

0:00:04.2 Katie Berlin: Hi, welcome back to central line, I'm your host, Katie Berlin, and Franklin is here with us today.

0:00:10.0 Laura Pletz: Hi buddy, he's so cute.

0:00:12.0 Katie Berlin: So if you hear the gnome noises, I apologize, but he doesn't like to sit in my lap while I record all the time anymore, and he's very old, so I know the noise is... It's hard to ignore, but I don't like to tell of no anymore, it's like 100 years old chihuahua years, so he's kind of mean, so hopefully that means he's got 100 more. [laughter] Anyway, my guest today is the wonderful Dr. Laura Pletz. Welcome Laura.

0:00:41.8 Laura Pletz: Thank you for having me. I'm so excited to be here and I love that he's joining us, makes me happy.

0:00:47.2 Katie Berlin: Yes. He'll get annoyed with me about in a few minutes and wanna get down, and then he might wanna get up again, and it's the struggle of being a chihuahua. So, that's a great thing about vet podcast though.

0:01:00.6 Laura Pletz: Oh yeah, dogs are always welcome. No matter what.

0:01:02.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah, Laura, you were recently... Actually, we recently did a little interview with you for a new state, by a written interview, because you were one of our 15 women to watch for Women's History Month, which I love, that was such a great group. And it's so hard to chose wonderful women in this profession because it's so chock full of them, but you definitely are moving and shaking, and we were having a conversation before this where you were telling me about your kind trajectory and how it hasn't been a straight line and I definitely can relate to that, and I feel like that usually takes you good places, so I'm excited to have this chance to talk to you.

0:01:44.6 Laura Pletz: Yeah, me too.

0:01:46.8 Katie Berlin: Laura Would you mind just telling us a little bit about yourself? What you're doing now and how you got here?

0:01:49.5 Laura Pletz: Yeah, of course. Gosh, I've been doing this veterinary thing now for 23 years, which kind of blows my mind, but I started in private practice here in St. Louis area, which is still my home, I honestly thought that's what I was gonna do, I thought that's the one thing you do when you graduated veterinary school, you go work in a practice and I was gonna own a practice and I did that. I was one of the owners the last five years of my time there, and then I made the transition to industry, went to Royal Canin to work in various leadership roles, leading their technical services team, and then the field veterinary team.

0:02:28.8 Laura Pletz: And then full circle, January of this year, I came back to the practice space with Blue Pearl in a leadership role. And honestly, I kinda had this moment, towards the end of my time at Royal Canin, that I was like, What am I gonna do next? What's the next path here? And I didn't have the greatest answers, but I knew that how much I loved the leadership piece, and so started talking to some of my colleagues at Blue Pearl about, I'd love to bring that back to the clinic space. And it's been really rewarding to do that and does feel like, like I mentioned, that full circle moment, and man, there's such a need for leadership and a passion for it in the practice space, no

matter what company or what practice you're talking about. This is a tough time right now in veterinary medicine.

0:03:23.5 Katie Berlin: It really is. And I feel like the idea that people leave, if you have heard expression people don't leave bad jobs, they leave bad managers, and I do feel like there has not been enough emphasis on good leadership, good management or leadership versus management. In veterinary medicine, we tend to promote people who have been there the longest or want a raise. We can't give them a raise for doing the same job, so we promote them and it's really hard because then they don't... It's not their fault, they don't necessarily have the resources to lead well, and that definitely has been a factor in my career as well as just is leaving because I didn't feel supported by leadership and some of the roles that I had.

0:04:15.6 Katie Berlin: So it's such an important thing that you're doing. And we'll talk more about that today. Because today our subject is developing leaders in vet med, which is something I'm super excited about. But I have a personal question to ask you. This is one of my favorite questions to ask people, 'cause you can learn a lot about them, if you had an autobiography, what would the title be?

