

0:00:04.1 Katie Berlin: Hi, welcome back to Central Line. I'm your host Katie Berlin, and my guest today is Stacy Pursell. Stacy, welcome to Central Line. So glad to have you.

0:00:12.4 Stacy Pursell: Thank you so much, Katie. I'm happy to be here.

0:00:14.4 Katie Berlin: If people listening have been paying attention, they may have noticed that Stacy's name has shown up a few times recently in our publications. So in News Star and in Trends, Stacy's been a contributing author, writing about retention, recruitment, all those good things. So if her name sounds familiar, I'm sure you've seen Stacy around on the circuit. I feel like we've been crossing paths for a long time and I'm so glad to finally get a chance to sit down and chat with you. Stacy, would you mind just letting us know a little bit about yourself and what it is you do?

0:00:46.5 Stacy Pursell: Yes, sure. Thank you Katie. So Stacy Pursell, I've spent the last 26 years in executive search and recruiting. I started out my career working for a large international executive search firm, and I was placing people with Fortune 500 companies, specifically in the food and beverage industry. And one of my clients that was a human food company had a pet division where they sold pet food and they needed an executive to run that division. So that's how I first got into this industry and I loved the people and I saw a need and decided I wanted to focus on this. I started in 1997. Back at that time, some of the corporations were just starting to get going and I helped one of those companies hire over 300 veterinarians. And I quickly switched from working with food and beverage companies to deciding to specialize in the animal health industry and veterinary profession. So I'm the founder and CEO of The Vet Recruiter, and we focus on executive search and recruiting exclusively for the animal health industry and the veterinary profession.

0:01:54.9 Katie Berlin: That's a long time to be in this industry and you've seen a lot of trends come and go probably during that time. And I would imagine that staying in this industry for that long, you've sort of found a guiding light that helps keep you on track to say, okay, this is what's motivating me to get up every morning and do this work in the veterinary and animal health community. So what is that guiding light for you? What guides you?

0:02:25.4 Stacy Pursell: Yeah, I thought long and hard about that question because, and really it's an easy answer for me though. What gets me out of bed every morning is just the passion for helping people in solving problems. When you ask employers, and Katie, I saw you at the Western Vet Conference a few weeks ago in Las Vegas, and when I asked employers, what's your biggest challenge in your business right now? Almost 100% of them said that their biggest challenge is hiring and retaining employees. So I get to solve those problems for companies. I have the opportunity to solve their biggest challenges, which are hiring and retaining people. And at the same time, I get to help employers with that. I also get to help animal health professionals and veterinarians grow their careers by helping them find opportunities to help them improve their quality of life.

0:03:17.1 Katie Berlin: That's pretty big. I mean, when you think about problem solving, and I think veterinarians, vet techs, we can relate for sure that we're problem solvers too. Medicine is really a big puzzle and medicine and patient care, there's so much about it, it's just solving problems all the time. And it's a big thing to be able to go to one of the biggest vet conferences and basically everyone you talk to, they're like, this is my biggest problem. And you happen to be the person with this skillset and the position to be able to help solve that problem for them. That's a really big deal. That's a good guiding light. It's a bad problem to have... If you're the practice owner and you're

working short staffed all the time, but it's also a really, it's gotta be a really good feeling.

0:04:03.0 Stacy Pursell: Well, it really is. And I like to say that I'm my clients' biggest secret weapon 'cause they'll hire a great person and then their competitors will go, how did they get that person? Where did that person come from? So I've said before, I'm kind of like the Wizard of Oz, the wizard behind the curtain. My name isn't in light when somebody hires this great person, this company announces this hire. But my name's not ever mentioned. My work is behind the scenes.

0:04:36.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah, you're sort of an unsung hero of this particular problem at least. So you had mentioned that people answered your question that their biggest problem was not just finding people to hire, but also keeping good team members. And I think everybody listening can probably relate to that because we've all seen too many good people leave the job, leave the profession and it's really unfortunate and sad. That's one of the things that affected me the most I feel like when I was in clinical practice very recently, was seeing people that I really admired and loved working with leaving the hospital, leaving the field. Right now, a lot of the advice is about hiring and recruiting, attracting candidates, big sign on bonuses, getting them to come and wanna work for you. But that's clearly... That's only half the battle. So can you talk about trends that you've seen recently in the profession and maybe compared to some older trends when it comes to retention and attrition and how things have changed over the last few years?

