

[music]

0:00:00.9 Katie Berlin: So Garth, Garth Jordan, not your typical CEO.

0:00:07.0 Garth Jordan: I'm not?

0:00:09.4 Katie Berlin: No. Most CEOs...

0:00:09.8 Garth Jordan: What is typical?

0:00:11.2 Katie Berlin: I would say that in the veterinary industry at least, it hasn't been super common to see the CEO of AAHA giving his plenary in jeans or wearing...

0:00:22.7 Garth Jordan: Or Lululama... I mean Lemon.

0:00:26.0 Katie Berlin: Yes, or Lululemon.

0:00:26.0 Garth Jordan: [chuckle] Someone asked me, "What are you wearing?" And I said, "I'm wearing Lululemon on the red carpet, of course."

0:00:31.1 Katie Berlin: Of course.

0:00:32.2 Garth Jordan: So...

0:00:33.8 Katie Berlin: I mean, you dressed up.

0:00:33.8 Garth Jordan: That is dressed up for me.

0:00:36.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah. And you are... It's not just that you're not wearing the suit with the tie.

0:00:44.3 Garth Jordan: Right, the tie. The tie is very choky.

0:00:46.1 Katie Berlin: Shiny shoes.

0:00:46.2 Garth Jordan: Very choky.

0:00:46.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah. You're...

0:00:47.3 Garth Jordan: Very uptight.

0:00:48.3 Katie Berlin: Your leadership style is also reflective of your laid-back wardrobe.

0:00:53.0 Garth Jordan: Oh, not choky and uptight.

0:00:55.0 Katie Berlin: Not choky and uptight.

[laughter]

0:00:55.1 Katie Berlin: That's right.

0:00:55.5 Garth Jordan: I'm not choky and uptight leader.

0:00:58.0 Katie Berlin: Not choky. No.

0:00:58.9 Garth Jordan: Thank you.

0:01:00.6 Katie Berlin: You let your people do what they're good at and you check in sometimes is how it feels.

0:01:02.6 Garth Jordan: I try.

0:01:03.6 Katie Berlin: I like that. I really... I love that style because it gives people confidence that they have somebody helping to support them, but also the independence to do their jobs and not feel like they're being micromanaged.

0:01:17.0 Garth Jordan: That's very kind that you notice that. And can I preface my speech tomorrow in this podcast, even though no one would know that that's what I'm doing?

0:01:25.7 Katie Berlin: No one's gonna hear it until after. Yeah.

0:01:27.8 Garth Jordan: Right. Oh, I thought you were just going to stop there and say no one's going to hear it.

0:01:31.7 Katie Berlin: Oh, [chuckle] Yeah, we're done.

[laughter]

0:01:33.2 Garth Jordan: We're done. Garth, this is the worst podcast ever. So I was reading this article and I shared it with you from the Harvard Business Review about why people love their jobs. And there were three things that kept coming out of this article for me. And one was that there's kind of trust in all dimensions or all directions, I guess you might say, from leadership to the rest of the employees and vice versa, from employees to leadership and in any way you might connect all of those. It's just trust. That's one big thing. The other one was, of course, people feel like they're part of a team. They're not a cog in a machine. I think that's truly important. One way you feel like you're part of a team, trust me, I'm gonna get to the point in a second, one way you feel like you're part of a team is you know what your contributions give to the team and to the organization.

0:02:28.9 Garth Jordan: But the third one is, I think, kind of where you're going. And that is, I get to be an individual. So it feels a little like contradictory, but I get to be myself while I'm part of the team. And the message in there was, I have skills, abilities, desires to contribute in the things that I'm passionate about. And if I can do that, I can be my best self while I'm contributing to a team. And when I read that, I actually realized, oh, I hated the first five jobs I ever had. I absolutely despise them. And I thought there were certain reasons why I didn't like 'em. Like I had to wake up too early, when you're 22, that makes a big deal.

0:03:16.9 Katie Berlin: Right, that's a factor. Yeah.

0:03:18.1 Garth Jordan: Or I didn't make enough money, which is probably true. But there are many, many reasons that I thought I hated them. And when I read that article, like way too late in life, 35 years, 40 years later, whatever, I realized, wait a minute, I didn't like my job 'cause I didn't get to be my best individual self while I was contributing to a team that recognized what my contributions were. I couldn't see how I was contributing. And so therefore, it's really hard to build all this trust. Those three things all compiled on each other. So what you just said, just strikes home for me, A, not just 'cause the article, but B, as I reflect on my career, I've been in that position where I didn't like a job or I didn't feel like I was getting to be my individual self. And how could you turn around and do that to anybody? Makes no sense to me.

