

0:00:04.2 Katie Berlin: Hi, welcome back to Central Line. I'm your host, Katie Berlin. I have one of my most favorite people that I literally just met. Aaron Davis. Thank you so much for coming on Central Line.

0:00:18.1 Aaron Davis: Thank you for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

0:00:21.6 Katie Berlin: And Aaron, you are a little bit of an onion. You do a lot of stuff. I feel like whenever I'm at a conference or talking to someone, your name somehow pops up. You're just one of those people who's got your finger in a lot of stuff in Vet Med right now, and I think that's awesome. That means we're doing something right. So would you mind letting everyone know a little bit about what it is you're doing?

0:00:45.1 Aaron Davis: Yeah. Thank you so much, Katie. So I just recently moved into this new role. I'm with a company called Destination Pet. We are a national vet care brand based outta Denver. We have vet practices across the country as well as pet care centers. And I am your new director of employee and community engagement, which means I get to go all, do all the fun engagement opportunities at conferences within our centers, on campuses. And if you know me, you know that this is a role that, if I could have written my perfect job description, it would've been pretty similar to what I'm getting to do right now.

0:01:20.9 Katie Berlin: Yeah, I agree. Just from the short time that I have known you, I feel, I think I said that when you told me you got this, you were moved into this position. 'Cause I feel like it is tailor made for you, so that's very exciting. Congratulations and good job on Destination Pet for realizing that you were the perfect person for that. But you also do some other stuff outside of Destination Pet.

0:01:42.3 Aaron Davis: That's right. So I also have the absolute pleasure and joy of working with Dr. Nicole Bruno at Blendvet. I am involved in their Pathway program. In fact, I am the Pathway program director. So we held our, Blendvet held their third ever youth immersion program at St. Petersburg College in St. Petersburg, Florida. In June, we had 50 middle school kids come out with all their parents and spend a day learning about life as a veterinarian or as a veterinary technician. And as Blend is focusing on diversity inclusion we prioritize kids that come from equity deserving communities and veterinarians and technicians to teach them what that looked like them and came from their same communities. And we're putting our next event on next month at AHA Con in San Diego. So we are really, really excited about that.

0:02:41.6 Katie Berlin: Yes, we're super excited about that too. And it's awesome that you're working with them. Both Nicole and Janine have been on the podcast and they are both just dynamite and I cannot wait to see what kind of amazing things you all do together. So also a very good seat for you to be in, and you seem to know a lot of people in the industry. Like we keep ending up getting connected through, various degrees of separation. So, and I think we actually connected first when you posted on Instagram, you have an account on Instagram where you post some really good kind of helpful tips for team engagement in veterinary practices and empowering team members. And I love that.

0:03:26.8 Aaron Davis: I do. And Katie, you know what, when we met, that was a really special moment for me because you came up to me and you're kind of like, Hey, you're that guy from

Instagram. And I was like, are you one of my 175 followers?

[laughter]

0:03:44.4 Aaron Davis: I had just made that account that.

0:03:47.1 Katie Berlin: Can you just tell a little bit of your story? We were gonna talk about community today and you are the director of employee and community engagement at Destination Pet now. And I would like to know why community is so important to you and how that connects to your personal story.

0:04:08.3 Aaron Davis: That's a wonderful question, Katie. So I'm what you'd call a Vet Med lifer. I've been in the industry since I was 14 years old. I've worked probably every clinical role that you can imagine except for veterinarian. And my passions in my early part of my career brought me to emergency medicine really fast. I found a love for it. I found a passion for it. I was always a night owl, so overnights were great for me. I didn't really ever love family holidays, so having that as an excuse was always amazing. And I just really enjoyed the energy and the pace of the emergency room. This was at a time, many, many years ago where I don't think the veterinary community was as noticeable to me back then, or was as apparent to me back then.

0:05:02.5 Aaron Davis: So, as things are, you kind of go through your career and I was really fortunate that I made a lot of friends with, people that I worked with. So we were a really tight-knit bunch. We went out, after our shifts together, we always would do stuff on the weekends together. And it was really great. And I felt like I had this amazing team that understood me, that knew me. And it was my early 20s, so we were having a lot of fun. And then I moved to Houston where I didn't know so many people and I didn't have as much of that local community at my new practice, back in the day, I found myself moving into a leadership role really fast and thought that was just like the most amazing thing ever.