0:05:48.8 Stacy Pursell: Sure. Well, attrition in veterinary medicine has historically been high, I think. But it has ramped up even more during the past few years. And there was an article that was posted on LinkedIn. I don't remember the author of the article or the original source, but there was an article posted on LinkedIn that said up to one third of veterinary graduates think about leaving the profession within five years of graduation. And in 2021 the AVMA Veterinary Business and Economic Forum, there was a speaker that said 39% of veterinarians have thought about leaving during the past five years. And so some of those reasons that veterinarians are leaving are burnout, financial stress and a lack of work-life balance. But I would say too that the pandemic contributed to these conditions too. So, that we know that that increased the demand for veterinary services.

0:06:52.8 Stacy Pursell: People adopted pets, a pet or multiple pets, and then that led to even more burnout and stress and then the shortage as well. So there were retirements during the pandemic. There were veterinarians that had planned to stay and work longer more years, but they had sped up their retirement, so they decided to drop out. So we had thousands of veterinarians that dropped out of the workforce over the past few years. But it's like a vicious cycle because one of the reasons that veterinarians leave is stress and burnout, and then that leads to more stress and burnout for the veterinarians that stay, because in some clinics, there's a lack of personnel which causes vet... If you're in a full doctor practice or historically a full doctor practice and you're the only doctor there, then you're doing more work than you're accustomed to doing. And then that leads to more stress and burnout and attrition.

0:07:46.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah, I'm not glad that it exists, but I'm glad that you said that, that it's always, it's been a profession where attrition is high. I don't like admitting that that's something our profession has always struggled with, but it's not a profession that's for everybody. And it's very hard, I think, for us to get an idea of what it's gonna be like until we graduate. No matter how many times you work in a vet clinic as a kid, as a vet student, it's just very difficult to get that feeling of what it's really gonna be like when this is your job. And I remember getting out of school and I was a second career graduate, so I had already worked in a different field for a few years when I went to

vet school. And I still, when I got out, I was one of those one third where I was like, am I gonna make it? Am I gonna stay in this field?

0:08:38.0 Katie Berlin: And that sort of five year mark was really a turning point for me. So it doesn't surprise me that you said that. And then adding the stress of the pandemic, having worked through that myself, that was definitely, it was a really big deal and it caused a lot of people to question what's important to them. And you had mentioned that during the pandemic a lot of people got pets, so it seemed like there was a pet boom. And I know I've heard differing opinions on whether we have a true shortage of veterinarians and veterinary technicians. Do we have a shortage in your view and why aren't the new graduates filling that gap?

0:09:23.0 Stacy Pursell: Yeah, so that's a great question. It's interesting in my opinion that there's even a debate on is there a shortage or is there not a shortage? If you sat in my seat, you would know that there is definitely a shortage because my phone rings off the hook all day long with practices that are trying to hire a veterinarian. Some that have been trying to hire for months, six months, a year, they've been running ads for, some of them for over a year, especially in some of these rural areas. And they get no applicants, they can't find anybody. So I look at the data, so the national unemployment rate for the whole country was 3.6 in February, which was just last month. But according to the job search site, Zippia, since 2013, the unemployment rate in the veterinary profession has decreased from 1% to 0.2%.

0:10:21.0 Stacy Pursell: So that's almost no unemployment. So any veterinarian who wants to have a job, has a job. And there are not unemployed veterinarians lining up looking for a job. If anybody wants a job, they can easily find one. And if they're looking, they get multiple job offers. And so here's some more data. And this is gonna be the case for the foreseeable future. So the Bureau of Labor Statistics, or the BLS in September of last year said that veterinarian jobs are projected to grow by 19% between 2021 and 2031. So we're already two years into this because we're in 2023. So the BLS is projecting 4800 openings for veterinarians each year on average over the next decade with about 1680 of those representing brand newly created positions. And then the rest of those job openings will be to replace people who have transferred to different occupations or exited the workforce due to retirement.

