matters. Hear me, none of it matters because when it's all said and done, you are the only one who knows what's right for you. For most of us, we have not even given ourselves permission to consider what's right for us, because we are living within these rules, this society, and that our parents, even our friends, and our colleagues have kind of put in place and reinforced without even realizing it. I don't think they're doing it intentionally. I think that overall, the people that care about us have our best intentions in mind. I think that the people who give us guidance absolutely want the best for us, but what we maybe don't consider is that as the guidance is given, it's also given through the lens of their own experience. Sometimes we just need somebody to say, "Hey, you know what? Maybe Vet Med's not for you." and if it's not for you, that's okay. That doesn't mean that you did anything wrong. That doesn't mean that you made a mistake pursuing it because here's another thing that I know is true. It is not until you try things that you have data by which to evaluate what's working for you and what doesn't. We know this.

In a lot of areas in our lives - a lot of like maybe less important areas of our lives, less volatile areas of our lives - we know you just kind of try and adjust and you try and adjust. But when it comes to the bigger things - like relationships, occupations - trying and adjusting and trying and adjusting doesn't seem to be as accepted. Right? If you try out a profession and it doesn't work out for you, we make it mean so much more than it does. We make it mean that we're failures. We make it mean that we're not cut out for this. We make it mean that we made a bad choice pursuing it in the first place. And I think all of that is wrong. I think we are not failures if we decide to pursue something different. We're simply aware. We're simply curious. We're simply willing to continue to explore. I think we did not make a mistake by pursuing it because unless you pursue it, you wouldn't know. Here's the other part of it: when you're at that point where you're in that bit of a struggle, you're trying to figure out, "Do I hate Veterinary Medicine? Is this just the wrong career field for me? Or have I just not found my fit yet?" when you're in that and you're struggling in that, it's very, very easy to turn that struggle to yourself. To blame yourself for not being good enough; for not being smart enough; for not being worthy enough. We do this all the time - compare and despair. We look at everybody else. We make assumptions about how great their lives are and how great their careers are. Then we measure ourselves against a standard that we've actually made up to which we can never attain because it can never be defined. In doing that, we limit what is possible because we've shut off all possibilities. We literally do not give ourselves permission to even consider it. I know. I did this for years.

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Now, you guys have heard my story before, most of you, that when I went into Veterinary Medicine, I had three jobs, on the first year out of Vet school. But as I kind of continue to pursue and figure out where do I fit in this profession, I got to the point that for me, it was a black or white decision. I have got to figure out how to control all the variables to decide whether or not I like this job; whether or not I'm fit for this job. So for me, what that looked like is I started a Veterinary hospital from the ground up. I didn't even buy one. I went out, started one from the very ground up because here was my silly rationale. My rationale was that if I could control the standard of medicine that I practiced; if I could control the kind of clients that we saw; if I could control the hours that I worked; if I could control the money that I make; if I could control the number of staff members I had; if I could control the way those staff members were educated and trained; if I could control all of those variables - that were the variables that I would say were stressing me out and making me miserable in Veterinary Medicine - if I could control all that and I was still unhappy, then Vet Med must not be for me. I have laughed about that many times because it was a very complicated way to try to make a decision. Very complicated way to make a decision. But I also think it was useful because of all the things that I learned along the way and all the things I've been able to apply as I've moved forward. But I kind of, in doing that, missed a bit the point, which is that if I had just listened to myself, I already knew the answer. I just wouldn't give myself permission to consider that answer because of what I was making that answer mean. Cause you know, I don't practice Veterinary Medicine full-time anymore. Really at this point, thanks to 2020, I don't even practice part-time anymore.

Joyful DVM, this is what I do. I help veterinary professionals. I help all humans actually, and we're expanding kind of to what we're doing because for me it's all about purpose. It's all about finding the right fit. It's all about understanding the demons that keep you stuck where you are. Most of that just created by the belief system that we have adopted from the people around us and never questioned. Through all of that, we don't find our purpose, but if we don't at least attempt to give ourselves permission to pursue; to consider; to dream a little bit, then what happens is what happened to me. We keep ourselves inside of a box of a decision that we made.