0:04:37.8 Laura Pletz: Oh gosh, well, I think that the title would be very simple, it would be what's next and where this comes from is... And it's funny, I'm thinking back to the story I was just telling you, and I actually asked myself that question in my story, but it comes from one of my favorite TV shows of all time, that West Wing, where they would always when they're discussing these big items and their priorities and different things, it's always like, okay, we're done with that, what's next? And I think it comes down to that kind of growth mindset is where that fits in for me. It's like, I just, I don't know what's around the corner, but I'm interested to find out, and I don't necessarily have it all planned out, and I think that's the fun of it.

0:05:23.3 Katie Berlin: Yes, that definitely is me to a T as well, and it took a while to embrace that though, because like you said, in vet med, we kind of are trained to think like, Okay, you get out of school, you go to practice, especially if you're doing a small animal, you go to small animal private practice, and if you didn't do an internship in a residency, then that's just what you're gonna do forever, and your goal should be to own. It feels like a lot of people are critical of associate who don't wanna own, and then that you should be happy with that, then eventually you sell your practice, you retire end of story. And man, it just doesn't go that way for a lot of us, and then we feel like it's us that we're the problem, but that growth mindset definitely can look different for different people, for sure.

0:06:12.1 Laura Pletz: Yeah, absolutely. I think if I go back to... It was very clear what my path and my goal was all the way through vet school, like that was... I had that figured out from the time I was very young, I think I was five when I started saying I wanted to be a veterinarian. Which is common.

0:06:27.0 Laura Pletz: People decide really early in this particular profession, and so up until that point, I did have that clear like this is what it's gonna look like, but then after that, you start to go, I don't think this is how it works for ever. Those goals aren't as clearly defined as they are with school and finishing vet school and getting that first job, and then it starts to get a little bit... There's way more options.

0:06:56.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah, and leadership offers a lot of those options for people who don't wanna leave the field but wanna grow, and maybe that growth looks a little bit different than that traditional school associate, practice owner path or credential technician. Even the tech specialist path. Leadership can look so different and those skills can be developed from even when before you're a leader by title, and I think that's really important too. For your job right now, your group medical director. Correct?

0:07:31.3 Laura Pletz: Correct.

0:07:34.7 Katie Berlin: And can you tell me about what that job looks like. What do you love most about it?

0:07:37.2 Laura Pletz: Yeah, if you think about what truly my job is, is it to be this sort of the medical director for... Right now, I have five hospitals to start, there'll probably be additional ones added at some point, but so very involved in decisions around medical quality and how we're ensuring that we're doing a good job with that 'cause it's so important to us as an organization, but the biggest piece is how do I find the leaders within these hospitals, get them into their positions, help them grow, make sure we have a deep bench.

0:08:12.7 Laura Pletz: If you're gonna value leadership, you can't just find a leader and then be done, you've gotta have a strong bench of strong team, because, life takes us different places. Life moves us, sometimes we decide we want to do something different, leadership is not gonna be for us, so that's really a big priority for me, and until that is in place, making sure that my teams in those hospitals have that consistent leadership presence from me and then certainly that support will look a little different once you have those medical directors in place.

0:08:54.6 Katie Berlin: Blue Pearl as specialty in ER, right?

0:08:56.3 Laura Pletz: Correct.

0:08:58.2 Katie Berlin: And you are not a specialist?

0:09:03.1 Laura Pletz: That's right.

0:09:05.0 Katie Berlin: So I was wondering what that's like to be a medical director and then have your territory be populated by specialists and critical care vets.

0:09:17.1 Laura Pletz: Yeah, so it's a little bit of a different approach that I take because while we are peers in terms of veterinary medicine, we've done very different things in our career, and I approach it just like I do any other time that I've been a leader. I believe the way you're most successful is surrounding yourself by people that are way smarter than you, and figure out how to get out of their way and solve some of the barriers for them, so I remember feeling a little intimidated, I don't know, some of these things, I would be coming to them to ask for these really complicated internal medicine or surgical, whatever it may be, I would be coming to them, but ultimately, they don't need me to tell them how to practice, it's a very clinician-driven culture.

0:10:05.5 Laura Pletz: I need to understand what some of the barriers are for them to be able to do their best every day and feel like they can do the best for their patients every day. So that's really

my job. So once we understand that of each other, that you're the expert, I value that, let me help you be able to do your job the way you wanna do it.

