

0:00:02.0 Katie Berlin: All right, Dr. Adam Hechko, thank you so much for joining us.

0:00:07.0 Adam Hechko: Oh, thank you, Dr. Berlin.

0:00:09.2 Katie Berlin: So would you mind just introducing yourself and telling us a little bit about who you are and why we're talking today?

0:00:15.2 Adam Hechko: Sure. My name is Dr. Adam Hechko. I am the current president of AAHA for just the next few days and then...

0:00:22.6 Katie Berlin: Caught you at the end.

0:00:24.3 Adam Hechko: You did. And it's been a fantastic journey. I have been with the board now, I will be going on my eighth year with the board of directors. And I have a small animal practice just south of Cleveland, Ohio with five other doctors, and it's an amazing team.

0:00:39.5 Katie Berlin: Awesome. So shout out to your team.

0:00:41.2 Adam Hechko: Oh, they're fantastic. A couple of them are here at the conference, and I couldn't have been able to participate as much as I did as president of AAHA this year without the support I had from them back home.

0:00:55.2 Katie Berlin: Yeah, that's fantastic. So I'm glad they're supportive because I know it's probably hard to have you away a lot, but we really appreciate them lending you to us.

0:01:03.5 Adam Hechko: Oh, thank you.

[laughter]

0:01:06.2 Katie Berlin: So Adam, we've had a few conversations at conferences in the past, and it's been really nice getting to know you. And I know you're passing the gavel, as we call it, soon to our new board president. But I was just wondering, first of all, we're here at Connexity right now, and the theme for this conference this year is, create a better world. And I just wondered what that means to you in veterinary medicine. What does a better world look like?

0:01:35.0 Adam Hechko: It's multifaceted for our practices. It's not just a veterinarian, it's not just a practice owner or a practice manager or a technician or assistant. It's the whole team. And we've seen struggles with all of our teams. It's such a big topic right now of being short staffed and figuring out ways to improve the workflow of your team. And in doing that, I think that helps with burnout, and I think that that helps to make the world a better place. Because then we have more energy to devote to every patient that comes into our practice. And at the end of the day, that's who we all identify as walking into that practice. That's why we all fell in love with this profession.

0:02:19.3 Katie Berlin: Absolutely. And I'm noticing a theme too when I'm asking people what they think that better world looks like, which is they involve other people in that. It's never just like, "I can make this a better world by doing this." We all have a role to play, but that team effort and that togetherness, lifting each other up seems to be something that a lot of leaders in this profession see as a common theme. And I know that you're doing a table talk here at the conference and that it

sort of fits with that theme, right?

0:02:54.1 Adam Hechko: It does.

0:02:54.9 Katie Berlin: What is it that you're going to be talking about?

0:02:56.0 Adam Hechko: I'm going to be talking about staff utilization when you're short staffed.

0:03:00.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah. I mean, that's a... It just rolls off the tongue for me. [chuckle] But that is a major topic. And I feel like everybody is dealing with that right now.

0:03:13.3 Adam Hechko: Yeah.

0:03:13.4 Katie Berlin: Nobody has enough people and they're trying to figure out how to find other people while getting by with the people they have and not overworking those people.

0:03:19.1 Adam Hechko: I would agree. And even through this conference, while I'm in this conference, I have friends texting me from home saying, "I'm struggling. I have to, you know, close a day. I have to reduce hours. I have to close my daycare or change the way I operate." And it can be really overwhelming when you're just trying to put out that fire and just trying to survive. But when you can take a step back, and I know it's really hard, it's been hard for me over the years, but when I can take a step back and look at it more globally and then start to dial in on those low hanging fruits and those little things that have tremendous impact on the entire team culture, it makes it all of a sudden something feels like something that you can achieve.

0:04:04.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah. That's a really good point. It's so easy to feel like we're in survival mode and just say, "You know what, we just got to get through today so that then we can get through tomorrow and I can deal with this stuff later when things are better." But if you don't deal with the stuff, maybe things aren't going to get better, at least not as fast.

0:04:21.4 Adam Hechko: Well, I think... And that's a great point. It's changing the narrative.

0:04:25.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:04:26.2 Adam Hechko: And it's something we've talked about here in AAHA and something we've talked about at previous Connexities, is we have the ability to change and create that narrative and just thinking, "I'm going to get through today so I can get through tomorrow and to get through the weekend so I have a breather because it's going to be just the same next week." But if we can say, "I'm going to solve this today because it's going to help me tomorrow, next week, next month and next year, I'm just going to pick one little thing that I think is going to have tremendous impact." And in my practice, I've learned over the last couple of years with the pandemic how important it is on how you deliver that to your team and how that reflection is brought out. And change is scary.