Most of us, when we were in our twenties or early, early twenties, a decision that we made at that point in time, we feel some kind of sense of obligation to hang onto for the rest of our lives and we would miss out. Can you imagine, for those of you who have been following Joyful DVM in the nearly four years since we created it or who have been in any of our programs or any of our workshops, can you imagine if this has been useful for you at all if it didn't exist? I can't even imagine what it would be like if it didn't exist because of how much impact it has had on me personally, as I've continued to mentor and to help, and to guide. I can't even imagine, but I also know that I could never have gotten here if I hadn't started there. That the decision to go into Veterinary Medicine, which for years I believe was the wrong choice - the biggest mistake that I ever made - that decision was still one of the best decisions. It was a necessary decision. The experience - all of those jobs and all the different

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ways that I pursued this career - all of it absolutely necessary to bring me here so that I can have this conversation with you. Nobody told me that I had permission to change my mind. Nobody told me that my decisions would be compounding; that it was all intentional; that it was all just part of forwarding progress; that it was all part of the life that I was meant to live. Nobody told me. Nobody overtly told me that I couldn't. Don't misunderstand. Nobody overtly said, "You know, you can't do that. You have to stay in this job because that's what you chose." But I know for some of you, there's somebody in your life who is telling you that. I know there is. You've told me. And even though nobody flat out said that to me, nobody either gave me permission to consider pursuing something different.

I'm giving you permission for that. I'm giving you permission just to explore all of the things that you're interested in. I'm giving you permission to think about how you feel day in and day out in your job. For some of us, we are meant to be in the veterinary profession and it's some mind drama that we've got to work with. We've got to work with that silly primitive brain that wants to bring up all the fear and give us the worst-case scenario. There's so much we can do there to manage that. We all have to manage that piece. That's why it's so essential.

The things that we do in Vet Life Academy are so essential whether you stay or you go. There are skills there that we need for our lives. But for some of us, we kind of split this into a kind of two very broad sweeping categories: we've got those who are meant to serve in Veterinary Medicine in some capacity, that is their calling, and then we have the others, who in Veterinary Medicine and career here was a stepping stone. It was one piece of your journey and there's something more, and you know who you are. You feel that in your bones that there's something different here. Many of you are trying to make it mean, not like, let me beat myself up on purpose, but the way that you're interpreting - that draw, that nudging, that knowing - is that you've made a mistake somewhere. You can't even allow yourself to consider it because of the judgment that you are already placing on yourselves. So I give you permission to let go of all that. And this is such an important topic that for our first workshop of the year, here in 2021, we're going to dig into it.

So we're going to be doing a workshop next month. It's going to be called Discovering Your Purpose. This is for people who are in Veterinary Medicine and want to stay in Veterinary Medicine. These are people who are in Veterinary Medicine or think of maybe they want to leave Veterinary Medicine. It's for everybody, quite honestly because the thing of it is, it doesn't matter if you're a long-termer like this is your calling versus somebody whom this is maybe a skipping off point. It doesn't matter because odds are that if you're struggling, if you're frustrated, if you're burned out, that you haven't quite locked into your own purpose and that's whether or not you're staying in Veterinary Medicine or whether or not you're going to give yourself permission to leave it. We have got to figure that piece out. It all comes down to figuring out who you are and what are the different components that add to that. So in that workshop, we are going to take a look at that, for sure. We don't have it all set up yet,

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but to get the updates, if you just go to joyfuldvm.com/purpose. Fill up that quick little form, that'll add you to our email list and it will tag you so that I send you reminders about that workshop as I continue to get it all set up for next month for sure.

Somebody asks, "What do you recommend for someone who realizes that Vet Med is a stepping stone, but are also considering the amount of debt they are in." Okay, this is what I want you to consider. This is such a great question, because this is for most of us, the thing that keeps us locked here. Right? It's the money. Is the, "What the hell do we do about the debt?" Right? For sure. So this is what I want you to consider. This is actually the way that I used to practice Veterinary Medicine, full-time. In Veterinary Medicine, when I practice it full-time, when I own my hospital and I had hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of debt and all of that, my philosophy was, "When you practice good medicine, the money takes care of itself." So when I practice medicine in the way that it was aligned with me and what I believed in, that the money took care of itself, and that was always true. That was absolutely my experience. So now, where I am now, in this world, in doing all kinds of different things, I have to hang on to that same thing - when I am doing what I'm supposed to do, the money is going to take care of itself. I know it sounds woo. I know it sounds like pie in the sky yet, but that's not tangible, and that I just want us to all recognize is fear.