0:10:29.1 Katie Berlin: That's fantastic. And that's what I was hoping you'd say and answer that question, because I know when I was coming up as an associate, I felt like a medical director. Just by that title, no matter what kind of medical director they were, they had to know the most and they had to know all the medicine, and they had to be able to do all the surgeries, and that was what a medical director meant.

0:10:50.9 Katie Berlin: Was you were creating medical policy for everyone to follow. And that's just not always the case, as a group medical director, it sounds like you're mostly responsible for supporting the people who help to do that at their individual hospitals, and that's really cool. Just because you might be the best surgeon or have the most knowledge about how to treat difficult endocrine cases, God love them, does not mean that you have extensive training in leadership, and sometimes that it... In fact, oftentimes you don't, 'cause you've been spending all of your time becoming a specialist in medicine, and I think that's so important to have that kind of support to develop those leadership skills to go along with the medical and surgical skills that you might have been very comfortable with at that point.

0:11:41.3 Laura Pletz: Yeah, absolutely, it's really interesting to me too... And this isn't, I'm not speaking about my organization, this is everything I've seen, because, go back to my time at Royal Canin, I was in all types of clinics, you name it specialty, general practice, emergent, you name it. And I think that as we've grown and we see these larger structures for organizations and need that leadership, we tended to go, Oh, this is that doctor that just go, go, go, really, really successful doctor, super smart, like whoever that person in the practice, that's gonna be the medical director.

0:12:21.2 Laura Pletz: And it's the wrong way to look at it. Yeah, it has nothing to do with who is a very productive Clinician, who's a really amazing doctor, diagnostician, any of those things, sometimes there's overlap, but it's a totally separate skill set and desire. And it's just like any other type thing, when you're a really strong individual performer, and you go into your first leadership role, there's a lot of things that made you a great individual performer that you have to let go of to be a strong leader, 'cause you're like, let me do it like I'm the action-oriented. And your job becomes to get things done through other people. Which is an entirely different skill set.

0:13:08.1 Katie Berlin: Yes, the group project skill set is completely different from the individual term paper skills set. [laughter]

0:13:15.1 Laura Pletz: Yes, 100%.

0:13:18.8 Katie Berlin: It's funny because I feel like that is something that... Because we become a culture where it's so ingrained that the best doctor becomes a leader or the most skilled technician gets promoted to manager that the rest of the team expects that as well, and I'm thinking about back to practices where I've worked and thinking about what would it have been like if the best communicator for the leader, the person who had the most, the highest EQ and who had that sort of either training or natural ability to help people and support them more than sort of tell them what to do or say, Well, why can't you do it? I can do it. That's always a good one. And I feel like that would have made a much more successful team if the team accepted it, and that's a whole other ball game. Isn't it? Is changing the culture.

0:14:21.3 Laura Pletz: It's very different. And it's funny, it's changed a lot over the years, and it's so different to see it now in the clinic space. So I think about my time at Royal Canin when I would sit in meetings and talk to people or connect with my team members on one-on-one basis and the things I would look for in leadership, it's a lot different in that space that it is in the clinic, it's... You'll be at a doctor's meeting or a staff meeting, and you're seeing a lot of conversation around one particular subject, and everybody can get so attached on to whatever they're focused on, but if you look, sometimes it's the great listener. Who's that person that's taking it all in, trying to understand, and then comes back to a group-based solution, not just like, this is my issue, this is my issue and I'm stuck on it. And like you said, or the communicator that just knows how to bring everybody in and get that feedback, just totally different.

0:15:31.9 Katie Berlin: Do you think... You've been in a leadership role now for a while in various positions, were you always a leader, were you kind of a natural leader in school, and that's been something that's followed you or did you have to develop those skills?

0:15:50.2 Laura Pletz: So I think I always had that tendency, but I also had to learn how to do it effectively, because I could also very much be at times, and when I was much more inexperienced as a leader, it was sort of... I just do it for you, that's what I'm gonna do.