0:05:54.4 Aaron Davis: Here I am, 26 years old and I'm now in charge of this emergency department, this critical care department. But what I didn't realize at the time was, A, I was not as good of a leader as I thought I was. In fact, I was a pretty crappy leader. I was a pretty terrible leader to the people that I worked with. And two, I was really, really, really burnt out. And this was before I knew what burnout was. This was before I think a lot of us knew about burnout and about compassion fatigue. And because I didn't have those tools, because I didn't have that community around me, and because I didn't really have the knowledge to do better, I got really burnt out and I let it affect my work. I let it affect my relationships at work. I let it affect my leadership. And I ended up leaving not only my practice, but I ended up leaving the field for two years.

0:06:56.2 Aaron Davis: I reached a point to where I no longer felt joy around dogs or cats or any animals. I felt I reached a point to where, if I saw a dog walking down the street, instead of saying like, "Oh, that's a cute dog, I wanna smooch his face." I'd recoil and I'd think like, "Ugh, get that thing away from me." So it was really awful to let such a central part of your identity be taken away like that. I'm an animal lover and here I am, I don't want to look at animals anymore. Wow. So, I did a little reality escape. I, actually, [laughter] bopped around for a little bit and found myself living in Key West, Florida for about two years, and worked, odd jobs, worked bar jobs, and did anything that didn't involve dogs or cats, anything that didn't involve animals.

0:07:51.0 Aaron Davis: After a couple of years, I guess when my burnout recovery was complete or what I was doing better, I found myself, moving out of Key West. It's when I found myself in New York City back in Vet Med, and I don't know if, for those of you that have worked emergency medicine before, but when you take two years off as an emergency person, [laughter] those skills don't really come back to you so easy. You're not the same sharp, fast moving person that you were two years ago. And it's really not like riding a bike. I mean you can do it well, but I found that I was just, I wasn't the shark tech that I once was. So that gave me an opportunity to start discovering what my next passion was gonna be in Vet Med.

0:08:41.7 Aaron Davis: And it was also around the time that I started discovering more of the Vet Med community online, I started discovering a lot of affinity groups, like PrideVMC, Not One More Vet. And I started, kind of looking into these groups and just following them from a distance thinking like, "Oh, it's so cool that they exist. But, I don't have any business reaching out to them. I'm just some kid in New York." But after a while, I found myself start getting a little bit more courage to reach out 'cause, and let me tell you why I didn't reach out at first, because in Vet Med we're so used to being isolated from our community. We're so used to being... We're told that the clinic down the street is our competitors, so don't talk to them. We're told not to share anything with our colleagues in the same community. So it makes this...

0:09:43.3 Katie Berlin: So true.

0:09:43.9 Aaron Davis: Right? It makes it really hard for us to reach out. But when I started doing it, I realized that this is a big community and there is help out there. And that, maybe back in the day, I did have to suffer in silence through my burnout, but that's not the case anymore. And maybe, as a queer person in Vet Med, there are groups out there for me is, if you're a woman in veterinary medicine, there are groups for you, if you're BIPOC, there are groups for you. And I just started seeing this, and I started seeing how many opportunities there were to engage with the community. And that's really what started, helping me develop my new passions and help me develop my new network of people that, have made it a much healthier experience for me in the second time around.

0:10:38.0 Katie Berlin: I love hearing that because I can relate to it so closely. Personally, I doubt... I've never left Vet Med since I started. But I have had several times where I felt isolated and I thought about leaving, and I just wasn't sure if there was a place for me. And then a community at the right time, the right community at the right time, back. And then it got to the point, it gets to the point where you have confidence in that community being there. So you know that, if things get rough again, they're gonna be there to catch you. And that is such a huge, huge thing. And I love that you wanted to talk about this because, we talk, we throw around the word community a lot. But what does it really mean, and does it have to mean the same thing to everyone?

0:11:30.9 Katie Berlin: And one of the things I was gonna ask you, our internet seems to be a little bit, I'm just gonna, I'm not even gonna say it out loud, [laughter] but you haven't frozen for a hot minute. So, I was gonna ask you before we started this, like, do you have a third space, like a place where you don't have to be like vet community Aaron or like, home Aaron, that you can be somebody else different who has interests, no one asks you about what you do, and you can just kind of like, enjoy being apart from those things? Or is Vet Med now that space for you?