0:11:24.8 Stacy Pursell: Now, one other thing too. You'd asked about the new graduates, what about veterinary graduates and new veterinarians entering the workforce, are they gonna help? So the problem there is that there are not enough new graduates to make up for the difference. So if you look at data from the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges, there's about 3000 veterinary students that graduated in 2020. So if we have the same number of graduates that are entering the profession every year for the next 10 years, that would be 30,000 new veterinarians. But the problem there is, there's gonna be 48,000 open positions for veterinarians during that time span. So that means at the end of the decade, we'll be looking at 18,000 open positions for veterinarians and not enough veterinarians to fill them. So we're gonna have 18,000 open positions and there won't be enough veterinarians, so we'll have 18,000 positions sitting open.

0:12:22.7 Katie Berlin: Well, that's pretty sobering, isn't it? And I... When I talk to people who, for instance, work for telehealth companies, and they say they're inundated by applicants because people wanna work from home. The pandemic definitely changed that landscape a lot, and it doesn't seem like it's hard to find people who want to work remotely as veterinarians or veterinary technicians for services that provide that kind of career. And so, but those jobs, there's so few of

those jobs comparatively. And so I'm sure we can't say that just because there might be 50 applicants for an opening with a telehealth company, that doesn't negate the fact that we still can have thousands, too few veterinarians and veterinary technicians for the open positions on the clinic floor that we have. And they may not even be the same applicants because some people who wanna work from home may not be able to work in a clinic. And I know for me, one of the things that caused me to leave the clinic was just because I wanted to try something different. I was burned out on clinical practice and I wanted to try working in the profession in a different way. And that's why I'm at AAHA now and got very lucky to have the opportunity. But for you, for everything that you've seen, what do you think is the number one reason that people leave their jobs?

0:13:55.7 Stacy Pursell: Well, I was gonna say too about what you just said. So during the pandemic, during the lockdowns and people staying at home, people were saying everybody's working from home. And I wish I had the statistics with me. I can't remember what they were, but I looked it up to see how many people historically work from home. And I think it was like 75% of people don't work from home, and then the pandemic changed that. But think about all of the jobs where people can't work from home. I mean, not just veterinary clinics, but human hospitals, people that work in manufacturing facilities, there's a tremendous amount of jobs that don't allow people to work from home. But the pandemic did change this a bit with the veterinary profession and with telemedicine becoming more popular.

0:14:46.0 Stacy Pursell: I was talking to a veterinarian at the Western Vet Conference, and she had transitioned from working in a clinic. One was for health reasons, the physical demand of working in a clinic and lifting pets was one reason, but also just the work-life balance, the flexibility that she was able to gain by working telemedicine. And she had an app on her phone with the company that she was working for where she could pick her schedule and she likes to work evenings, so she knows she can have her days free and work in the evenings. And she was making enough money to support herself by working when she wanted to work. So that is definitely something that did change. And so now I've forgotten your original question, if you could ask again.

0:15:30.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah, I was curious about what you've seen even anecdotally as the number one reason that people leave their jobs in vet med.

0:15:40.5 Stacy Pursell: Okay. So the thing that I hear the most in my recruiting practice, because I talk to veterinarians all day long, and our firm is placing veterinarians both in practice and also in industry. But the veterinarians that I talk with that are in practice, that are wanting to leave, the number one reason that they give me is burnout. Other reasons are lack of work-life balance, the scheduling. They don't really see a career path in some cases, they feel like they're doing the same thing that they've done for years. I talked to a lady last week and she said, I feel like I work 24/7. She didn't have the boundaries in place. So those are the most common reasons that I hear.

0:16:29.1 Katie Berlin: Yeah, that's interesting that you mentioned kind of feeling stuck, that lack of growth and development opportunity because I think a lot of us choose this field because we know we're not gonna be bored, right? I mean, vet med is a lot of things, but it's usually not boring, [laughter] and I knew every day was gonna be different, and I felt like you constantly are learning and learning and I'm definitely somebody who loves learning. Like, you can always see piles and piles of books behind me because I'm constantly cycling through books and wanting to learn more. And I still felt stuck as an associate vet, and I don't think I'm alone in that, as you mentioned. I know I'm not alone in that, in feeling that there just wasn't a place to go if I didn't wanna own a

practice.

