

Episode 42 | Why You're Probably Too Smart For Your Own Good

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How our academic achievements have actually contributed to making us too smart for our own good, that's what we're talking about in Episode 42.

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 42. Today, I want to talk about how we may be too smart for our own good. When it comes to being happy in our lives, happy in our careers, fulfilled in our relationships, our very analytical minds want to try to make sense of it all. Today, what I would like to do is talk about the concepts of the right brain and the left brain, as well as the concepts of the higher brain and the lower brain, and how these things together can actually make things way more complicated than they need to be.

So let's start out and let's talk about the left brain and right brain. You guys have probably heard about this before. The left side of the brain is the part that is all about logic. This is logic, very linear thinking. When we think about our careers and we think about what it's taken to get into Veterinary Medicine and the kinds of academics that we've been through, we've really utilized the left side of our brain. That side of our brain is super useful when it comes to learning new information and applying new information in a very streamlined kind of way. This is what we develop when we go through veterinary school or veterinary technician school. This is what we use as we see our patients. We gather data. We analyze the data. We make plans and all of that. So the left side of our brain gets a lot of use.

The right side of our brain is the more creative side of our brain. It's the more abstract side. It's the bigger picture side, and it's also extremely useful. But when we get into an academic program, get very focused on something that's very left-brain-oriented, a lot of times we don't take the time to engage the right side of the brain. Over time, what happens is we completely function in our lives from a left-sided, logical, responsible kind of place. Sound familiar at all? But that doesn't seem like it would be such a bad thing.

Let's bring in now the lower brain and the higher brain. The lower brain is the primitive brain. It's that part of the brain that was created thousands of years ago, and it had a purpose to really keep us safe; to keep the human species alive. We needed food, shelter, and the ability to reproduce, and without those things, this species doesn't exist. This is true for any species, right? So this lower brain was designed to alert us when there was something threatening those things; something threatening our ability to survive. Very useful when you're being stalked by predators, but today, not so much. The tricky part with that lower part of the brain is that it's always looking for threats. It's always looking for

the negative. This isn't a problem. This isn't a defective thing. This is just what it does. This is why it's so easy. Easy for us to find the negative in any situation. This is why it's so easy for us to look to the glass half empty side of things; to look at the things that could go wrong. This is a very, very normal neurologic process. It's the lower brain in action, but it's not necessary so much today.

Now, thankfully, we as humans have our higher brain - the prefrontal cortex - and those other higher brain systems that allow us to think about what we're thinking about. That's the part of the brain that allows us the ability to make decisions in advance. To plan ahead. To set a goal. To move forward with a goal even when we may not really feel like it at the moment. To recognize that sometimes the way that we feel is really just lower brain kicking off in an alert, in a situation that doesn't really need; we don't need to be saved from if you will. So this is super useful because when it comes to understanding our emotional roller coasters and our experiences; if we think about the idea that our emotions - our emotional feelings are created by what we're thinking about - and then we remember that the lower part of our brain will offer us sentences in any situation that it's perceiving as a potentially threatening situation and those sentences are likely going to give us permission to get the heck out of there like a retreat, fight or flight, those kinds of things, then what we can see is that when we're feeling afraid and we're feeling uneasy, that we may have just a lower brain process kicking off, a lower brain trigger kicking off, and we can use our higher brain to recognize whether or not we're truly in danger at that moment. Now that's useful in and of itself - lower brain, higher brain - understanding the difference; utilizing that prefrontal cortex to analyze and interpret our situations.

