

**0:00:00.0 Speaker 1:** I feel like you get up in the morning and you're like, "I'm gonna create a better world today." There's like little singing birdies and stuff. Does that happen?

**0:00:08.2 Speaker 2:** Welcome to Central Line, the AAHA Podcast. This is the official podcast of the American Animal Hospital Association, dedicated to simplifying the journey towards excellence in veterinary medicine, for every member of the veterinary team. Here's your host, Dr. Katie Berlin.

**0:00:27.7 Speaker 1:** As part of my job, like I still cannot believe this is my job, I got to go to AAHA's annual conference, Connexity, which was in Nashville this year, and I got to sit and talk to a whole bunch of really fun, truly inspiring people making their marks on veterinary medicine. Connexity's theme this year was 'Create a Better World.' So instead of having an outline or questions that we discussed beforehand, like I usually do, I just asked everyone, "What does a better world look like to you?" And this is what they said. Also, stay tuned to the end for the stuff they say before we officially hit record. We're starting with four light bringers of vet med; Michael Shirley of Family Pet Health and the Veterinary Leadership Book Club, Josh Vaisman of Flourish Veterinary Consulting, Alyssa Mages of Empowering Veterinary Teams, and Phil Richmond of Flourishing Phoenix Veterinary Consultants, who honestly brighten up every room they're in.

**0:01:17.5 Speaker 4:** Rule number one is that you are the driver of your own bus. When you wake up every morning, you have to realize like, "I'm in charge of where I'm going today. I can't be in charge of what happens to me, but I can be in charge of my response to those things."

**0:01:31.8 Speaker 5:** We're always learning, right? Don't stop because life's not gonna stop teaching you. And you have to choose your response and be thoughtful about your intentions.

**0:01:39.1 Speaker 6:** For me, a better world, through the prism of veterinary medicine, certainly, but really just generally speaking, a better world is a world of humanity where we sort of just embrace and recognize that we are fully human beings. And all of us are doing the best we can each and every day with what we have to try and move forward and be productive. There are challenges. There are problems. There are moments when we're not at our best. And there are experiences that are negative, and there's an, "and" there as well. And that vision for me, it manifests as possibility. Maybe I'm not going to be at my best right now. Maybe you're not going to be at your best right now. Maybe together, our profession is not at its best. And we can get there. Because there are so many vibrant, beautiful strengths and possibilities that exist within all of the people of this beautiful profession and within the profession itself. And if we can start to lean into those strengths, we'll get through the stumbles and challenges just fine, and we'll build that brighter future.

**0:02:44.8 Speaker 7:** I forget what I was saying. I want the world to change, and it has to begin with me, is that that was... For me, I was one of those people where it was very easy for me to have the blame thrower. [chuckle] It's everyone else's fault. I would be doing so great in this world [chuckle] amongst everyone if the eight million people would just do what I want. Well, I can't absolutely control any of those people. It took a big change in my life to get to a point where I realized that I was the only one that I could control. If we can do that on an individual level and know that we have to do that there, and then we work on a team level and then help the people around us, and then also help the organizational level, and it works when it all comes together in that regard.

**0:03:36.9 Speaker 8:** I got into the profession to be the voice for the voiceless, and that shifted from the patients to the team.

**0:03:45.1 Speaker 1:** I got to meet some of the team from our AAHA accredited practice of the year; Garrott and Liz Van Bebber, Holly Hunt and Kortney Ellerbe of Lafayette Veterinary Care Center fresh off their victory the night before.

**0:03:57.1 Speaker 9:** My personal opinion would be through social media and the instant gratification of the world, everybody is available all the time and maybe a little too available. I think that that's probably put a lot more stress on veterinarians' minds and their hearts than was ever intended. It's just the world we live in. So I do think to me, creating a better world is maybe creating some healthy boundaries between pet owners and staff members and appropriate boundaries so that we can all be happy together and then go back to doing that thing that we were designed to do, which is taking care of the animals.

**0:04:40.8 Speaker 10:** I wanna say just being kind in general. I think we have become more aware over the last few years that everybody comes from different backgrounds, whether social, economical, ethnical, whatever.

**0:04:53.1 Speaker 11:** Having an open mind and being understanding of everybody in any given situation at any time.

**0:05:00.2 Speaker 12:** I think getting out to the community more and...

**0:05:01.5 Speaker 1:** Oh, love that.

**0:05:01.5 Speaker 12:** Just getting everybody more involved in, not only like you said, just veterinary medicine, but in everything. Just being able to see, like you said, where everybody's coming from and being that rock for your community, I think is a really good thing to do, to be able to get out there.

**0:05:24.4 Speaker 1:** Niccole Bruno and Genine Ervin-Smith of Blend are helping make veterinary workplaces more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. And that sure sounds like a better world to me.