0:17:18.0 Katie Berlin: I didn't know how to grow other than just making sure I was practicing the best patient care that I could. And as a field of go-getters, of people who have been striving for a long time and usually do well in school and are used to getting what they go after, it's hard to graduate and just put the breaks on and not be that way anymore and not have goals and things to strive for and places to go. And so I wonder if that's something that would be worth us kind of investigating further as a profession, I think we are probably doing that, and I think the more we can do that and talk about it, the better. Would you agree up with that?

0:17:58.9 Stacy Pursell: It's gotten a lot better though, I would say. Yes, I would, but at the same time, it's so much better in terms of the opportunities available to veterinarians than it was 25 years ago. When I started placing veterinarians in 1997, the majority of the veterinarians that I talked with either owned a practice or they were an associate in a practice. But the corporatization of veterinary medicine, even though sometimes it gets a bad rap, it's actually done some very positive things for the profession. So some of these larger corporations will put veterinarians in regional leadership positions, quality control. Some of the corporations really do offer a career path, you can be a medical director without having to go to the bank and take out a loan to open up your own practice, and then even in industry, there are so many interesting opportunities available in industry or in non-profit associations. So I see more jobs for veterinarians today than I did 20 years ago or over 25 years ago.

0:19:13.6 Katie Berlin: That's great. Yeah, that's a good point about corporate ownership of vet clinics definitely does open up a lot more tiers of possibility for veterinarians who don't necessarily wanna be practice owners, and I have seen that for sure make a difference in my peer group. So I wanna switch tracks a little bit from the idea of like, okay, here's why people leave, to, how can we try to reverse that trend? And I know there are a lot of people listening who are like please tell me how to keep my team members because I've been hemorrhaging them, and I don't know how to make it stop. What is maybe the first step that a practice can do to try to... If they've had a bunch of people leave seemingly for different reasons even, like what can they do first to try to figure out why and see if they can reverse the trend?

0:20:13.4 Stacy Pursell: Well, the first step that I would recommend a practice do that's experiencing turnover is to find out what is the reason that their employees are turning over, so one thing they can do is they can conduct an exit interview with the team members that are leaving and that might feel embarrassing or maybe you don't wanna hear the reasons, but what exit interviews are, they are confidential conversations conducted by someone at the practice with the person who's just handed in their resignation, and so when you're conducting an exit interview, ask open-ended questions that encourage the departing employee to provide their honest and detailed feedback about what it was like to work for the practice, so some of the questions you can ask somebody in an exit interview are, what factors influenced your decision to leave our practice, and did you feel valued and supported in your role and were you provided with the resources and the training that you needed to do your job effectively? Do you feel you had opportunities to grow and develop yourself professionally, and was there anything about the culture or the work environment that you found was challenging or unsatisfying? So if you can get some information, then you can learn some things about your practice, and this insight can cause the practice to make some positive changes to help reduce the turnover going forward.

0:21:42.4 Katie Berlin: That's great advice. I have a few follow-up questions on that, so first one is the timing of the exit interview, I would imagine that it could be awkward if you have an interview with somebody who's put in their two weeks notice, they still have 10 days left of that two weeks. [chuckle] And they say some some pretty open, honest things, I could imagine that they might be more likely to be forthcoming about those things if they then don't have to sit face-to-face with you across an exam table for another 10 days, so do you recommend doing these exit interviews after their last day, or how does that timing work out usually?

0:22:22.7 Stacy Pursell: My recommendation would be to schedule it on their last day, so if they've given you a two-week notice and their last day is on a Friday, let them know that on their last day that you'd like to schedule an exit interview with them and then carve out time on that day to do that, it might be awkward to take them to lunch on their last day. It depends on the relationship you have with them. If you have a great relationship with them as they're leaving, you could schedule a lunch on the last day to do this one-on-one with them, or if you don't have a great relationship, just conduct it in the afternoon on their last day and just try to get the information from them before they leave, 'cause once they've already departed, they may be less likely to conduct an exit interview, and like you said, if you do it on the day they hand in their resignation and they have to work with you for the next two weeks, that would be awkward too.