0:04:09.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah, thank goodness.

[laughter]

0:04:14.2 Katie Berlin: But you...

0:04:15.1 Garth Jordan: Thank goodness all my jobs sucked. [laughter]

0:04:15.5 Katie Berlin: Thank goodness that you realized that by the time you came to be CEO.

[laughter]

0:04:21.7 Katie Berlin: Because I told one of the board members last night, "This is the happiest I've ever been at a job." And I don't think I would have realized that because I didn't realize I was unhappy before. I thought that was just how it was at jobs. [laughter]

0:04:37.3 Garth Jordan: I was the same way. So one example, I worked in an environmental chemistry lab. And so it was one of my first jobs. And I had to wake up at 3:00 in the morning to be in the lab at 4:00. From 4:00 to 1:00. I had very highly, highly repetitive tasks. I basically prepped the same type of water sample every day for an entire year. And then what I thought was the worst part of the job is I worked five days on two days off, 10 days on four days off, 15 days on six days off, and 15 days on at 3:00 AM.

0:05:12.1 Katie Berlin: That's a lot.

0:05:13.0 Garth Jordan: That's really, really hard, especially for a 22-year-old who wants to have a nightlife, right?

0:05:18.5 Katie Berlin: Right.

0:05:18.9 Garth Jordan: And when I reflect on all that, again, that's not why I didn't like my job. I thought that this is just what people do.

0:05:27.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah. Like, well, the party's over.

0:05:31.2 Garth Jordan: Oh, there you go. I've played this game since I was 51. Now I'm 56, but

I've played this game since I was 51 where someone says, "How old are you?" And I say, "Well, I'm closing in on 60."

[laughter]

0:05:43.2 Garth Jordan: Because I want them to look at me and say, "Dang, you look good."

[laughter]

0:05:46.0 Garth Jordan: And now that I'm 56, I'm like, I ain't working so good anymore. They're like, "Yeah, I see that."

[laughter]

0:05:55.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah, there's really just no good way to approach those conversations, but it's just... But yeah.

0:06:00.9 Garth Jordan: Yeah. I think it's all in attitude.

[chuckle]

0:06:03.3 Garth Jordan: When they say, "How old are you?" I'm like, "Well, I love Metallica and the Red Hot Chili Peppers." Right?

0:06:09.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah. Yeah.

0:06:10.9 Garth Jordan: And I just don't tell them when I saw 'em first in concert. That's all.

0:06:12.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah. I like to say I'm a year younger than Star Wars.

0:06:17.4 Garth Jordan: That's a good one.

0:06:18.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah. My parents are pretty into Star Wars, so I watched that from a younger age.

0:06:21.2 Garth Jordan: I'm a Star Wars geek. I told you my Star Wars story. I don't have to tell you this podcast. Maybe that's another podcast.

0:06:27.9 Katie Berlin: [chuckle] Maybe.

0:06:28.3 Garth Jordan: How I ruined an original Star Wars tape trying to dub in a marriage proposal to my wife.

0:06:36.8 Katie Berlin: That might be the most Garth Jordan thing I could imagine.

0:06:39.7 Garth Jordan: Do you want me to tell you the story now just for fun since we're recording?

0:06:42.1 Katie Berlin: Yes, I do.

0:06:43.2 Garth Jordan: And you can decide whether you want to use this or not.

0:06:44.6 Katie Berlin: I mean, part of the reason I wanted to talk to you is 'cause I wanted people to know that AAHA is run by real people.

0:06:50.1 Garth Jordan: Right.

0:06:50.5 Katie Berlin: So you're being real.

0:06:50.5 Garth Jordan: Okay. So I'll be real for a second. So I won't tell you about the divorce that got me to this point in time, but that's another story.

0:07:00.0 Katie Berlin: I mean, that's a whole other podcast.

0:07:00.8 Garth Jordan: That's actually a really good story.

[chuckle]

0:07:00.9 Garth Jordan: And I will absolutely share that one with the world. But I ran into my now wife who I had known since childhood. This was after my first wife. We were divorced, obviously. And so we ran into each other and we went and had some drinks together to talk about our exes, to really talk smack about exes and...

0:07:25.9 Katie Berlin: Bond over hatred.

0:07:27.2 Garth Jordan: Just bond over hatred. Oh, yeah, 'cause hatred is strong bond. We never talked about 'em. So of course, we hit it off just like we had when we were kids. And three months later... Actually, sorry, two months later, I was wanting to propose. She was a teacher and she was off doing an expedition with her kids in the mountains for like a week. So during that week, I went and I bought the ring and I did all the stuff and then thinking about how do I want to propose? I wanna make it kinda fun. And we're Star Wars geeks. So I took Empire... No, wait a minute. When does Yoda die? The third one, right? Yoda passes away in the third.