[laughter]

0:16:11.0 Katie Berlin: Do you want something, right?

[laughter]

0:16:13.0 Laura Pletz: Yeah. So it was just a little bit... And I'm sure we can get into some personality types and stuff, and that will explain itself very well. But I'm a very assertive person, like I see it, I try to start latching onto it, so I had to learn that that's not your job anymore as a leader, I had to learn the... I've done various versions of this over the years, but asking people when they come to you thing with things that my favorite version of it right now is, do you need me to hear you, help you or handle it, which one?

0:16:50.6 Katie Berlin: I love that.

0:16:53.2 Laura Pletz: Because people come to you for... Those are the three big buckets. And what I find is in my earlier days when I always defaulted to just handle it, I wasn't allowing them to grow, ever. So I had to change that.

0:17:11.8 Katie Berlin: I feel like that's a good rule of thumb for relationship conversation is like are you venting?

0:17:17.4 Laura Pletz: Any relationship.

0:17:19.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah, like any relationship. Yeah, your friend calls and they're upset, what is my role here? And it's fine anyway that you need me to be... But it's good to have those expectations. That's definitely true. It's interesting 'cause I was a very shy kid, I wasn't a leader at all, I didn't like speak in class, I didn't like to take charge of anything, and now you cannot get me to

shut up and I don't know what happened. I think... My dad is the debate King, and I think... He's a trial lawyer, and I think the genes just started to express themselves a little bit late, but it is definitely the active listening and taking a step back and letting people figure it out is, sometimes really hard because as the type A in me just wants to make sure it's done, so I can completely get that. Have you ever done any kind of personality or communication style testing, like disc or strength finding.

0:18:20.3 Laura Pletz: Yeah I've done those. It's funny, I was probably 10 or so years ago, straight D, all the way, like about as much of a D on disk as you can be, I've drifted over towards the eye a little bit.

0:18:35.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah, same.

0:18:37.9 Laura Pletz: That's interesting. And then Myers breaks, it's the EN, TJ, which it'll say classic later, but it also is like... You gotta tone it down for some folks, it's too much. [laughter]

0:18:57.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah. It's funny how those change over time too. You think like, oh, I'm gonna be this, this is who I am and that's how I'm gonna be forever. And when I was one year out of school, and I went to work for VCA, and they took you to like a new leader's workshop when we did the whole full disc and assessment, and then we all got into groups and I was like, super D like DDDDD, which for people who are not familiar with disc D is like sort of dominant. So you're the natural leader. You like to sort of get things done. You don't like to mess around too much with the small talk, just like get it done, and if it's not working, tell me why, so we can fix it.

0:19:35.7 Katie Berlin: And since then, I'm pretty much equal DI, but it's been an evolution for sure. And the, and the S&C are like non-existent. So I was more of an influencer. Like you want to, when you speak to groups, you wanna get them kind of hyped up and inspired and excited and it's more of a collaborative type of leader, I think, than D. So yeah, and we do StrengthsFinder too at AAHA and that's been really enlightening because the strengths are more about, are more nuanced, I think. So yeah.

0:20:17.6 Laura Pletz: Yeah, those are always fun. And it's fun to see where your team is. I've always enjoyed that the mapping, just so you can see where everybody is, try to understand each other a little bit better. Those are always a lot of fun.

0:20:32.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah. And even if you're not a huge believer in doing like a personality test, it's kind of fun to do this as a group activity, I think. Sort of it puts everybody on equal footing and says, okay, everybody's got things they're good at. My leader is not good at everything either. Yeah, very important. Okay, well, so what do you think... You were talking about things that you love. I'm sure that you love seeing people kind of come out of their shells as leaders and figure out how to lead well. What about some of the hardest things about developing new leaders?

0:21:11.5 Laura Pletz: Yeah. I do think the hardest... Sometimes one of the hardest parts is getting some really strong leaders to see themselves that way. That's the first hurdle. I've had multiple conversations where I'm the one that brings it up. They've not come and said, Hey, I think I wanna be in a leadership role. But I say, I've seen something in you. Have you ever thought about this? And you just see the look on their face, like, no, I haven't. And sometimes those first conversations, I've learned, I remember it used to be very disappointing. I'd be like, well, I guess I misread that

one. But that's not true. Because what happens is it's, you let it sit for a bit, the next time you talk to them, it's a whole different...