0:23:19.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah. And so another follow-up question I have is for the employee, so say I was in that position, and I have had jobs that I've left where I did have an exit interview, and this is actually when I worked for a corporation and they had a third party doing these exit interviews, so it was a company that did the interviews for them and they called me after I had left, and I was very honest during that interview, but I also didn't know if anybody was gonna hear it because it was going to a person who didn't even work directly for that company, and so it felt, you know, I had some things to say, but I also wasn't sure how effective it was gonna be, and also then I've had the opposite situation where I left a position where I worked for people I really liked. Didn't mean there weren't significant issues that contributed to me leaving, but I really liked them and I didn't wanna leave on a sour note, and so I wasn't sure if I should be totally honest with them. For the employee, how do you recommend that they sort of ride that line, like how honest can you really be in an exit interview and is this a situation where being more honest is actually the more kind thing to do?

0:24:36.3 Stacy Pursell: Yeah, so I like that that employer hired an outside firm to do that because it takes the pressure off the hiring manager or the practice owner, and so that also might result in the employee being more honest because it is a third party, and because that company invested in hiring and paying for that third party, I'm sure that that third party did provide that feedback to that employer, but as far as whether or not the employee leaving should be honest, I would recommend that they do be honest. They can be diplomatic. They can be professional, but I think that it's important to be honest. You wanna be honest because hopefully when you're leaving you're still, you wanna leave in a professional way, and you don't wanna have the next employees come in and experience whatever the negativity was that you experienced, so think of it as you're helping the next person that's coming into this role have a better experience than you did.

0:25:50.0 Katie Berlin: That's great advice. And I'm thinking about all of the opportunities that maybe we pass up, either as employees or employers, to have those conversations before somebody's handed in their resignation, knowing that somebody could be happier and we could be addressing those issues sooner, but also not every team member is gonna feel comfortable speaking

up. And so it can be hard, I'm sure, for employers and employees to line up on like when is the right time to ask them about whether they're happy. For an employer looking at their team, what do you think the best barometer is? So if this employer kind of conducts reviews and has meetings and everybody seems like they're not approaching them, asking them to talk all the time, how can an employer tell if their team is happy and how engaged they are?

0:26:51.1 Stacy Pursell: Well, your point before about when you were leaving and the outside firm conducted the exit interview, what you can do as an employer is you can hire an outside firm to conduct regular feedback studies on your employees so that you don't have the awkwardness of doing that yourself, that what you can do is you can hire that firm or that person, and you can decide what questions are gonna be asked, what information are you looking for? But don't wait until somebody hands in their resignation to learn that they're unhappy, but conduct regular surveys, it could be done quarterly of everyone in your company, and you can give them a \$10 or a \$20 Amazon or a Starbucks gift card for completing the study, and then you're gonna get that regular feedback, but you're not gonna have the awkwardness of having to sit down with them and bring them into your office and ask the questions, you have a neutral third party that's doing that for you, and then you're getting that feedback so that you can make changes along the way every quarter, and look from quarter to quarter these same themes that I heard the last quarter, the last year, or is there something new that's coming up that I need to be aware of?

0:28:11.4 Stacy Pursell: Another thing, some of the younger people, they don't wanna have just an annual review once a year, but they want regular check-in times, maybe even on a monthly or a quarterly basis. We have people in our recruiting firm, some of the younger people that have specifically said, "No, I want a monthly review," and at first I thought, well, that's a lot of work for me, but it's very valuable because once a month we can check in with everybody, let them know how they're doing, they can let us know how they're doing, and it provides tremendous value.

0:28:43.8 Katie Berlin: I love that you said that though, like we could hire... Employers could hire somebody to do this for them long before it's an exit interview, because I'm not sure that's something that people think about really. We talk a lot now, which is wonderful, about creating a culture of feedback and making sure that there's two-way feedback that's possible between management and the team, and that's wonderful, but you're right, there are also things that will be hard for employees to say directly to the person, especially if that person is the person who's responsible for some of the things that might be making them unhappy. So as far as a third party to do this, where can employers find these third parties and how can they get that kind of arrangement set up, and also, is this typically within the realm of possibility for a private practice?