0:12:06.4 Aaron Davis: I think Vet Med is definitely that space for me, and I've, gone back and forth on how I feel about that, right? Because on one hand I want to be this person that preaches

work-life balance and healthy separation. But truthfully, my world has become very blended in the past few years, and a lot of my network and a lot of my interests really do revolve around Vet Med. But I also make sure to shut it off. And if you've seen me running around, an exhibit hall or a conference, or if you've seen me at a campus event, or even out when I'm doing center visits with my team, you would probably get the sense that I'm this like, this nonstop extrovert, right? Because I'm just running around. I'm talking to people. I'm networking, but when I'm home, Katie, it is the polar opposite. These blinds are drawn, these lights are turned off. I enjoy my peace.

[laughter]

0:13:16.7 Aaron Davis: I am a big introvert, so when I'm home, I really like to read. I really like to spend time with my animals. I really like to just try my best to just shut it off too, because I've also got that ADHD brain that's going 10 billion miles a second. So yeah, I would say when I'm not doing Vet Med stuff, I'm much more of a homebody and an introvert.

0:13:40.7 Katie Berlin: Well, I think that's really interesting that you said it. 'Cause I have lots of... Have so many interests, but it used to be that I needed like a running group or the barn where I rode horses or a gym or a book group or something where I needed to not be vet Katie. And I don't find that I need that anymore because I think who I am when I'm with my Vet Med people is the most accurate and authentic version of me. I don't think that I can be any more myself than I am with the people that I love within the vet community because there's so much about our jobs that are just, it's just weird and very difficult to explain to other people who do like other things, normal things for a living.

[laughter]

0:14:34.7 Katie Berlin: And it is so easy to just like be who you are with people that just get it and you don't have to explain to them. And that is one of the most valuable things that I've found. And so I still do other things, but I don't feel like I have to escape from Vet Med anymore the way that I used to. So that's really interesting that you kind of have found that too. We talked about this a little bit before off the record, but do you feel like having that community in veterinary medicine has helped you to be more confident and feel more, secure in your personal life as well? Like, that has nothing to do with your professional goals or ambitions or what you do for a job?

0:15:20.0 Aaron Davis: A 100%. First of all, I am surrounded by so many colleagues that are also my close friends, that are people that I trust immensely. And these are people that I can go to for advice on just about any subject and I want to touch on Katie, what you said earlier about being able to be your authentic self in Vet Med, because that is so true. Prior to those early days of my career when I was younger I wasn't as much as my authentic self back then as I am today. And I didn't feel that safety of really showing up in my practice as my true, authentic self you would code down. You wouldn't talk about your personal life. You wouldn't talk about your mental health struggles.

0:16:17.0 Aaron Davis: It was just a culture of the time. Now, when I go out, when I'm in my vet bubble and I'm with my colleagues, I can be exactly who I am and it's not tasking in that way. I don't have to code down. I don't have to change who I am. And that makes it a lot easier to come home and just recuperate because you don't have to find that third space where you can be your true, authentic self anymore. Like Vet Med can tick both of those boxes for you. But... And I'm

sorry, I forgot, what was that? What question did you just ask?

0:17:00.9 Katie Berlin: Oh, if it helps in...

0:17:01.2 Aaron Davis: I went off on a tangent.

[laughter]

0:17:02.8 Katie Berlin: If it helps in your personal life. For instance, you and I both made some major life decisions in the last year or so, and we talked about how having the confidence of having that community behind you and underneath you, has made us more confident in listening to what we really want in our personal lives.

0:17:25.4 Aaron Davis: I really think it has. For one I am a lot more confident in myself because of the people that I surround myself with because of the work that we're doing together, it does instill that sense of pride and that sense of confidence. So yeah, I would say absolutely.

0:17:48.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah, which is such a gift. And like I, full disclosure here to podcast listeners, I'm always personal. I don't know how to be not personal, but I'm about to get super personal, which is that and I found out that my partner of three years...

0:18:07.3 Aaron Davis: You froze, ugh.