0:22:04.5 Laura Pletz: It may take several conversations, but just to see that light start to come on, I think that's a lot of fun. That's my favorite. But I think then when you get people on board and they're trying to figure this out, the conflict resolution piece is a really challenging one to coach people through. That ultimately comes around to making sure that they're really strong in terms of empathy and that EQ, understanding perspective. That's one of the big crucial things to me is leaders really have to be able to step back and see like the big picture, the perspective, the whole perspective of what's happening. And not just one thing because in the clinic environment too, like it's complex. There's so much happening.

0:22:55.1 Laura Pletz: There's so many different services, especially hospitals like I'm working with right now. Different services, different personalities, different ways of doing things. You have to be able to step back and say, okay, let's not just... Every time somebody comes to you with something, put a little bandaid on here and there, which I think is what we tend to do when we have that, just, I'm gonna fix it. But then you... It's not, it's not a good approach. You've eventually, you're like, okay, well, we've put a lot of bandaid on a lot of little things, but we've got some things we need to address holistically here.

0:23:28.6 Katie Berlin: Do people ever surprise you when you might not have seen that they could be a good leader and they really step up?

0:23:38.7 Laura Pletz: Oh, absolutely. It's funny. It's the good character arc. If you get to be around people long enough, you see them really grow as a person. And when they reach that point that they're ready to take it on and show you that, that's pretty exciting too.

0:23:58.4 Katie Berlin: So if there's somebody coming, we're talking about people who are reluctant to see themselves as leaders. There are definitely a lot of those in vet med. I know most associate vets that I know don't think of themselves as leaders, whereas when you're a veterinarian in a clinic, you are already in a leadership position whether you like it or not, and whether it's ever called that. But a lot of people just are like, I didn't come here to do that. I just wanna treat my patients. But what about the opposite? If you have somebody who's really amped for promotion, for a management position, for a team lead and you're like, I don't know about that. Are there steps or ways that you can sort of gauge whether that will work, or how much time do you give somebody, what kind of support does that person need, and is it always a yes, just with qualifications if they want to lead we can support them into it?

0:24:52.6 Laura Pletz: I think for me, because that will absolutely happen sometimes, that there are some people that are very driven by making that next move or it's kind of that it... We're very ambitious people.

0:25:08.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah, like the what's next question.

0:25:10.4 Laura Pletz: Exactly. So you will occasionally get someone who's decided, okay, that's what I have to do next, because I've tapped out here and I'm a person who wants to keep moving. That's not a good motivation for being a leader. That's not at all. So what I tend to do with those is, I really wanna understand why do they wanna be a leader, so that that becomes a conversation. And

understanding that, and I've had to have some conversations that where I tried to be very clear, but I thought it was the most kind approach, because I just wasn't hearing anything other than I want the next layer of job, which is not gonna make them happy, or the people working for them in a good... It's not gonna be a good setup. So if there's some motivation in there that's driving it, that's about some of the right things to move a team forward, then absolutely. Let's get on the development piece and work on that. But if it's really just about, I've tapped out at this level, so I want the next layer of job, not a good enough reason.

0:26:26.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah. You can level up professional skills in that case, maybe, like technical skills without necessarily being responsible for other people's success and happiness.

0:26:37.9 Laura Pletz: Yeah. Oh absolutely. And listen, I fell into this trap of my own at times, because when I'm trying to figure out what do I want to do, what's the next opportunity when I was at Royal Canin and started to realize, I think I've kind of done as much as I can do in this role. I've evolved it, I've grown as much as I'm going to grow in this role. And I started thinking about what were my options. And sometimes, it was like, oh, well, I should be working towards chief medical officer somewhere someday, or some other role like that, that's like charting this course. And it just never felt good to me to look at it like that. So I stepped back and started to think about what do I enjoy? What do I contribute the most? Where are the places I want to grow? And that's how I started to choose what opportunities I would look at. It wasn't about being on some trajectory. I just found that not helpful at all. And I think that's sometimes, a little bit of that mindset that people might come to you if they're really gung-ho, I want this job, but I can't tell you why I'm a good fit or what I hope to grow, how I hope to grow in this role.