0:29:44.4 Stacy Pursell: Sure, you can... There's companies that specialize... With some of the veterinary practices, especially if they're smaller, they may not have a need for a whole HR staff on-site like a bigger company would, and so there are firms that specialize in providing human resources services for smaller businesses. So you can actually outsource that to a company that specializes in providing human resources services, and I know a company or two, so after this podcast, if somebody wants to reach out to me I could hand over a referral.

0:30:26.6 Katie Berlin: Awesome. Well, I really like that idea, and I know I would have appreciated having that at certain points, just having somebody ask me to be honest with them about how things are going during that time before we were in a crisis situation, 'cause I have been in clinics where people hired a consultant to come in and figure out what's wrong, basically

troubleshoot our culture, and at that point, by the time most people hire that person I feel like it's pretty bad, and it's kind of preventive medicine, the way you're describing it, and I really like that idea, like why not?

0:31:00.2 Stacy Pursell: Or it could be awkward when that consultant comes in, then at that point everybody knows there is an issue and this consultant is here to try to figure out what the problem is, but by having those regular quarterly surveys, hopefully it doesn't lead to a big problem where you have to bring in the consultant to the site.

0:31:16.2 Katie Berlin: Right. Love it. And I also... This is sort of segueing me into something else that I wanted to ask you about, because this is sort of the intersection between attracting team members and retaining them, is that the question of hiring bonuses. Sign-on bonuses. So I know that if I were an associate in a practice right now, and I knew that people were advertising like \$100,000 sign-on bonus for an associate coming into the practice, and I was still working there and I was just getting paid what I was getting paid, I would have something to say about that, [chuckle] and I would want somebody to ask me what that thing was, and I don't know if people are asking, so first question is, do you think sign-on bonuses are working to keep people at practices? I could imagine they're helping to attract them, but are they actually helping retain people, and how do you negotiate that arrangement if you have loyal employees who are working hard and didn't get that bonus when they started working for you?

0:32:22.6 Stacy Pursell: Well, the sign-on bonus encourages somebody to leave one practice and join another practice because they're getting a sign-on bonus to do that, but the sign-on bonus doesn't keep them there, depending on what the arrangement is, so they might have to stay a year or pay it back, but a retention bonus is what can keep them there because we're seeing some practices that are offering a sign-on and retention bonus where you get your sign-on bonus upfront in the first year, and then the retention bonus for staying the second and the third year, so your question, if you're somebody in a practice and you've been there 10 years and your practice just hired somebody and offered them a sign-on bonus, you might be thinking, "Well, I need to leave this practice and go to another practice so I can get that sign-on bonus." So what we've seen some employers do to be able to retain the people and really reward them for their loyalty is offer them a retention bonus, so if you're hiring new people into the practice and you're giving them a sign-on bonus, consider offering your loyal team members a retention bonus to keep them happy so that they don't leave to go somewhere else for, like you said, \$100,000 sign-on bonus.

0:33:36.2 Katie Berlin: Yeah, it's kind of like... We hear this with clients. If we have a new client special where they get a discount on this or a free first exam or something like that, and then your clients who've been coming to you for 25 years, like six different pets, you've seen their kids grow up and they're like, "Wait a second, what about me, where's my loyalty reward?" And it's no different if you're working hard in the trenches and seeing people get offered these enormous sums of money, and you're right. I was thinking about sign-on bonuses having a condition like you have to stay a certain amount of time, but yeah, a sign-on bonus, that usually isn't very long if there is one, or relocation money and stuff like that, which most of us who were employed at vet clinics a long time ago, 10 years ago or more, didn't get. And I think it's so important to be open and transparent about that with your teams, they don't find this out in a job ad, and then to pacify them, offer them that thing. Offer them the thing first would be my advice as an employee.