0:18:10.4 Katie Berlin: That... It's gonna get better [laughter] that my partner of three years had cheated and I didn't know what to do. I was so distraught and upset and I felt kind of lost because we were also alone during that time. And it was my, one of my veterinarian friends that answered the phone at 01:00 AM and held my, basically held my hand through the phone line at 01:00 AM during a global pandemic when I was suddenly unpredictably completely alone. And the community where I met that veterinarian was the uncharted veterinary community. And the people that I met there, just, they lifted me up and those hands just kept me lifted until I could walk on my own again. I was like pretty down and out for a few weeks that year as were a lot of us for various reasons. But it really was them. They were the ones, and I didn't even see them very often. We were spread out all over North America. And that was just a really telling moment where I was like, "Oh, this isn't actually just my veterinary community. This is my community. This is my chosen family and my people". And that was just, there's no better feeling in the world than to know that you have that behind you, right?

0:19:33.0 Aaron Davis: Yeah, absolutely. And it's interesting that I guess it's not so interesting that that happened during the pandemic. Because the pandemic was really this big critical moment for a lot of us, and for me too. It was the start of the pandemic where I started seeing my passion for community kind of come into play. I don't know if you remember, but I think it was like around the start of the pandemic.

0:20:05.9 Aaron Davis: There were several... We lost several people to suicide in the veterinarian community in like a two month span. I think like seven veterinarians and technicians were lost during that time. And it was a really scary moment because of the mental health component. And then the pandemic is starting and now, I lived in New York City where we just got hit so hard by the pandemic.

0:20:35.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:20:36.0 Aaron Davis: They locked down. And it actually spurred me and a handful of my friends here to start a group. We started the Veterinary Mutual Aid Coalition. And did that in order to kind of respond to people's immediate needs. And we saw a lot of mutual aid pop up during the pandemic to help people with food insecurity, housing insecurity, childcare. And that was what we wanted to try to accomplish is, if you're a technician, if you're a vet assistant or a CSR or a veterinarian and you need access to resources in the New York City area, we would try to find those resources for you.

0:21:24.8 Aaron Davis: And we would try and we also set up several get togethers at parks. We would host, we would do like cookouts and like did some fun like art projects at a park one time. And it was just, it was a lot of fun. And it, I don't know how much we accomplished there because it was a very short run endeavor, but I think it definitely spurred us all to value community and to see how in action, it can really make a difference. I don't know... You froze.

0:21:54.5 Katie Berlin: Oh man.

[laughter]

0:21:55.5 Katie Berlin: This is like, I just.

0:21:58.0 Aaron Davis: You're back now.

0:22:00.7 Katie Berlin: Okay. [laughter] I was wondering whether you think online communities can be just as helpful as meeting a person...

[laughter]

0:22:07.2 Aaron Davis: Oh my god.

[laughter]

0:22:10.2 Aaron Davis: Okay. What was the last question?

[laughter]

0:22:12.7 Katie Berlin: Do you think because a lot of people during the pandemic started online communities, so they would do like online happy hours or have church services online or start support groups online. Do you feel like online communities are just as helpful as meeting in person? Or is there something like really just sort of that magic of meeting in person that you can't replicate online?

0:22:33.5 Aaron Davis: I think it's definitely not an apples to apples comparison. Right? They both serve different, they both have different pros and cons. Personally, if I could choose, I would always choose to be in person because you just get so much more out of it, right?

0:22:49.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:22:49.7 Aaron Davis: You and I have been to dinner how many times now that and that energy that we have across the table, we're replicating most of it right here. But it's just not the same thing.

0:23:02.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:23:03.0 Aaron Davis: But in this day, it's not really feasible for everyone to meet in person all the time. And our networks are so expanded, across zip codes, across time zones that it makes more sense to have that virtual component. But whenever you can meet in person, do it. I mean, that's what we experience when we go to these conferences and we see people in real life for the first time that we've known for years online. And it's like, oh my God, I've wanted to hug you for years now and we finally get a chance to do it.

0:23:39.2 Katie Berlin: You have legs. [laughter]

0:23:39.5 Aaron Davis: You have legs. This what you look like with a body? Wow.