0:08:02.5 Katie Berlin: Oh, spoiler alert.

0:08:04.2 Garth Jordan: Sorry. Yes. Sorry, guys.

[laughter]

0:08:05.8 Garth Jordan: For those who haven't seen it. So anyway, so we're kind of...

0:08:08.5 Katie Berlin: Wait, was it the third one? Second one.

0:08:09.6 Garth Jordan: The second one. No, third one. Second one?

0:08:12.5 Katie Berlin: Dude, we're the worst Star Wars geeks ever.

0:08:14.3 Garth Jordan: I know. We're supposed to know when Yoda dies.

0:08:17.7 Katie Berlin: We can't publish this.

0:08:18.9 Garth Jordan: I know.

0:08:19.0 Katie Berlin: We're gonna get hate mail.

0:08:18.9 Garth Jordan: I know. Okay. Everyone, we actually know we're just doing this for...

0:08:22.6 Katie Berlin: We're just gonna cut that part.

0:08:23.2 Garth Jordan: Dramatic, dramatic fashion here. Okay. So I take the video and I'm like, I know my wife will be watching this video 'cause we're Star Wars. We love watching the trilogy, the original trilogy, right? So we decide to watch the trilogy and I know she will always watch the scene when Yoda passes away 'cause Yoda is her favorite character, et cetera. And I say, okay, I can dub in over Yoda's death a video of me proposing. Okay. So yes, I ruined that video tape, but it will be ruined in the best way forever. It will be ingrained in VHS...

[laughter]

0:09:08.2 Katie Berlin: Forever.

0:09:08.7 Garth Jordan: Forever. And we will watch it forever 'cause there will always be VHS tapes. So that's what I did and I swear I did it right and it was beautiful and it was the most heartfelt proposal ever. And we get into the room and we're watching the tape and I've got the ring in the crevice of the couch and we're waiting and Yoda's death comes up and all of a sudden it's cars for everyone.

[laughter]

0:09:36.1 Garth Jordan: I accidentally taped Oprah. [laughter] When I was taping, I was taping Oprah doing one of her cars for everyone and...

[laughter]

0:09:49.8 Katie Berlin: You get a car and you get a car.

0:09:51.5 Garth Jordan: And you get a car and you get a car and the whole audience is going crazy. I'm like, where's my proposal? And my wife looks at me and is like, "What happened to our VHS tape?" So then I told her this entire story that I'm telling you now.

0:10:06.0 Katie Berlin: You told her.

0:10:07.3 Garth Jordan: I told her this entire story and I ended with the proposal and I gave her the ring and she just looks at me and she's like, "Yes."

[laughter]

0:10:18.2 Garth Jordan: That was pretty much it.

0:10:20.3 Katie Berlin: And she's been doing that ever since then.

0:10:21.7 Garth Jordan: Right.

[laughter]

0:10:25.4 Katie Berlin: Oh, God, that's a great story. It wasn't a car.

0:10:29.5 Garth Jordan: It was a fantastic failure.

0:10:32.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah. A failure, but you got married.

0:10:34.8 Garth Jordan: We got married and we've been married for 22 years. We've known each other for 44 years.

0:10:40.0 Katie Berlin: It's amazing.

0:10:41.3 Garth Jordan: Yeah. So...

0:10:42.8 Katie Berlin: It's really amazing.

0:10:43.6 Garth Jordan: It's a fantastic failure.

0:10:45.0 Katie Berlin: It is. Yeah. It's a failure, but also a really cute story. Like if it had gone well, it would be an okay story.

0:10:49.7 Garth Jordan: Right. And that was cool. You proposed in the middle... And you... But you taped over Star Wars, Garth. Like what's wrong with you?

0:10:56.2 Katie Berlin: Yeah, that's still bad.

0:10:56.4 Garth Jordan: Yeah. It's still bad.

0:10:57.9 Katie Berlin: But this way, at least you were foiled by the universe.

[laughter]

0:11:02.7 Katie Berlin: So the universe loved you.

0:11:03.8 Garth Jordan: The universe said, never, ever try to tape over Yoda.

0:11:05.5 Katie Berlin: It's not gonna happen the way you think it's going to. [chuckle] So Garth, I brought you here to talk about veterinary medicine.

0:11:15.3 Garth Jordan: Oh, is that what we're here for? Okay.

[chuckle]

0:11:16.6 Katie Berlin: But I've enjoyed these stories. I like getting to know you better. And I do feel like that is a model that we're seeing more of in veterinary medicine is leadership starting to be more accessible.