But do you notice the words I'm using here? Analyze. Interpret. So part of that prefrontal cortex really likes that left-sided brain kind of strategy. It likes to look at logic. It likes to break down into a linear thought pattern what's happening. The left-sided brain really is trying to create more of a certain conclusion. That's where logic comes in, right? Like, A plus B equals C. That's a very logical conclusion and that's what that left brain does. For us, as veterinary medical professionals, we've had a lot of training to utilize and to strengthen that side of our brain, the part of our brain that's more masculine energy. It doesn't have anything to do at all with gender, but the more masculine energy of the brain is that left-sided brain. So then we've got the more feminine side. Again, that doesn't have anything to do with gender, just energy, and that's the more creative, bigger picture side of things. The right brain looks beyond logic. It looks at the problem; it looks at the situation through something other than what would be logical; what would be reasonable; what would be linear. There's a lot to be gained from engaging our right side of our brain in all these situations. I think that this is part of the problem for us as we become dissatisfied and frustrated in our careers, because for many of us if we would just give ourselves a moment to kind of think back to where we started, there were likely creative outlets in your life. Things that you were interested in beyond science and technology. Things that let you up. Things that you enjoyed, and engaging in those things were probably right-side brain activities. We then get into school, very left-sided oriented. We've become successful in that. We've found some certainty through that kind of process, and by that, I mean, you know, you do

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the work; you earn the grade; you pass the class; you get the degree, right? So you just do these things and it's all very logical that you will be successful. Then we get out into the real world, and when we're not happy, we think we're not successful, and we try to fix it using the logic of the left brain. Also recognizing, as some of you have gotten to understand the Think-Feel-Act cycle, you recognize that a lot of the discomfort that you're feeling is coming from your lower brain, so you're also very logically considering that using the prefrontal cortex.

So we're very logically trying to fix the way that we feel and it makes sense that we approach it this way, but there's more to it than that especially now. For some of us, we may be able just to understand it and adjust it, and we're good to go. But for others of us, particularly if we might be in that camp where traditional Veterinary Medicine is not really part of the purpose that we have here, we might not be able to solve it with just logic. We may not be able to solve it by just understanding what's happening. The logic of the left brain to understand what's happening between the lower brain and higher brain and understanding our experience is super useful. But there's not a solution there, right? Those of us who are very left-brain oriented, who are always looking for a way to fix things, want to fix the negative emotion in these situations. We logically understand where it comes from. And so, therefore, if we can fix where it comes from, then we don't have to feel it anymore. Completely doesn't work because life is 50-50 positive and negative. We're always going to experience both sides of that coin, emotionally. We're supposed to. That's part of the process. Those of us who want to fix things, even though we can academically understand that, the experience doesn't get any easier. If we would engage our right brain a little bit more, though, if we would look at the bigger picture of the entire experience and allow ourselves to step out of solving the experience and just to allow the experience, the experience would get easier. It's really interesting. That is part of what I want us to consider, particularly, if you feel like you have tried all the things and you just can't figure out why you're not happy, and this could be Veterinary Medicine or otherwise, let's look back a little bit and figure out what's the side of your brain are you using most of the time? Are you engaging mostly in left-side, logical, linear thinking? Many of us would because that's where a lot of the conditioning of the world comes in. You get a good job. You earned a good paycheck. Then you have safety and security. This is not the fact, by the way. It's just a line of belief, but it's adopted by so many people in our culture, including our mentors and our parents and people like that who share that with us, that it becomes a belief. Something that we believe is true. Something we live our life through as if it is absolute truth and that closes off possibility. And that possibility, that ability to see the more abstract concepts of what's actually happening in our life experience is something the right brain can help us with. If we've really been focused on using that left brain, it doesn't even often give us the permission to explore the alternative abstract considerations.

This is a really interesting thing to consider. Are you locked into your thought patterns? So what this all boils down to, are you too smart for your own good? Have you use logic and linear thinking to so