0:23:46.2 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

[laughter]

0:23:46.7 Aaron Davis: So, I will always choose in-person over virtual, but I love the opportunities to build my network virtually and then make these connections, make these relationships, and then seek these people out in real life, IRL as fast as I can.

0:24:06.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah and then having that ability to connect online in between those times just only strengthens. I mean imagine like if we had only met a couple of times in person and not had conversations in between and we really have only known each other for five minutes. Like, everyone's gonna be like, oh, you've been to dinner a bunch of times. Like you said, you just met. But we really did just meet, but also have made the most of the conversations we've had. Like there hasn't been a lot of small talk at those conversations.

0:24:34.5 Aaron Davis: No.

[laughter]

0:24:35.0 Katie Berlin: And I think that's another thing too is like, the reason I asked about online communities is 'cause there are a lot of people listening probably who are like, well, I mean the maybe... [laughter] There are a lot of people listening who are saying, I hate conferences. Like, I don't like networking. I don't like having conversations with people I don't know well because we are a very introverted profession in general, and I mean, you and I both identify as introverts, even though we have absolutely no problem going up to a total stranger at a conference and being like I saw you on Instagram, but [laughter]

0:25:06.9 Aaron Davis: Tell me your life story.

0:25:07.5 Katie Berlin: Right, exactly. Like tell me your deepest fears.

[laughter]

0:25:11.5 Katie Berlin: But don't talk about the weather ever.

0:25:13.5 Aaron Davis: No.

0:25:14.5 Katie Berlin: But there are a lot of people who aren't like that and who would prefer to stay kind of in their familiar environment. And I get that. I really do. Especially after the pandemic. A lot of people were really scared to go out and I get that too.

0:25:27.7 Aaron Davis: And for...

0:25:28.0 Katie Berlin: Having that online ability is really special.

0:25:31.5 Aaron Davis: Yeah. For people that just don't wanna go to conferences and hey, I get it. That is a lot going on. Those virtual communities, those online communities make perfect sense and they provide that sense of connection while you're still safe in your comfort zone, while you're still at home. And you can do more that way too. I mean, that's right. By the way, I can hear him purring this entire time. And I'm not upset by it.

0:26:06.9 Katie Berlin: Oh no.

0:26:07.0 Aaron Davis: But no, I mean, it also gives you a chance to do more, right? I can be involved in more organizations and be involved in more groups because we have our meetings online.

0:26:16.2 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:26:17.5 Aaron Davis: Can you imagine if it were still the 1980s and you had to like, fly to a business meeting and then fly back home?

0:26:23.7 Katie Berlin: No.

0:26:24.0 Aaron Davis: Just to meet with people.

0:26:25.7 Katie Berlin: I can't even imagine if we had to use dial-up.

[laughter]

0:26:28.8 Katie Berlin: We think we're having technical issues now. [laughter]

0:26:33.1 Aaron Davis: I was gonna say dial-up might be a step up from the experience we're having.

0:26:36.0 Katie Berlin: It's possible at least then we'd just be chatting and not trying to do video.

0:26:37.6 Aaron Davis: Exactly. Exactly.

0:26:38.4 Katie Berlin: Like the expectation of the video call and then the total fail is like the real disappointment is thinking it's gonna be there and then not working. But anyway yeah. Well, that's all a good reminder that there are different ways to feel connected. And you don't have to be somebody that loves to go to cocktail parties where they know no one and circulate around the room. Like you don't have to be that way.

0:27:05.5 Katie Berlin: It also helps to befriend an extrovert or an extroverted introvert who then can introduce you to everyone. I feel like I know half of the people I know because of a couple of very extroverted friends I've met in the veterinary community who connected me to people who have changed my entire life. I mean, it really is a special place and it gives you so much more optimism when you meet people who see it the way you do and who see all the potential and the hope and growth that's going on right now.

0:27:38.6 Aaron Davis: And that's a really great point, Katie too. If you don't have someone already get you someone who is gonna advocate for you in rooms that you're in and rooms that you're not in. I feel the same way. I know just about every vet med connection that I have stems from about three or four people. And these were people that I met early on in my career. Some of them I met, 15 years ago.