0:11:30.0 Garth Jordan: Sure.

0:11:30.3 Katie Berlin: I worked for clinics where the owner was the owner and you weren't gonna question decisions and you wasn't gonna be a committee about anything. It was one person making the decisions and it really wasn't open for debate. If there was a debate, it wasn't gonna go anywhere. You know what I mean? And that's not to say that's a bad thing, for some people that works really well. It did not work well for me. I did not like it. I like being treated like I have a voice, even if it's not the loudest voice. And you gave me a microphone, so [laughter] thanks.

0:12:03.1 Garth Jordan: No taking that back.

0:12:03.8 Katie Berlin: No taking it back.

[laughter]

0:12:04.5 Katie Berlin: It's mine now. But I do think that's a model we're starting to see a little bit more of. And you have shown it at AAHA that you want to really explore what servant leadership looks like. You have skip level meetings with teams that don't involve our bosses so that we can talk to you about what's going on in our own teams and feel like we could be a little more honest about it. But I appreciate that approach so much and I think there's a lot that the industry in general can do within vet clinics to have that same type of structure that they don't. And we don't think about sometimes vet clinics being organizations. We think about them, we call them families and so they're like families, but they're organizations, they're workplaces and that structure is there even if it's a tiny staff. And I just wonder, I know we're doing a lot of initiatives at AAHA where we talk about culture and workplace psychological safety and stuff like that. And it's all part of that. But like, what do you think that small or medium sized vet clinics that think of themselves as more of a work family than like an organization like AAHA, what can they learn from what larger companies spend a lot of time and resources trying to figure out?

0:13:27.0 Garth Jordan: That's an interesting question. So if I was to say something negative about families, it's that everyone has their own dysfunction anyway. So just saying we're a family doesn't solve any potential current or future dysfunctional problems. Right?

0:13:44.7 Katie Berlin: And many people at VetMed know this on a personal level.

0:13:48.1 Garth Jordan: Right. And I've been in small companies of five to 12 to 18 people myself. And I've seen it, I've been part of it, I've probably contributed to it. In fact, I'll say I know I've contributed to it. So that dysfunction happens whether you like it or not. So I'm a big believer. Like if there's one thing I tell people, I truly believe that the... And these are not my original words, I can't remember where I heard them, so I can't give the person attribution. But I'm a big believer

that the culture you create is the culture you tolerate. So if you think about it that way, what it really means is the culture, who you are as an organization requires active and purposeful design and contribution to that culture. So the best way I see it happening, small or large, I go back to what you and I were kind of talking about earlier. And that is you gotta let individuals truly be who they are and contribute in the ways that motivate them. And 'cause all of us have things that we love to do.

0:15:02.5 Garth Jordan: And if they can contribute in the ways that motivate them and see how those contributions make a difference, that is just a huge, huge hurdle. And I go back to a couple of things, I think about my daughters are 20 and 22. So they're the age of a lot of the current or almost workforce now. And their experience in school, number one, was completely different than mine. They were in group projects all of the time. I was never in group projects ever throughout all of my schooling.

0:15:44.4 Katie Berlin: I hated group projects. [chuckle] I don't know what that says about me.

0:15:47.6 Garth Jordan: Right. No, no, no. That's okay. It's not whether you loved or hated it. It's that they're used to having a voice in the project. So you're building that. They're used to having a voice in the project. So if you think about how schools are working today, maybe not all schools, but many of them, they want a point to contribute. That'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 in 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 contribution. So whether you're a five person, 15 person or 500 person organization, I think that's your duty.

0:16:48.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah. And diversity makes you stronger, right? So...

0:16:53.3 Garth Jordan: In all dimensions of the word. Absolutely.

0:16:56.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah. Okay. So I'm gonna wrap up now. But before I let you go, the theme of Connexity where we are right now is create a better world. And we've already spoken on what that means to you, but can you give us maybe a one or two sentence summary of what a better world in veterinary medicine looks like to you?

0:17:16.5 Garth Jordan: Well, I spoke about it a little bit today, which your audience didn't hear, 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 our 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.

0:18:07.6 Katie Berlin: The connectedness though, you really, one word sums it up though, is more connected or connectedness. And I think that's really special because we do feel fragmented right now and putting efforts towards that so that we can at least be intentional about keeping the gaps from broadening.

0:18:27.4 Garth Jordan: The word intentional, purposeful, et cetera, you've got to actively seek out being connected. And what I would say is it takes time, but it pays off in the long run and saves you time.

0:18:45.1 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:18:46.9 Garth Jordan: So...

0:18:47.6 Katie Berlin: Thank you, Garth.

0:18:47.7 Garth Jordan: Yeah, thank you.

[music]