0:34:47.1 Stacy Pursell: With their salary too, because I had an experience recently where a

practice owner called me and he said, I've been trying to hire somebody and he said, "What do you think I would need to pay them?" So I haven't seen a single salary accepted in the last two years that was under 100,000 because new grads are, you know, the minimum salary they're accepting is 100,000, so this practice owner was paying all of his current veterinarians \$90,000, and he said, "What is it gonna take to hire somebody new?" And I said, "Well, at least 100,000, and that's gonna be for a new grad, and then with the experience, it's gonna be more." And he goes, "Well, I only pay my current veterinarians 90,000," and I said, "Well, then they're a flight risk," I said, "If you don't bump their pay up to at least 100,000, then they're at risk of going somewhere else," and I don't think he had thought about that, but if you're hiring new people in at a higher salary than you're paying your current veterinarians and your current veterinarians find out about that, and they probably will at some point, that they're gonna start thinking, "Well, I'm not getting what I'm worth in this market, I need to start looking for something else."

0:35:53.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah, and even if you give it to them when they come to you and ask for a raise and then you give them their pay increase, it feels a little bit dishonest that they had to find out and come and ask you, and that would change the relationship, I think for me anyway. I have one more question for you about this, which is sort of related, but I hadn't planned to ask you, but it's just rolling around in my head now, but I was always paid on ProSal, so I had a base salary and then I got a percentage of production, I had negative accruals, so if I went on vacation and I didn't make enough to cover my base then I would be in the hole for the next month, and that's been under debate a lot lately. It used to be the standard. When I graduated in 2009, it was the standard, everybody was getting paid that way, now we're talking about new grads sometimes getting \$150,000 for that first year, and I know that even with inflation and price increases since 2009, and I did graduate during a recession, so I realize there's a difference, but there's no way that I could have made back \$150,000 in production my first year out of school, so I'm just wondering, are we just sort of suggesting to people that they pay these higher salaries to keep bodies, to keep their workers even if there's no way that they're generating that amount of income?

0:37:22.9 Stacy Pursell: Yeah, so that's a question that I think about every single day, because practice owners will say, "Well, if I pay this salary, how is this new grad gonna produce that?" And I think that's happening in some cases, I think that they're offering a new grad a salary that may be unsustainable because they may not be able to produce that in the first year, and so I have thought long and hard about that, and I'm not a practice management consultant that gets into the, is this practice profitable? The conversations I have are about salaries, but I will say I saw something the other day that... So in my search practice, the majority of the offers are ProSal, there are some that are straight salary, but the most common way to pay is ProSal, and not only are the salaries going up, but the ProSal percentages are going up. I used to see 18% to 20%, and then 20% to 22%. Now we're seeing even 22% to 25% on ProSal, and in no negative accrual, it's become very out of fashion to do the negative accrual, especially the newer graduates don't want that, they'll turn down a job if there's negative accrual.

0:38:36.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah, I support this.

[chuckle]

0:38:41.8 Stacy Pursell: And so... Hopefully if you hire that person, especially a newer grad, you're gonna retain them, so I don't know what the answer is, I don't want a practice to lose money their first year, but hopefully you have a great culture and you can look at this person as a long-term

investment that if we provide them the mentorship and a great culture, they're gonna stay there year two and year three, if they leave after a year, you really have to look in the mirror and say, "Okay, why did this person we invested in leave in year two?" And it's probably because the mentorship wasn't there, because that's the number one thing I hear from doctors that have started a practice and they leave after year one or two, it's the mentorship wasn't what they were expecting it to be.

0:39:30.4 Katie Berlin: That's a great point, and mentorship comes up a lot in other discussions that we've had, and in fact AAHA has a new mentoring guideline coming out this summer, because it is such an important thing, and people I think feel overwhelmed by the idea. They think that training is mentorship and it's not. Mentorship is a completely different skillset that a lot of people just haven't had the chance to develop, so... I like that answer. I think as veterinarians at least, and I could only speak for associate vets, 'cause that's the role I have spent the most time in, but I sort of felt like I was only valued for that dollar amount, but in almost every other profession, like the dollar amount that I brought into the practice, but in almost every other profession, people get a salary that's not... That can't be based exactly on dollars in dollars out, apart from somebody who works solely on commission and sales, it's very difficult to gauge somebody's actual value with a checks and balances sheet, and the value of an employee goes so far beyond that cash amount in terms of what you contribute to the culture, are you getting along great with the rest of the staff, are you a great communicator with clients, do you bring in a little bit less money but clients keep coming back to see you because they trust you?