0:28:00.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah. That's a great segue into my next question, which was gonna be about team leaders, people who are already practice managers or practice owners who want to help their team members develop into leaders. It sounds like asking that question like why, is a really good start. But do you have other top tips for people like that who can't have somebody like you come to the practice and say, okay, here's what I would look for, here's the kind of training I would give them. Like just a few things that anybody who's a leader right now could do to help develop their team?

0:28:35.2 Laura Pletz: I think the first thing that's so important is real honest communication. We had... This comes up for me every so often, but we were having a team call last week, and we like to share just some little development tips that have helped us over the years. It's just something we do, and it granted, this is my peers more than my team that's reporting to me, and I brought out the oldie, but goody from Brene Brown of Clear is Kind. It's so simple and so true.

0:29:14.2 Katie Berlin: It's so hard sometimes.

0:29:15.3 Laura Pletz: It's really... It's so hard. Yes. Like, when somebody's really struggling and they're just making some poor choices, and you empathize with them and you understand they've got a lot going on, and you sort of see the why behind it, but you've gotta tell 'em the impact it's having, and you've gotta help 'em to see that, and it's a really tough conversation sometimes. But I think any leader, if they're dancing around things and being vague and hoping people get it, like that's the first thing to stop. You've got to be very clear and kind and open and honest about it. That's key.

0:29:55.7 Katie Berlin: Okay. So follow up question to that. What if you are a team member and your leader is not being clear? How can you... And you know that, like you know enough to know that, and you're like, I don't really know what's expected of me here, or I just need to get a straight answer about how I'm doing. I need to get feedback. How can you communicate that to somebody who's technically your superior? I don't like that word, but...

0:30:23.6 Laura Pletz: I know. Well, this is the challenge. I think some people, it takes a while to have that trust and feel safe enough to go to them and ask a question like that. And so this is like a two-part thing. That person's in a tough spot, but it's even tougher if that leader has not created that safe space and that area where you have that trust that you can say, I need to understand what's expected of me. I'm a little fuzzy on that, and it's a little stressful for me. I wanna make sure I'm delivering. So I think it's not a criticism, it's that I want to understand what's happening. And what I'm supposed to be doing, and is this working? Is it not working? I just need to know, because I want to learn and grow, and I want to deliver what the business needs. And I just don't know what you expect of me.

0:31:24.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah. It's so hard, but it is like a muscle. And the more you do it, and the more you just, you learn how to be clear and civil. Nobody's saying like demand, but being clear and kind is, it's a skill and it is developable. But it is hard. You have to do it in order to develop it.

0:31:49.9 Laura Pletz: Well, and coming back to what I said about the leaders establishing trust, I fully recognize, so I'm just wrapping up my first 90 days in this new job, right? So I came in totally new. Most of them don't know me from anywhere. The absolute first thing I had to do was just get to know these folks, show them who I am. That's another thing that leaders have to be a little bit vulnerable and open and let their people know like, I'm not perfect. This is how I handle things. Be honest, but you've gotta establish that trust before you can start making a lot of other progress with things. Because it's hard to have that open space until you do that. You have to spend a lot of time listening, and learning and understanding the situation and make sure that there's trust there when you have to have an unfortunate conversation. One of the things that's great for me is when I want them to know this is gonna be a tough conversation, let's work on... Let's align together and move forward. But then, it's really important for them to know that I'm done with that. It comes back to my autobiography, I guess. I'm like, what's next? We're gonna move on from this. I'm not dragging this around. Everybody makes mistakes. Move on.

0:33:12.9 Katie Berlin: Yeah. That's another characteristic of Ds, right? No dwelling.

0:33:18.9 Laura Pletz: Yep, yep.