Money is actually just a neutral thing. It doesn't have any emotion tied to it. But our money stories, which we have adopted through our lives - from our parents, from our colleagues, from our mentors, and our teachers - money has been given so much power in our lives that we make life choices based on money. But money doesn't make anybody happy at all. That sounds like a cliché because people throw that around the world all the time. Money is not going to make you happy, and a lot of people are like, "Yeah, but money can make you unhappy", and I just want you to say neither one of those is true. There are ways to make the money. I really, really do believe that when you are aligned with your own purpose, the money part just takes care of itself because leaving Vet Med, I'm not saying, let's leave Vet Med and go sit on a beach somewhere and just never do anything. I mean, I guess you could hide from Vet Med that way. That's not what I'm saying at all. I'm saying, let's figure out how you're supposed to serve. Let's figure out what you're meant to do. Just know that when we are living as who we are supposed to be, our needs are taken care of, and that includes things like paying back student loans, for sure. It requires us to consider it from a completely different perspective. You cannot approach these kinds of concepts with the rules of the world with you. That's part of the process is to shut off all of the pieces that we've just believed because people that we care about, people who we trust have kind of introduced us to the concepts a 100%. Like my dad, absolutely perfect example of this. One of the greatest lessons that he taught me, one of the things that I will just hold with me forever, that I've had to try to let go a little bit, was always with the best intention, and he said, "I don't care what you do with your life. You just need to be able to take care of yourself." It sounds like great advice, right? So much of it is true. But when you add that to somebody

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who's an achiever, to somebody who's hyper responsible, somebody who's a bit of a perfectionist, you know, where that goes in a hurry, right? And many of you have the same way. So what are the stories? If you really want to dig into that piece, I'll just kind of give you a side note if, I'm not sure if you're in Vet Life Academy, but for those of you who have this, these same kinds of concerns, inside of Vet Life Academy, we actually did an entire module on money - around money stories and uncovering the money stories. I've gotten some really good feedback from our members about how people who really felt financially secure went through our money module and were like, "Whoa, I didn't realize the impact of money and how much my money story was influencing my decisions in my relationships and all these kinds of things." We're actually going to do it again. So we did it once. It's already there, inside of Vet Life Academy. The other we're going to do, I think it's April because we're going to talk about money again. It's such an important topic because of how influential it is. All the way around, a hundred percent. So we're going to talk about that again. So if you're curious and you want to dig more into your own money story, Vet Life Academy is a great way to start. Just, you know, joyfuldvm.com/vetlifeacademy and you get the info on that, for sure.

Someone else said, "Would you say it's best to treat those loans, like paying off your mortgage to your house? It may last a long time, but is that's okay if those payments are doable for you?" So yeah, I think that there's no right or wrong way. I think you get to decide. I think it comes down to a lot of individual preference and tolerance. So we have to understand why we're kind of doing the thing we do. Some people just want the debt gone. They just want it over with. They want all that student loans gone and they're willing to do whatever it takes to get it there. I think, in particular, about a friend of mine who had hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of debt and just decided she wanted it gone. I think she paid it off in like six years, five or six years, hundreds of thousands of dollars. She did that by just purposely deciding just to live like a college student, basically, just really minimize her expenses so that she could put all of her money, every penny she could toward those loans to get it paid off. That's what she wanted to do. So she had done it in five years. I don't exactly remember, but it was an amazingly short period of time for the amount of money. That was what worked for her because she believed for herself that she needed to do that. She wanted to do that.