0:40:57.6 Katie Berlin: These are things that you can't necessarily value in dollars, and I always felt a little bit odd about being paid solely based on my production, excuse me, and having that sort of not be part of the conversation. And then when I got out of clinical practice and I was just gonna get a salary for being a vet in a different job, it seemed insane to me. How do you know how much I'm worth? I don't even know how much I'm worth, and it was very strange transition to sort of the real world, so I hope that in the next few years we start to see a little bit of a shift in how we think about associate veterinarians. I think it's already starting like you were alluding to, and I think that would be a very positive thing if we could stop talking about associates solely in terms of numbers.

0:41:45.8 Stacy Pursell: Well, it is interesting because like I said, the majority of offers that I see are on ProSal, and there is a debate with this, but some veterinarians, they only wanna be paid on ProSal and some veterinarians don't wanna be paid on ProSal, they only wanna be paid on a salary. So some practices do it one way or the other, but what we've seen recently that's become more popular is where the practice builds an offer around what that veterinarian wants. So there'll be practices where some of the doctors are on ProSal, some are on salary, so they'll get with that individual and say, "How do you wanna be paid? Do you wanna be paid on salary, do you wanna be paid on production?" And even the benefits, we have practices that are customizing, and I'm not talking about benefits like medical or dental or 401K, 'cause these are usually locked in, but things like... We had a veterinarian negotiate books for continuing education and training, or more CE or maybe I want to go to this particular conference to learn this new skill, so customizing some of the things that you do have flexibility to customize, maybe this person wants more vacation time, maybe this person wants to do more CE, just figure out what it is that's important to that person you're trying to hire and try to have some degree of flexibility with it.

0:43:10.1 Katie Berlin: I love that. Yeah, I'm very in favor of that trend, like not every employee is the same and not every employee is gonna value the same things. So, love that. Okay, Stacy, I have one more question for you, because I feel like you have so much knowledge of the industry and

you've been here for a long time, seeing people come and go and seeing trends change, but I'm sure some things stay the same and I was wondering if you, let's say you could stick a post-it on the rear view mirror of every single veterinary professional in any role, of every single veterinary professional's car so that when they get in to go to work in the morning they'll see it. What would it say?

0:43:54.8 Stacy Pursell: One day or day one.

0:43:58.1 Katie Berlin: Love it. Does that have specific meaning for you personally?

0:44:02.9 Stacy Pursell: Well, some people have a tendency to say, "One day I'll do this," whether it be the owner of a practice, one day we'll do this, one day we'll make this change, or whether it be a veterinarian, maybe somebody is in a practice situation and they're very unfulfilled, they're not happy. But they don't do anything about it. They go, "One day I'll do something about this." Well, you can continue to say, "One day I'll do something," or you can say, "Day one, I'm gonna do something now," so it really comes down to being proactive instead of being reactive.

0:44:39.5 Katie Berlin: I love that, and I fully agree with you. And definitely a lot of great things have happened in my life when I decided it was day one, [chuckle] but it is not always... It's definitely easier said than done, but it's a great reminder. Stacy...

0:44:55.2 Stacy Pursell: It's hard to make change, but if you don't make changes then you're not growing, if you're in the status quo, then there's other people that are... They're moving forward and you're staying stuck, so if you're stuck, whether you're an employer or whether you're a veterinarian in a practice, get unstuck, change is hard sometimes, but sometimes changes can be very positive.

0:45:25.2 Katie Berlin: I love that so much. Stacy, thank you so much for spending time and sharing all of your wisdom with us, you always have great tips for everyone to be able to actually go out and change what they're doing if it isn't working for them. We'll put your contact information and website in the show notes today, but do you wanna just let everybody know where they can find you?

0:45:48.3 Stacy Pursell: Yes, so I'm very easy to find. My website is www.thevetrecruiter.com, and my email is Stacy, that's S-T-A-C-Y @thevetrecruiter.com. And Katie, thank you so much for inviting me here today. It's been a pleasure, it's been a lot of fun.

0:46:07.0 Katie Berlin: For me too, Stacy, thank you so much. And hopefully I'll run into you again in a conference soon, but for now it's been great to connect. And thanks to everyone for listening, we'll catch you next time on another episode of Central Line.