0:33:19.0 Katie Berlin: Onto the next thing. Okay. So I'm gonna... My next question for you was about team members who want to take a more active role in leadership, and I'm gonna put this in context, thinking about when, in the past when I asked my practice owner if I could use my CE allowance to go to a conference that talked about management, leadership, communication, rather than medical skills. And he said, no. And I was an associate. There was no room for growth in that role. He wasn't looking for partners, he wasn't looking for a team lead. But I felt really strongly that that was something that would make me happier at my job and better at my job.

0:34:04.3 Katie Berlin: And and I was really disappointed and I went anyway, but I paid for it myself. And whole other story. That was the Uncharted Veterinary Conference in 2017, the first

one, and it changed my whole darn life. So that was the best money I ever spent. But anyway. But how can people go about this if, like, so say you're a practice owner and somebody comes to you with this request, or you're a team member and you know this is something you wanna do, and you feel so passionate about these things, but you don't know how to go about getting them, because you're not sure that's gonna be supported. How can you broach those conversations?

0:34:40.6 Laura Pletz: Yeah, I think a lot of it comes back to being very clear about why it's important to you, and it takes a little courage to push back a little bit sometimes. I think the answer that you got is very unfortunate. So I kind of wanna coach both sides here. I'm trying, I'm like, first and foremost, be a little bit more open and understand that it's important for human beings to feel like they're growing. And it may not be exactly what you want to see them grow in, but you gotta let people do that. So I think it's really just whether it's a leader having a conversation or an associate needing to talk to their leader, help me understand. That's my favorite question, my favorite way to start things.

0:35:34.2 Laura Pletz: Help me understand why this is a non-starter. Like, can we talk about ways that this could benefit the clinic? And it comes back to a point you made, even if there wasn't an obvious, and I think that's probably the problem, is why do I need to pay for this? I don't need someone to be a leader. But understanding that we all are leaders on that floor every day. Everyday leadership is something that Vivaldi's always talked about, and that's exactly why it's what you said earlier. Every veterinarian is stepping in as a leader at some point in time. And sharing, talking about how those learnings will translate, not just about getting a different job, it's about growing as an individual and how I show up at work.

0:36:28.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah. So, so true. And on the one hand, I'm glad he said no, because I left. I went to a different clinic ultimately, not because of that decision, but that was a symptom of the reasons why leaving was the right call. And that training has sunk in. I went to Uncharted every year after that and now, I am the manager of a small team at AAHA. And I absolutely believe that my job is to support them and not manage them because they all do their jobs way better than I could. I don't have any clue how to do some of the things they do. And I just wanna make sure they have all the things that they have, all the resources that they need to do those jobs and be happy at their jobs, and at least as far as that's under my control.

0:37:20.6 Katie Berlin: And I definitely learned a lot over the years about the kind of leader I do not want to be, so that's also important. So we were just talking about the Uncharted conference. I know the AAHA Con this year is gonna have great practice management and, and leadership and wellbeing talks as well as tons of clinical stuff. But I was wondering if you had resources specifically that you love for developing leaders, either for people who want to help their leaders develop, or people who are interested in leading better.

0:37:55.5 Laura Pletz: Yeah, so there's a lot of good authors out there. Going way back, I think some of the first things that I read that really intrigued me were some of the things from Simon Sinek. I love Adam Grant. Just this perspective on how to approach things. I did do... I did a course, and this is not necessarily accessible for everyone, but I did a course at Cornell, a certificate program for women specifically in leadership because listen, it's different.

0:38:29.2 Katie Berlin: You mean that one?

0:38:31.9 Laura Pletz: Yeah. It's a different approach, and there's some situations that you deal with that are a little bit different. I'm trying to think. I have listened to some podcasts every now and then. I'm not like fan girl of any particular podcast from a leadership standpoint, it's more topic based. A lot of times I'll say, okay, I've got some interesting conflict happening. What are some thing... Listening to some people discuss some of those things. But probably, my best advice on how to grow is to develop a network of other leaders that you respect and trust. Every time over book course, anything, calling up a person that I know is an amazing leader and maybe approaches things a little differently than I do sometimes and say, Hey, I'm struggling with this. You had this situation, what do you think? And talking it out, that's probably been the best from a learning standpoint for me.

