

0:00:04.4 Katie Berlin: Hi, welcome back to Central Line. I'm your host Katie Berlin, and my guest today is a celebrity around AAHA way. Nicole Jameson Fritz is our veterinary technician of the year, so our inaugural winner of the Vet Tech of the Year Award. And from our earlier conversation, I can say that she is extremely deserving and super cool human, who we are lucky to have in the profession. Nicole, thank you so much for joining me.

0:00:32.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Aww, thank you Katie for such a nice introduction. I appreciate that.

0:00:36.4 Katie Berlin: Absolutely. It's a pleasure to have you. And rockstar technicians are somebody who I wish we heard more of. So that's a personal mission for me and for AAHA this year is to make sure that we're hearing from as many rockstar technicians as possible. But to start us off, our rockstar technician for the day, would you please let us know a little bit about yourself and what it is that you do?

0:00:57.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah. So I'm a veterinary technician, and also have my VTS in emergency and critical care. I started my passion for animals early on. I think very familiar story with a lot of us as veterinary technicians that our love for animals started off as in childhood. I grew up on a hobby farm and they cared for a whole range of animals and different species from wild birds that had injured wings to bottle feeding lambs and piglets and things like that. So definitely started out early on and, again, with most of us, I feel like it seems that we have this goal of becoming a veterinarian at some point in our life. But before I committed myself to that length of education and whatnot, I wanted to make sure that that was the right fit for me, the field of veterinary medicine.

0:01:45.3 Nicole Jameson Fritz: So I pursued getting my veterinary technician diploma. And after that spent a year in emergency medicine. I was very fortunate to be part of the startup team of an emergency specialty hospital. And from there, we just celebrated our 25th anniversary.

0:02:03.5 Katie Berlin: Wow.

0:02:04.3 Nicole Jameson Fritz: So I've been through all the ups and downs and growth of watching four doctor practice grow into a multi-specialty with over 20 doctors and 150 staff members. So it's been an amazing career growth for me and honestly, haven't looked back at that initial desire to become a veterinarian. I've been very fortunate that I've been fully satisfied and every box that you can imagine ticking as far as career satisfaction has pretty much been met. So, I'm here to stay and couldn't imagine doing anything else.

0:02:37.4 Katie Berlin: I love that. And I'm just astonished. We're talking so much, and we're gonna talk more about this today, but all the big topic of discussion right now is how do we attract more technicians and how do we keep technicians in the field? And you have not only been in the field for 25 years or more, is that...

0:02:58.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah, just over 26, yep 27.

0:03:00.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah. But you've been at the same hospital, and I think that is amazing because that means... That says something about your dedication, but it also says that hospital is doing something right because they were able to keep you happy and challenged and satisfied as

you've grown. That is just... I love stories like that. So.

0:03:18.8 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yes.

0:03:20.9 Katie Berlin: Unusual and very, very cool. Before we start, I wanna ask you a very, very important question because to me, the field of veterinary medicine is like a nonstop minefield of ways to completely humiliate ourselves. I am just thinking right now of 25 separate incidents where I was completely humiliated in front of clients or in front of coworkers, whatever, because that's just what we do. So I was... That's what I wanted to ask you. It was very important, is what is one of your most embarrassing vet tech in the field stories?

0:03:51.5 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Oh, gosh. It's funny. I was trying to think about that and I think there's been so many that I've purposely blocked out of my mind, you know? Is that...

0:04:00.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah, I know. It's like when you wake up in the middle of the night, you're like, "Oh, there was that time."

0:04:03.5 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yes, yes. I think it's just a part of what we do is we have those embarrassing moments where we kind of wish we hadn't said something to a client or wish we hadn't said something to a coworker. But just thinking of a couple of examples. I remember once we... I was in surgery, there was a pug having an exploratory laparotomy and we had a visiting veterinarian that was coming to check out our hospital. And while monitoring this patient under anesthesia, I noticed that he'd become extubated. And I was mortified because I didn't know this visiting veterinarian, they were in the middle of the surgery, the abdomen was opened up. And so somehow I managed to reintubate this dog while he was on his back without letting the surgeon know, without letting the veterinary know.

0:04:45.3 Katie Berlin: Wow.

0:04:45.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: But it was fantastic because... I mean, I was embarrassed in the moment but also able to avert that full on embarrassment and that visiting veterinarian ended up joining us as a permanent member, and so we kind of often laugh about that story. "Remember the time when you were visiting?" Yeah. And then I think I was... On the opposite end of another embarrassing moment, but also a very good learning moment was not funny though, I remember a number of years ago we had a patient, it was a rottweiler with an osteosarcoma in its four leg, and it was in a lot of pain. And the owner had decided he wanted to euthanize. And anyway, so he didn't wanna be present for the euthanasia, so he left, he signed and left the building, we thought.

0:05:33.5 Nicole Jameson Fritz: And the veterinarian and I were performing the euthanasia, giving the dog lots of cuddles and snuggles. And next thing we knew that owner burst through the front, the door of the exam room and was totally distraught and emotional. And I remember looking at him and saying, "I know how you feel." And he looked at me and he's like, "You have no idea how I feel." And he was so angry, and I just felt so terrible in that moment and embarrassed because I was just like... Obviously had said something incorrect. But I think what I took out of that was I learned you never... I mean, we can be empathetic in different ways, and I share that story with just about anyone I work with so that they can learn from something that I could have handled a bit differently in that situation. So, yeah, I think there's so many different stories.