0:28:05.7 Aaron Davis: Some of them I met two years ago. But they have been my advocates every step of the way. And when we do go into a room full of people, if they know someone, they make sure that I know them. If we're talking on the phone and there's a connection to be made, they're like, oh, well, let me connect you through email or let me connect you through text. You've gotta have advocates in your corner and then you have the responsibility after that turning around being some, excuse me, turning around and being someone else's advocate.

0:28:41.3 Aaron Davis: So if you know someone that they don't, make that connection, build that network for someone else. Not only are you helping other people, not only are you helping someone, get a jumpstart, but you look really good in the process too. And you get to be that kind of, that great connector so to speak. And that's a really fun role to have.

0:29:07.4 Katie Berlin: Yes, absolutely. And it gives me a lot of satisfaction to see the community of positive forward thinking really optimistic veterinary professionals growing in that way. It's like, you introduce this person to this person and then they introduce that person to somebody else and it just starts growing exponentially. And I just love seeing that. It's really, it's super fun. And that's one, maybe my favorite part of this job is sort of having to see, I have.

0:29:36.3 Katie Berlin: I get to see that more than I think when we're in practice and we're kind of in that little bubble. It doesn't mean you can't connect the same way, but it means you don't get to sort of have a bird's eye view of that stuff going on as much. What do you think the best way is for somebody who's feeling isolated in their practice? They might be in a small practice and they feel like they want to start building their own community and getting more in touch with the vet community at large. How would you? What's a good first step for them to start building that?

0:30:07.9 Aaron Davis: Well, I think if they're in a small practice reaching out into a virtual community makes a lot of sense at first, especially if you are someone who identifies with any equity deserving community. If you're a woman, there's the Women's Veterinary Leadership

Development Initiative. If you're a queer person in Vet Med, there's PrideVMC if you're a Black or BIPOC person, there is the BlackDVM network.

0:30:42.7 Aaron Davis: There's the Latinx VMA. There are professional affinity organizations for many, many, many communities. And not only can you reach out and build your network and find people that are members of multiple of your communities, but you can help them out in the process too. And that's the other great thing is, I told you a while back, I started finding all these groups online and I never reached out to them. And I just kind of thought like, oh, well this is like a national, like, big fancy group. They don't really need my help. No like they... [laughter]

0:31:15.4 Katie Berlin: They do, they need it.

0:31:18.3 Aaron Davis: 'Cause it turns out like these, they need our help dramatically. I've been on committee and working group calls for national affinity organizations where three people show up and these are volunteer led organizations. These are not for-profit groups. They're not running around with huge budgets, they don't have masses of staff. They might be working with two staff members running 10 programs and anywhere from one to 15 volunteers or whoever shows up on a given day. So if you really wanna give back, it's so easy to do it.

0:31:58.5 Aaron Davis: And I promise you, the day that you show up, nobody is gonna treat you like an outsider. No one's gonna treat you like you don't belong there. They're gonna be grateful that you're there. And they're probably gonna put you to work on day one. They're probably gonna find, like, what is it that you wanna do? How is it that you wanna engage? Great. Let's get you in front of that thing as fast as possible so that we can keep you here and keep you engaged and keep you satisfied and happy.

0:32:24.3 Katie Berlin: I love that. I didn't join or reach out to any organizations either for a long time, even after I got out of the clinic full-time into this role. It took me a minute and I'm really sad about that because there are so many amazing people that I could have met earlier. But I guess, it does take a second to realize that the groups are really grassroots in some cases.

0:32:49.5 Katie Berlin: And like there are some very, very young affinity groups out there, like the MCVMA and the LVMA are very young groups and they need all of that help they can get, they all do. So I 100% second what you said, and also if you don't identify personally with any of those groups, that doesn't mean you can't help.

0:33:14.2 Katie Berlin: I'm straight and white identity, white passing anyway. And still I think it's important to listen to those conversations that are going on and to know what your colleagues are going through and just learn about the ways that you can support them when you do have privilege that they don't have. And the best way to do that is to get into those organizations and actually listen to people. And so for allies, for people who want to know more about those issues and learn for their own personal growth, and just for being a better citizen of the world, not just the vet community, those groups are a fantastic way to start. And everybody is so welcoming, and wonderful.