**0:05:35.9 Speaker 13:** I want veterinarians to understand that it's just as important to provide the practice environment, the workplace environment, so that everybody who is underrepresented in this profession can have a voice, can feel as if they belong. We have to do more on both sides to feed the pipeline, but create the culture in our practices that say, "Hey, you belong in this space." That's how we change the world.

**0:06:00.7 Speaker 14:** That's absolutely what we've gotta do. We have to really create the culture to make them wanna stay.

**0:06:03.6 Speaker 1:** Adam Hechko believes in the value of teamwork and experimentation, and he's demonstrated that beautifully during his year as AAHA's board president. What does a better world look like?

**0:06:14.8 Speaker 15:** It's multifaceted for our practices. It's not just a veterinarian, it's not just a

practice owner or a practice manager or a technician or assistant, it's the whole team. And we've seen struggles with all of our teams. It's such a big topic right now of being short staffed and figuring out ways to improve the workflow of your team. And in doing that, I think that helps with burnout, and I think that that helps to make the world a better place. Because then we have more energy to devote to every patient that comes into our practice. And at the end of the day, that's who we all identify as, walking into that practice. It's why we all fell in love with this profession.

**0:06:58.8 Speaker 1:** Addie Reinhard of MentorVet talked about inadvertently but incredibly successfully starting a movement to change the veterinary world for the better.

**0:07:08.2 Speaker 16:** I also see that we have a big opportunity for growth in the mental health and wellbeing space to create a profession in which any veterinarian or veterinary team member can have a sustainable career in this profession. And I think that for me, a sustainable career just means that you can find joy and passion in your career as well as find a space that's very inclusive to everyone. And so I think really looking at veterinary medicine as we go forward, I just hope that we can continue to create healthier workplaces, healthier communities, and just communities of support where we all support one another in this sometimes challenging career, helping people be able to help themselves and others.

**0:08:00.1 Speaker 1:** It was an unconventional road that took Cheyanne Flerx from veterinary assistant to consultant at Hey Cheyanne, LLC.

**0:08:05.5 Speaker 17:** It's really just empowering people to pursue their dreams within veterinary medicine. And even if that's not conventional, like how I did, or even just being the best support team member or best practice owner, just helping them be the best that they can so that we can all make this a better place to work in.

**0:08:22.1 Speaker 1:** Emily Tincher and Jules Benson of Nationwide Pet Insurance are collecting data and redefining what's gold standard to help us make appropriate care possible for every pet.

**0:08:31.9 Speaker 18:** I personally, firmly believe that pets are not a luxury and they're not a privilege and everyone deserves the ability to own a pet. They are a responsibility. Of course, you have to take care of them, but everyone deserves the ability to have a pet for the benefits that they bring; mental health, physical health. Just joy, I think. Even if anyone was questioning that before COVID, there's so many great stories of the ways that our pets made our lives better, pouncing all over us [chuckle] on Zoom calls during times of being stuck in isolation. And I think we have a responsibility as a profession to find ways to do that in a business sustainable way.

**0:09:17.5 Speaker 1:** Our Inevitable CEO, Garth Jordan, has a gift for listening and for designing systems around people and not the other way around.

**0:09:25.5 Speaker 19:** It's our job as the individuals who are in organizations, whether we're running them or not, is to think about that there are differences, and diversity is not just diversity in race and sexual orientation, et cetera. It's also diversity in how we were brought up and our education. And to me, that's something that we've got to be thinking about and actively designing around, and helping people find that path towards contributions. But I believe as I've experienced veterinary medicine, that we can become a lot more connected as a community and that creates empathy for each other, for customers. There's plenty of empathy for the pets, I think, but for each

other. And the connectedness we make, whether we make that through our educational practices, whether we make it through coming to conferences, there's a connectedness that is, I think, I won't say 100% missing, but we can grow it, we can foster it. And this ecosystem needs our veterinarians, our vet techs and our teams to be connected with each other and to learn from each other.

**0:10:46.7 Speaker 1:** Jennifer Bruns with PetSmart Veterinary Services is hoping to care for veterinarians as much as veterinarians care for pets. And also, she left the reception outside and put down her wine to talk to me. And at a conference, I think that means she wins.

**0:11:00.2 Speaker 20:** So even through veterinary school, I always thought, "Oh, how can we care for the veterinarian, and what does that look like?" Because I had been, at such a vulnerable age, exposed to mental health issues in my boss. And so now I look at this, and so for me, I always say, "Gosh, I hope I leave places better than how I found them." That would make my life... I feel like that's my addition to making life a better place. But I always like... And feel like with every connection I have with a veterinarian, I hope I leave them a little bit better than when I found them. And if that happens, I think I've made the world a better place.

**0:11:30.0 Speaker 1:** Kathy Cooney makes you feel calmer just by sitting down with her. I mean, listen to her voice. It's no wonder that she's one of vet med's authorities on how to make euthanasia and end of life care as beautiful and meaningful as the years that you spent together.