much success up until this point that you can't see around it for any solutions. That any possibility to fix your situation; to fix the way that you feel; to fix your job; to fix your career; to fix your relationship. The only way to fix that is through some kind of logic that you can really tangibly put together, and when you can't come up with the logic to get from point A to point B, are you then deciding there's something wrong with you? This is often what happens. We're very, very smart people, but a lot of us are suffering from self-worth and self-esteem, and self-confidence not because we're stupid, but because we're smart, we recognize that there's something missing and we cannot find it. We cannot put a finger on it. We're so smart we don't know how to think our way out of this and this. This where that right-side part of the brain is so important. It's actually hugely important in science too, because we cannot move forward in any situation looking only at what we already know. Logic is really based on the application of what we have already learned. What you have to do as a human is to continue to grow; to continue to evolve, and as we do that, we become different versions of ourselves. We don't know where we're going. That can be a little bit scary, but it's actually the most beautiful thing in the world. It's actually the only way that you've gotten to this point because you haven't known exactly where you were going. But you've had some certainty in that because there's probably been a bit of a roadmap up until now. Those of us who get to the point that we're very frustrated, we're very dissatisfied, we start to question all the things that we've done before - all the choices that we've made - and we start to apply this logic, this left-sided brain reasoning to our lives. As we look back over, we try to draw conclusions. We then often come up with things like, "I made a bad decision here", or "I took a wrong turn there" and we try to predict the future from that point - "If I hadn't made that decision; if I hadn't taken that term, then I wouldn't be here and then I wouldn't be unhappy" - completely not true. We don't know that either, by the way. We can't predict the future. But instead, if we would just look at it from a higher viewpoint, that bird's eye view, that overarching possibility view, and consider, maybe this is all very intentional. Maybe to get to point B, I don't need to know the road other than the two or three steps right in front of me. I don't need to know everything on the way. Maybe it's enough that I just know where I want to go and I believe that I can get there and I can trust that I will figure it out as I go. It's not very logical to believe that just because you want something, you can have it. It's not very logical to believe that you invested all this time and money in Veterinary Medicine and maybe a Veterinary Medicine career was not what you were supposed to do. It's not very logical to believe you can leave a high-paying job and still pay off your student loans. That's where faith comes in. That's where trust comes in. That's where utilizing the right side of your brain - the creative side of your brain - becomes so important because it's that right side of your brain that allows you to see outside of the box that we've put ourselves in. It allows us to consider the possibilities that are not obvious; the ones that are maybe not popular. At some point in your life, I'm going to guess that you used to utilize this quite a bit. You used to dream more. You used to think more about what you wanted for your future. You used to wish more, and you didn't know at that point either how you were going to get there. Even when you had that dream of getting into veterinary school or at tech school, it was a dream. You didn't have solid logic at the very beginning of it to assure you that you would make it. Not at the very beginning. Now, as you gathered

some more data and you saw what the roadmap looked like, then you found the courses that you would have to take and the classes and the degrees and all of those things. Then you had a bit of a roadmap and you found a bit of security in the existence of that roadmap. But that dream was there before that. That desire was there before that and that's where we need to go back to. We need to go back to the point before we were so smart that we got in our own way. Because at that point, before the logic came in, before the left brain became the dominant feature in our minds, we knew so much more about how to live our lives than we do now. It's the conditioning of the world; the conditioning of the education; the dominance of the left-sided brain thinking along with the influence of the lower brain which is always triggering fear and disaster, together, that puts us in a very restricted kind of hopeless, scary place. Those two things together are a recipe for disaster, but the good news is it's completely reversible. We can take that brainpower that we have, and we can start to actually use it in a better way. We can say, "Yes, this is logical", but activate the prefrontal cortex, activate the right side of the brain. This is the logical conclusion, but what else? What else is true here? If this isn't true; if this logical conclusion isn't absolute, then what's possible? This is what we need to look at more because we have so many of the answers right inside of us.

The answers to what you need in your life are not outside of you. They're not logical. They're not going to be given to you by somebody else. I promise you, this is true. And as you continue to move forward and seek your purpose and seek that place where you really feel like you are completely you, what I want you to recognize is the reason that you don't feel that way right now is probably because you've just been utilizing a tiny little fraction of your mind and too great success. As far as the world is concerned, you've earned the degrees, you're making the money, but not to the success of how you're actually supposed to serve and exist in this universe at this time.