0:34:01.3 Aaron Davis: Yeah, you're 100% spot on there. Diversity work is often left to the communities that are being affected by marginalization. But when allies show up and allies say, "Hey, we're gonna do this work too. We're gonna make it our responsibility." Especially if those

allies do come from a place of privilege, that means a lot. And that speaks volumes, equity work is for everyone. And it's everyone's responsibility, and everyone gets to benefit from us. So everyone needs to be involved in doing it.

0:34:40.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah, that goes back to what we talked about with authenticity, right? Like if we all can be our authentic selves, if we are all allowed to be our authentic selves, and feel safe doing so. And so allowing other people to feel safe and be able to express who they truly are benefits you personally, in a very selfish way. Because you're like, "Well, if they can be who they are, I can be who I am." And there doesn't have to be a lot of barrier between who you put forth into the world and who you actually are.

0:35:11.7 Katie Berlin: And that authenticity is what really makes a community feel like yours is that ability to be 100% yourself with them. And I never would have seen a vet conference as being that place for me for a very long time. So, I can't say enough about what Aaron just said about joining these affinity groups and asking what kind of conversations you can give. I think about going to those big conferences, smaller ones are easier I think. It's easier to strike up a conversation when everyone's going to the same tracks and stuff like that. But at those giant conferences, it just feels like you're sort of a body floating around with tens of thousands of other bodies. And this reminds me of, I don't know if you're a Brené Brown fan. But Brené Brown, the researcher says...

0:36:01.2 Aaron Davis: I love Brené Brown.

0:36:02.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah, same. She talks about the difference between fitting in and belonging. And belonging is something different. Can you talk about what those two terms mean to you, fitting in versus belonging?

0:36:21.6 Aaron Davis: So, first of all, Katie I love that you brought that up, because I actually shared this quote yesterday on our Destination Pet DEIV...

0:36:30.9 Katie Berlin: I did not know that.

0:36:31.6 Aaron Davis: Committee meeting.

[laughter]

0:36:34.8 Aaron Davis: I am a big fan of Brené Brown. And in fact, I wish everyone would be a fan because what she's done in the name of vulnerability and authenticity is incredible. But yeah, she says something along the lines of fitting in asks us to be someone we're not whereas the longing requires that we be and show up who we all are.

0:36:55.5 Aaron Davis: And I think that's really important because if you're trying to fit in, what you're trying to say is this space was not made for me. This space that I'm in right now was not made for me. It wasn't built for me. It's very clear from the people that I'm surrounded with, and the way that I'm being engaged that this space is built for other people and I'm welcome here. And so when we say you're welcome here, that's a really polite way of saying, try not to mess anything up, right?

0:37:33.0 Aaron Davis: But when we say that what we care about is belonging, that means that I

get to show up as my authentic self, and I get to engage on my own terms. And I don't have to be afraid of messing things up. In fact, the fact that I belong here means that if this needs to be changed, I get to be an active participant in that change.

0:37:55.5 Aaron Davis: If this wasn't built for me, then we're gonna work together to make sure that it is built for me and it is built for all the other people that are gonna come too. Belonging is a requirement of running a healthy enterprise, right? You cannot have a healthy team, a healthy group, a healthy organization without that sense of belonging, without everyone on your team being able to come in and say, "I feel as if this is my space as much as it is your space."

0:38:28.0 Katie Berlin: That's so beautifully put. And I think we can all relate to the feeling of, "Oh, never quite fitting in." I felt that way for a lot of my adult life as well as when I was a kid. And now feeling like if I go to dinner with a bunch of people that I know through veterinary medicine, and some of their friends who I don't know, there's no need to worry about whether I'm gonna belong there. Because the people who I know expect me to show up as my weird, sometimes aggressive, passionate [laughter] we'll say passionate self.

0:39:11.4 Katie Berlin: And in that who's interested in 25 things and will randomly say, "Well, the other day at Bollywood dance fitness [laughter] and that's totally normal." And there's no bigger tool for well being that I know of than finding that space where it's safe to do that. We talk a lot about well being as personal responsibility, do your yoga, do your meditation, use your EAP, join a support group or something where you can really work on yourself and address the things that are bothering you. But you can't create that feeling of belonging for yourself. That has to be done with other people.

0:39:51.4 Aaron Davis: No, you can't. And we also talk a whole lot about self care all the time, right? Self care, self care, and self care is amazing. But we also need to talk about community care, right?