**0:11:44.9 Speaker 1:** I was going to ask you what a better world looks like in vet med too. And it's one obviously where euthanasia doesn't have to be an experience that people are scared of talking about, or that they're scared of performing.

**0:11:57.5 Speaker 21:** That it doesn't have to be a failure of any sort. It's not necessarily a traditional treatment option, as we say, but it is an option that we have to have these conversations with families and we can come to a good decision together, a good resolution that this is in everyone's best interest and then embrace it and create meaning from it. And things like the way that we memorialize and pay tribute, where we get to sit and share stories and again, see that beauty right in front of us, which for a lot of veterinarians, when they're performing euthanasia, they might not have a lot of that backstory, right? It might not be that womb-to-tomb, cradle-to-grave, birth-to-earth relationship. It might be a non-client that we're just meeting for the first time where we get to sit down, establish that rapport, build that connection and then be in that world together for 30 minutes, for an hour, hour and a half, whatever that euthanasia is going to be. And just again, find the beauty in it, find the joy, for me, is what's kept me very sustained in vet med.

**0:13:09.2 Speaker 1:** Kathryn Primm, fellow podcaster, uses positivity and humor to create a better world, and she's sharing it with pet owners too on her podcast and at [drprimm.com](http://drprimm.com).

**0:13:21.5 Speaker 22:** I think we can make the world of veterinary medicine and the world at large a better place with positivity and lifting people up. And not instead of fixing the actual problems that are underlying the issues, but also you're more in a frame of mind to fix things or to wanna be part of the solution when you frame things in a more positive light.

**0:13:43.1 Speaker 1:** Sometimes what we don't know can hurt us. Petabyte and AAHA joined forces this year to launch our benchmarking program and Kim Fish came by to talk about how we can create a better world through data.

**0:13:54.6 Speaker 23:** All the conversations I've had with vets and practice managers over the years, and data can help support it. Making the world a better place is making better access to make sure that we're providing that medical care for the pets, is a big thing. I think that's part of it. I'm big on being a patient advocate. And then there's another part, which is I would love to see practices and the software and the technology out there really unite more on standardization, 'cause that's a big thing that we do.

**0:14:26.4 Speaker 1:** I was really excited to meet our incoming president and fellow Denver resident, Margot Vahrenwald. She's going to help take us places as an industry for sure in 2023.

**0:14:37.1 Speaker 24:** I think a better world in veterinary medicine to me is one where people are happy to be in the profession, to be in the industry.

**0:14:45.5 Speaker 1:** Hallelujah.

**0:14:49.1 Speaker 24:** I love my job. I love my practice. Good days, bad days. Yes, occasionally there's really bad days where you don't wanna go in the building, but 99% of the time, I'm always happy to go, I don't mind the challenges. You deal with the hard things and are resilient. And that's what I want people to see and not feel like we're doing it... Again, some of that is our cultures within our practice walls, but the other part is trying to teach our clients what we do, and have value. The people delivering it have value.

**0:15:23.6 Speaker 1:** Pride VMC is creating a better world by spreading the word about the Gender Identity Bill of Rights. I got to sit down with Omar Farias, their president elect, and I was just wondering, have you signed the bill yet? If not, get over there and do it.

**0:15:37.4 S25:** Creating a better world, from my perspective as a Pride VMC board member, obviously, our mission is just to create a better world for the LGBTQ plus community, a world in which we'd all just be one tribe. One of the things that we're working on this year is getting people to, first of all, bring awareness of the Gender Identity Bill of Rights. It just really outlines the basic human rights that those individuals should have and receive. So as part of our effort of creating a better world, we're really focusing and bringing awareness of this document.

**0:16:16.8 Speaker 1:** A better world would definitely include all pets getting the care they need, regardless of cost. Ryan Champagne is working hard to make that happen at Pawlicy Advisor.

**0:16:25.8 S26:** I think it would be so cool if veterinarians could just do whatever they need to do to care for that animal. Money aside, our goal is to hopefully insure all the animals out there. So when someone comes in and the doctor says, "Hey, it's going to cost X amount," now that pet parent can just say, "Yeah, do whatever you need to do." Which again, going back to your question, hopefully makes it a little easier for them, and the pet med world a little bit better as well.

**0:16:55.0 Speaker 1:** Okay, enough of that serious stuff. Go out and create a better world and let me know how you're doing it at [podcast@aha.org](mailto:podcast@aha.org).

[background conversation]

[music]

**0:18:28.2 Speaker 1:** Thanks for listening to today's episode of Central Line, the AAHA Podcast. If you love what you hear, please take a moment to leave us a rating and review. For more resources to help you simplify your journey towards excellence in veterinary medicine, we invite you to visit [AAHA.org](https://www.aaaha.org). That's A-A-H-A.O-R-G.

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