This is the opportunity I give to you is to consider that logic alone is never going to make you happy. That continuing to live your life, measuring it constantly against those around you, against standards that other people have put in place, against things like titles and dollars and degrees and possessions, those things will never make you happy. And I know you know this. You're already experiencing that. Some of us at that point, when we recognize those things - those things that we've worked so hard to get - don't create happiness for us, some of us have a bit of a breakdown at that point. We think, "Oh my gosh, I've done it all wrong." We think we've made wrong decisions. We second guess everything that we've done up until now and I want you to say, "No!" No, you didn't do anything wrong. Like you're supposed to learn this stuff at exactly the moment in time when you're supposed to learn it. And so when you hit that point when you start to question, "Why the heck did I do all this stuff?" just engage that creativity. Engage that right side of your brain that will help you to see no. This is all for a reason. This is all part of a bigger picture that you may not completely understand yet, but you don't need to. Listen to how you feel. Stop trying to make sense of it. Listen to how you feel when you go to make decisions. Give yourself the opportunity to consider how you feel about your life. Not what you think about your life. Two completely different things.

As we get more in touch again with who we are as people, whereas where we started very much as children before we were conditioned and we were educated and we were kind of put into these boxes of expectation. And I want to just pause for a second and say, not through any ill intent, right? Our mentors, our teachers, our parents, no ill intent there. They're just trying to raise good human beings. They try to take care of us the best that they know how. They're trying to set us up for success. So there's always very good intent here. But when you try to put everybody into the same box and you try to train everybody in the same way, you end up losing the individuality of the people and the people start to recognize that they don't fit with the herd, right? We're not a homogenous group of humans. We weren't ever supposed to be. So you get to give yourself a little bit of permission as you start to recognize that you don't fit in. Recognizing that you don't fit in is actually a beautiful thing. It's one of the most beautiful things because when you recognize that you don't fit in now your opportunity to say, "Okay, I'm not supposed to fit in. So what am I supposed to do? What do I feel about this? What are the possibilities if I lean more into that?" Instead, what we do because we don't even realize we have permission to live outside of the rules and expectations of the world, we keep trying to fix ourselves to fit into these categories of success that were never even created by us. It's exhausting. It doesn't work. It causes a lot of anxiety and stress and depression and all kinds of stuff like that because we're really living against our nature. If we would let go of the logic - the logic is trying to tell us that if you were like everybody else, you would be happy, skewed logic, by the way, not true, very linear thinking - if we could just allow ourselves to let that go, to set it aside and say, "Okay, maybe. But what else?" Literally, just ask that question, "But what else? What if this isn't true? What if that's not all there is? What did I use to enjoy when I was younger? How did I spend my time when I was younger?" Go back to that time before you were so smart and think about the person that you were. Think about what lit you up because there are clues there that you need today to figure out where you're going to go next. Logic will never get you there. I promise. This is only something that you can discover for yourself by going back to who you already know who you are.

So just to kind of recap here: left brain, right brain. Logical - left brain. Linear thinking. Science loves that. $A + B = C$. A lot of proof. A lot of tangible evidence. As medical professionals, we like that too. It helps us to make a diagnosis. It helps us to create treatment plans. Right brain - more abstract, more big picture, less detail. Oftentimes the right brain is just not even considered when we're trying to be more logical and tactical. Lower brain versus higher brain. The lower brain is the primitive brain. Always looking for danger; will always find the negative in any situation; will offer you that first. Not a problem, unless we believe it. The higher brain is the prefrontal cortex. That ability to think about what you're thinking about. That ability to look at your thought processes, to understand those thought processes, and to decide intentionally whether or not you want to keep the thoughts that are offered to you.

Remember my friends, your thoughts hold no moral value. Just because you think it, doesn't make it true. And so if you're caught up in a cycle of thinking that has you believing that you're not good

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enough; that you're not worthy enough; that you're on the wrong track, we just need to hijack those thought loops. We just need to recognize that your brain is very busy trying to find a logical way to get you out of the situation that you're in. And I want to offer you that logic will never get you there. Engage the right side of your brain. Engage that intuition. Engage what you feel about your life, and allow yourself to just consider possibilities from there. And I think what you're going to find are solutions that you didn't even realize existed and are so much easier to get to than you ever imagined possible.

Alright, my friends, I'm going to leave you with that and I'll see you next time.

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