0:39:40.0 Katie Berlin: That's such great advice. We always, I think in vet med, think of networking as a dirty word. And we're not talking about shallow schmoozing and like passing your business card around to everyone. We're talking about like forming real connections. You don't need 200 people, you just need a few that you really trust who know you.

0:39:57.0 Laura Pletz: Yeah. Absolutely.

0:40:00.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah. I definitely agree with that because I think this, having that sort of net, the safety net of people who can catch you before you get too low where you're like, I'm failing. I'm an imposter. I don't deserve to be here. Well, how dare I think about being able to do this ever, and they can really lift you up. And that could be somebody outside of vet med, like it doesn't have to be a veterinary person too. I love that, and I'll put links in the show notes too. The resources, the authors that you mentioned, Brene Brown you mentioned, and I love her book. Dare to Lead, which is about this. But I can say that the thing that is making the most difference for me as a new manager is just reading about communication and vulnerability, not even in a leadership sense, because going back to what you said, like that vulnerability is so... That's a superpower, and I think that's something where women as leaders can really excel, because we are taught from a young age that vulnerability is okay, and it can be so much harder for people identifying as men to let that vulnerability show.

0:41:16.8 Katie Berlin: And we sort of have that a lot of us naturally, because it's been allowed to various extents, I think depending on the person and their upbringing. But that relatability and authenticity is so important, is something I've really appreciated about leaders that I've met.

0:41:36.3 Laura Pletz: Yeah. I completely agree. And I think that when I think about developing myself as a veterinarian, the things I had to learn, and how did I grow my skillset there? It was very different than growing as a leader. Growing as a leader is really working on yourself.

0:41:55.1 Katie Berlin: So true.

0:41:56.2 Laura Pletz: It really is. And I think maybe that's why it's been such a wonderful thing to me, because it's very engaging just to have the space to do that, to like, to try to grow and learn and be a better person. Being a parent has helped me as a leader.

0:42:15.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah, that's the ultimate leadership position where it's never about you, right? [laughter]

0:42:21.4 Laura Pletz: Yeah. And just some of the hard things when I shared that I wanted to fix it for everybody, that's absolutely something I had to let go of with my kids at a point. When they're young, they're in junior and senior and high school now, so they've very much been in this life stage that I'm like, I can't, if I keep doing everything for you, I'm not gonna put a functional human being out into the world, you know? So you have to get comfortable letting them fail sometimes and letting them figure it out and be there to support and have their back. It's the same way with leadership. If you don't do that with your team, they're not gonna grow. You're not gonna have a great bench of leaders, because you're diminishing their opportunities for growth.

0:43:12.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah, very wise. And I know a lot of parents... I don't have kids, just a chihuahua and a cat. You can be a lot more D with the chihuahua and a cat than you can be with kids, I'm guessing. But I know a lot of people listening are relating to you pretty hard right now. And I hope that, I really hope that as a profession, having leaders like you who are so invested in the success of the profession through developing that deep bench can help shift the whole industry, the whole veterinary profession for the better, because it really is something we've been missing. And I'm so excited to see more people focusing on this now. It makes my Brene Brown nerd heart really, like fan girl heart very happy. But it's something we desperately need, so thank you for all the hard work that you're doing.

0:44:09.5 Laura Pletz: Oh, thank you. I appreciate that. It's a lot of fun. I really enjoy it.

0:44:13.1 Katie Berlin: Good. Well, Laura Pletz, thank you so much for your time today and your wisdom. And again, I'll drop some resources also for Vivaldi in the description for this episode. But as always, email me if you have any questions for Laura, or if you wanna have get more information about Vivaldi, just let me know and I'll make sure that your questions get answered and we'll catch you next time. Thank you so much for listening.

0:44:41.4 Laura Pletz: Thank you. Thank you for having me today. It was so much fun.