0:05:10.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:05:11.3 Adam Hechko: But when you approach it in the right way and you give the opportunity, give is probably not the best, but provide an opportunity for collaboration and feedback, you can

make a lot of changes that resonate with your team, improve morale, reduce burnout. I like to use the word experiment a lot. I no longer say we're trying this or doing this or here's our new protocol.

0:05:37.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:05:38.7 Adam Hechko: I say experiment. "Today is our new experiment." Because to me, experiment is, it might work, it might not work, it's not final. The team doesn't think, "Hh my gosh, we're going to do this, it's going to fail and we have no way out." When you use the word experiment, it gives them the comfort to say, "I don't like this experiment or I love this part of the experiment, but I want to try this."

0:06:00.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah, that's cool. And it makes everybody feel like they're trying something new together, which is sort of an adventure versus the whole like, we're implementing this policy change. Like, this is the email we all hate. It's like the email from above. It's like, from now on, we will be doing things this way and no one's asked you and you're the one having to do it and no one said, "Hey, what makes this easier or harder for you?" So I really like that. As somebody who was a career associate, never wanted to be an owner or manager, definitely did not have that aspiration and didn't have that voice in the practices I worked in. It was really nice when someone would just ask us, what would make your job easier and how do you think this procedure would work from your point of view? So that's very cool.

0:06:45.3 Adam Hechko: I think the important thing that I've taken out of this over the years is I don't have to have all the answers.

0:06:49.2 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:06:50.3 Adam Hechko: I have to be inquisitive. I want to learn. I want to grow and I can see it through somebody else's eyes when I ask those questions and present it in a way that's experimental.

0:07:01.0 Katie Berlin: It seems simple, but it's not something that every practice owner does, for sure.

0:07:05.2 Adam Hechko: It's a very conscious effort. And the first few times I did it in my practice when we made these big changes because of the pandemic and everyone's panicked and they're rolling their eyes because they don't know what's going to happen and then we try it and they give some fantastic feedback and then we do it again and do it again and now it's become a part of our culture of, let's experiment with it.

0:07:29.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah. That's pretty awesome. And we've all gotten a little bit more accustomed to change in the last few years. So the last two years especially and that is at once good because we know we can change and it won't be so bad probably, as bad as we think it will be anyway. But also when how you buy your groceries has changed, then the last thing you want is more change. So the change fatigue is real. I do think there's something to be said for experimenting at work in a way that provides an atmosphere of safety. Experimenting can be scary, like you said, change is scary, but there's something that feels safe about embarking on these things together and knowing that they could be temporary or they could be changed.

0:08:18.0 Adam Hechko: Trust is a big part of that.

0:08:19.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:08:20.7 Adam Hechko: Right?

0:08:20.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:08:20.8 Adam Hechko: And I think as a leader in the practice being able to take feedback...

0:08:28.7 Katie Berlin: That's tough.

0:08:28.7 Adam Hechko: And hear it, sometimes it's not what you were expecting. And to be able to say... [chuckle] "You're right, that's not how I looked at it, that's not how I interpreted it and what a great perception." You have to be humble.

0:08:44.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah. That's true. Giving and accepting feedback, that's a whole podcast episode.

[laughter]

0:08:51.5 Adam Hechko: Yes.

0:08:51.6 Katie Berlin: It's maybe a whole series. I think that might be a whole podcast somewhere. [chuckle]

0:08:57.0 Adam Hechko: That probably would be.

0:08:57.1 Katie Berlin: But yeah, that's a big topic and to be a great leader, you have to allow yourself to be humbled a little bit that way, I'm sure. So you are on your way out as far as your tenure as board president of AAHA. And I was curious, just because after having a few conversations with you, I'm pretty convinced that board presidents at AAHA haven't always looked like you. [chuckle] And so I would like to know, what are some changes that you've seen in the last year and in the last few years that you've been on the board and what would you like to see in the future for AAHA? What do you want people to know about leadership at AAHA?