Now others of us, yeah. I think it's completely fine. Like, just look at it as like an investment in your life, right. Just keep paying it off. For some of us, maybe we go the route where, for the words available for you, you pay off, you know, you pay the minimums, and then at the end, after however many years it gets forgiven and then you have the tax piece that you've got to pay. And like I'm not a financial advisor at all. So please don't hear that. But there are lots of different ways, right? Just because it's one way is right for one person doesn't mean it's right for another. So that's the decision you actually get to make for yourself. And the tricky part is, and I don't mean so tricky, but I think the part that makes it harder than it should be is because of how we fear people are going to judge our choice. Right? If you can make those payments and you're comfortable making those payments for

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20, 30 years, and that works for your lifestyle and the life that you want to have right now, cool. If you got somebody in your back pocket, who's telling you that you need to be doing it differently, let's look at that. Your opportunity here is to work on your mindset around how you are reacting to their opinion. Now that's completely something that you can decide for yourself. As you become more confident in your own choice and you understand your own purpose and you know where you're heading then what the other people think about your choices starts to matter less. That's the magic of all of it. Because once you can let what other people think about your choices not matter then you have the freedom to make all your own choices. It really becomes quite liberating to do that. It's not the simplest thing in the world, by any means, but it's totally worth it.

As you really start to realize how much that makes a big difference in the choices that you make. It's kind of eye-opening when you start to consider the decisions that you may have made because of how somebody else might've reacted. People-pleasing to some extent, right? We don't want people to get upset, but more so we don't want to feel like we made a wrong choice, and we all have people in our lives who are very quick to tell us when we make a wrong choice. But that's their opinion of our choice. That doesn't make our choice wrong. So let me say that one more time, just because somebody tells you you've made a wrong choice, doesn't mean you made a wrong choice. They just think that your choice is wrong. That doesn't mean that you have to believe them. That doesn't mean that you have to accept that their opinion of your choice is true. You get to decide that. This is your life, and they get to decide for them. Very liberating when we stopped trying to live in a box and everybody be the same and conform and try to all pursue these careers in the same ways and get to the same ends.

We all have different goals and those goals are all just part of that bigger piece, which is our purposes. There really is something inside of you that is just trying to become what it is always meant to be. As we let the world's influence trap us it does not come out at all. But what's so fascinating about it is once you do start to embrace who you are, you start to allow yourself to explore it; you give yourself permission to break the rules a little bit, what you find is that life gets a lot easier.

Alright, my friends, it's been so good talking about this today. So final take-home here.

Some of us aren't meant to stay in Vet Med. You're probably not going to hear a lot of people tell you that it's okay to leave. I'm going to tell you it's okay to leave, with one caveat, I don't want you running away from Vet Med to feel better. I want you to understand why you struggle in Veterinary Medicine and then figure out who you are so that you head toward that. It may seem like you get to the same place, but here's what I will promise you a hundred percent of the time. If you leave without understanding why you have the experience within the profession that you have, it doesn't matter if you're running in the right direction toward who you're supposed to be, you will carry with you the

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baggage of the experience of Veterinary Medicine. You don't want that. I promise you, you don't want that. So give yourself the opportunity to understand your experience, because then that gives you the truest of permission to pursue who you actually are and to move forward. You can do that with an understanding of how you react, what your patterns are, what your prior experiences are, and how all of that plays into that silly mind of ours to offer us all kinds of sentences that seem really true, that really isn't.

That's where I wanted us to go today is I want to just kind of start this conversation of, "We don't have to just fix everything." I think what's better and you've heard me say this a million times, Veterinary Medicine is the catalyst. So let's use it for what it is. It's the catalyst for some of us to understand and make our veterinary experiences better because Veterinary Medicine is in our bones and that's where we're supposed to be and we're just figuring out how to serve best. For others of us, it's the catalyst for us to get to know ourselves and to understand that Veterinary Medicine is a stepping stone to what comes next and it starts to give us the courage to move toward that. It is purposeful for both of us. It doesn't matter which camp. One camp is not better than the other. They are both equally important and necessary. It's up to us though, to understand ourselves enough, to know which camp that we're in, so that we don't limit our own potential and so that we actually live into who we're supposed to be.

Do you want to figure out more about that? Join us in this workshop. I'm going to be sending out information as soon as we get it all together. The workshop is going to be next month, joyfuldvm.com/purpose, to sign up to get those notifications for the [Discover Your Purpose workshop](#) that we're going to be holding in March.

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.