0:40:01.9 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:40:02.2 Aaron Davis: Because you can't... Just like, you can't care for a patient all on your own. You also can't care for yourself all on your own too. And some of that care needs to be done by your community, the people in your life, your village, and a lot of community care. It can be done at these events, can be done at working with these affinity groups. The benefit that you get out of it is connecting with other people that are going through similar things to you in the same industry, in the same community. And you get affinity. You get to heal with each other. You get to practice care with each other. And that's a really cool thing to get to do.

0:40:51.4 Katie Berlin: A 100%. Aaron, I love all of that that you said, and I'm gonna volunteer us to anybody listening who does not feel like they've found their veterinary community. You just find Aaron or me at a conference and we will say hi to you because we're extremely extroverted introverts at vet conferences.

0:41:10.9 Aaron Davis: We will drag you around.

[laughter]

0:41:12.1 Katie Berlin: We will drag you around and introduce you to someone else.

[laughter]

0:41:17.3 Katie Berlin: And because we want that community to grow, and we want everybody to have that here. I'm speaking for you like you're not even here, but I feel comfortable speaking for you after five minutes of knowing you that we want that community to grow and we want everybody to have that feeling of belonging. Because there's nothing better. So, and whatever crap is going on in your personal life, it's a lot more bearable when you know you have those people that you can turn to if you need them so thanks so much.

0:41:43.6 Aaron Davis: Accept that challenge.

0:41:45.1 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:41:45.6 Aaron Davis: I accept that challenge. Come find us. Katie, we should have a booth at the next conference that just come find us if you need a...

0:41:53.5 Katie Berlin: Extroverts for rent.

[laughter]

0:41:56.4 Katie Berlin: Temporary extroverts for rent.

0:42:00.0 Aaron Davis: That's right on the clock. Extroverts.

0:42:02.1 Katie Berlin: [laughter] that's right.

0:42:02.4 Aaron Davis: Come find us. We'll be your conference buddy.

0:42:05.0 Katie Berlin: We should do that. We should absolutely do that. We should have like conference, big brother, big sister, big buddy. And say, I don't think I wanna be known as a big buddy. I'm gonna cancel that.

[laughter]

0:42:19.0 Aaron Davis: Yeah. Yeah.

0:42:19.5 Katie Berlin: But we should have...

0:42:20.3 Aaron Davis: Buddies.

0:42:20.9 Katie Berlin: Buddies. Yeah. We should have that at some point because it really is so important. Like the Uncharted Conference actually did that where they set you up with somebody who'd been there a long time, had been to repeated events, and then kind of like showed you around and in the AHA community, which is online it's for members and we have people who introduce themselves and then a lot of the people who are active in the community will chime in and say hello. It's so great to have you. And sort of just take that person in and not just let them kind of sit

out there and be like, okay, now I'm here. Now what? That's not fun. And we all have been there. So definitely reach out if you need any help because we love doing stuff like that. So...

0:43:02.5 Aaron Davis: Absolutely.

0:43:05.1 Katie Berlin: Aaron Davis, thank you so much for spending this time. I hope at least 50% of what we said ends up.

[laughter]

0:43:10.6 Katie Berlin: Having been recorded and on this podcast. It may be that we're gonna splice this together. It'll be a little bit creative, but that's okay.

0:43:19.9 Aaron Davis: Well, if we have to come back and do it again, we can always try a fourth time to get it right.

[laughter]

0:43:27.8 Katie Berlin: Aaron thank you so much for spending so much time for making it through the tech issues. You're a trooper and we probably will have to record some of this over and that's all right.

[laughter]

0:43:38.5 Katie Berlin: It's just an excuse to see you again. Thanks to all of you for listening.

0:43:41.7 Aaron Davis: Honestly, if it's...

[laughter]

0:43:44.1 Katie Berlin: This far.

0:43:45.0 Aaron Davis: Yeah.

0:43:45.5 Katie Berlin: Is anybody still there? If so, thank you very much [laughter] And thank you. We'll catch you next time on Central Line if you ever come back, which I wouldn't blame you if you didn't.

0:43:55.8 Aaron Davis: This will be the last episode ever.

0:44:00.4 Katie Berlin: [laughter] yes. Thanks everyone. Talk to you soon. Bye.