0:09:35.6 Adam Hechko: Again, I've been with the board now for seven years. As I roll off as president, I'll get to take a step back as the past president and I'll still get to participate. I think leadership is something that's really evolved in our organization and I think it's something that has become really important both for the board and for our team at AAHA. And over the years, I have seen those changes of, we're going to do or make this happen and we're going to take that feedback and we're going to design it around the team that we have. And the big thing that I see with Garth now is the way that he operates, it's human centered design. He designs what the group helps to design, what the whole group wants and it's an inclusive approach. There's always room to improve by far. But I think as we roll forward, I hope our board continues to be inquisitive and to look beyond at what's in front of us and what the future can hold. Because today, some of the things that we're talking about in Connexity are the result of that thought process and that ingenuity and that excitement to move our profession forward between the benchmarking and our cohort accreditation

now bringing communities together and the certificates program, taking our guidelines and turning them into fantastic learning opportunities that we just don't have to go through 24 pages of a document, but it's immersive and interactive.

0:11:16.3 Adam Hechko: I am so excited to see those type of things continue with AAHA to help our profession. And the one thing that I... The big change that I would say that I've seen over the years is recently we've really put a focus on looking for what our members want through surveys. And I'm sure many of our members that are listening probably have heard or seen a survey come through at the request of AAHA, and their voices make a difference. Those surveys are presented to the leadership team at AAHA, they're presented to the board, they give us so much great information so that we know we're putting our efforts and our infrastructure and investments in the right place to help our members in a scientific way. There's no doubt this is what our teams want, we're going to deliver.

0:12:08.2 Katie Berlin: That's a really... That's a good observation because I've only been at AAHA for less than a year now and so I don't know how things used to be done, but I do see the number of surveys that we send out and I know people... You get a lot of surveys in your email and sometimes things just appear and you're like, "I don't know how important this is, like are they really going to listen or is this just a move they're making just to try to give the appearance of listening." And I can assure you we have lots of meetings about the results of those surveys and about the types of questions to ask and I hope people will take the time to fill them out if they haven't done that in the past because those surveys really do drive decisions, big decisions that we make at AAHA. And I absolutely agree with you, like the leadership at AAHA is why I'm here. Because I know how unusual it is to have such a trusted and solid organization that's been around for such a long time be in a growth phase and a forward thinking phase with leadership who really wants to affect change and not just keep things status quo.

0:13:18.4 Katie Berlin: And they want to do it soon, there's a certain amount of impatience in the atmosphere sometimes and I love that because we just are so, everybody's so excited to do what we can, to drive things forward and to give people support that they need and it's such an energizing environment. So thank you for being a president who feels that way too and is helping to push that forward and not hold it back. Because I know that hasn't always been the case in organizational medicine period and definitely at AAHA. I know there have been periods of stillness and I love that we're in a period of growth right now.

0:14:01.3 Adam Hechko: I can't agree more. I think the partnership that the board has with the AAHA team and Garth is the strongest I've seen in the last seven years that I've been on the board.

0:14:10.2 Katie Berlin: I love that.

0:14:10.3 Adam Hechko: And it feels collaborative. You and I are here talking today, that's not something that we would have done years ago.

0:14:18.6 Katie Berlin: Right.

0:14:19.0 Adam Hechko: And so these types of little interactions and recognizing the whole AAHA team when we're at this conference really gives us an opportunity to continue to strengthen our resolve for our members.

0:14:33.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah, absolutely. I always want people to know when they ask me about my job or when they talk about AAHA and they're like, "What is it like working there?" And I want them to know how much AAHA is driven by passionate people. Even people that never worked in vet med before. It's an organization, there are going to be people from all different backgrounds and that makes us stronger. And it definitely brings perspectives that we need. Most veterinarians don't have a lot of training and a lot of other things. So we need input from people with all different backgrounds. But the underlying theme is one of passion and real love for this industry. And that's the number one thing I want people to know when they think about AAHA is we're not just out to make stuff so we can say we made it. It's like everything we do we want it to be helping people.

0:15:28.7 Adam Hechko: With purpose.

0:15:29.6 Katie Berlin: Exactly.

0:15:30.5 Adam Hechko: There's a purpose behind it.

0:15:31.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah, yeah. And we want to hear about it if it's not meeting that purpose or if there's something that we're not doing that we could be doing. But I really appreciate your perspective and your leadership which is, you're the only president I've ever known at AAHA. [laughter] So you know to me you're the president. That's how it goes. But in fact your name tag just says president. So president of what? But I appreciate that leadership so much and I'm excited to see what happens in the next chapter but we'll still see you around.

0:16:06.8 Adam Hechko: Absolutely.

0:16:06.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah. Dr. Adam Hechko, thank you so much for stopping by.

0:16:11.6 Adam Hechko: Thank you Dr. Berlin.