0:06:24.2 Katie Berlin: So many.

0:06:24.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Tales from the trenches, whether it be hilarious, anal glands or diarrhea or taking the temperature of a dog that was, as I lifted up a tail, I'm like, "Ooh, something feels funny under this tail." And realizing it was covered in maggots because it had an open pyometra. Just we've all had those moments where we laugh and chuckle afterwards. And...

0:06:47.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah. I mean, my personal favorite routine fluffy cat moment is when you are trying to take the temperature of the cat and you cannot, like it's just fluff back there.

0:07:00.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Oh, yes. Yes.

0:07:00.4 Katie Berlin: And it's just blindly feeling around in the dark is what it seems like. And you're like, "Mm, everyone's watching me." But that's a... Usually you can figure it out, just takes a minute, but there's just so much fluff. But that is a really interesting perspective. What you mentioned is these moments where it's embarrassing in a really kind of heart stopping way where you're like, "Oh, I just messed up." And then you have to recover and not only recover for yourself, but also make sure that you're taking care of the person or the animal that you feel like you messed up for. And that is definitely something that happens a lot in this field. And I think certain people are maybe a little bit more, I don't know, laid back about it. They can shake things off better and other people kind of take that to heart and hold onto it for a long time. And either one I think is better, but that they... Either way, it definitely can make an impression, if that makes sense.

0:07:58.3 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah. 'Cause I think that we're in the field, well, and just even as people, I think we're on this earth to constantly learn and grow. And as people in veterinary medicine, we're taught how to take care of animals and what medications they need and how to place IV catheters. But those soft skills we learn through experiences and we learn as we grow. So to be able to take those moments as devastating or upsetting or as embarrassing as they may be in that moment, to take them and try to look past that and what can I learn from this so I can be a better person and grow from it, I think is really important.

0:08:31.5 Katie Berlin: Well, so that brings me to one question that I was gonna ask you, which clearly you are a person who puts a lot of value on that growth and that evolution as a professional, as a person. Is that part of what's kept you going all this time as a technician?

0:08:48.5 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Absolutely. For sure. I definitely would agree with that. Yes, absolutely. I mean, I think I've been very fortunate to be in an environment where I'm supported. My opportunities for growth and development have been endless. I mean, obviously I know I have to put the legwork in and opportunities don't come without effort and hard work. But I've also very much appreciated that I'm in an environment that supports that, people that see my strengths and are able to direct me in areas that are beneficial obviously for the hospital, but allow me to grow as well. 'Cause I think that's the other thing. We all have different strengths. We all have things that we're good at, some things we're not as strong at. So to be able to be in an environment that supports you for your strengths, I think, is really... Is great. And I think that's also what's really important and what's kept me in the field for so long is just to have that support and that that recognition and the opportunity to grow and be the best person I can be.

0:09:46.4 Katie Berlin: Now, did you start out having to ask for these things? Or did you have

somebody who sort of egged you on to become that type of technician? Did you have encouragement right from the beginning or did you sort of break the ice and then it became part of the culture where you are?

0:10:02.5 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah, that's a really good question. I think I definitely grew into the role when we started. As mentioned earlier, we were a very small hospital, there was four specialists, and I think there was about six of us technicians in total. And so we didn't have that kind of leadership structure. We had a practice manager and that was kind of it. But I think just my personality, I like to listen and I like to fix things. So I think I just kind of naturally have kind of grown into this role. And I think also just my belief, again, as I had mentioned earlier, that growth mindset because I think often people are put into roles of leadership because they may be the most senior person there or... But I think as a leader, especially, again, as I mentioned, I was trained in the area of veterinary medicine and animal nursing and as a veterinary technician.

0:10:53.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: So I think, as a leader we have to be open to learning and learning how to communicate better. And I think the landscape of employment has changed even especially over the last few years with COVID. It's done different things with recruitment and what's important to people is employees and values. So being able to be open and receptive to learning and navigating the different landscapes as they change over the years. And again, just that constant searching for ways to be better at what I do, I think has, yeah, just allowed me to kind of grow into this role and kind of been a natural progression.

0:11:31.4 Katie Berlin: I love that. And you coming in so early in the growth of the hospital where you are seems like it's really allowed you to feel like it's your place too, that you're sort of built into the culture there and have a lot of personal involvement in the way the hospital's grown. And I mean, I'm that kind of person too. I like to come in and like... I don't like to come into a perfect system and then just have to fit into the system. I like to come in and think like, "Okay, how can we grow? What can we change? What can we do differently? Who's not being served here? How can we make people happier and serve people better?" And that's exciting to me. And if things start running too smoothly, then I'mma start getting itchy. You seem like that person too.

0:12:21.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yes. Well, I think, yeah, yes, no, for sure. Absolutely. Yes. Like, no, exactly. Like I said, I like to fix things. I like to make things better for people. And I think, again, we're always learning and always growing. So even if things feel like it's plateaued and things are good, again, I've been around long enough that you'll just kind of feel that, "Okay, things are good," and then something else will happen that you're not experienced to dealing with. There'll be a new crisis or a new situation or it's just life, I think. So being able to be adaptable and move with those changing times or changing situations is important too. So, yes, I agree with you. I think that, yeah, I like to constantly be doing things. I couldn't be in a situation where I know what I'm doing from moment to moment. I go in, this is my schedule. And I know for some people they need that and they want that, and that's great for them to be able to recognize that and to be in that situation. But for me it's like, "Bring it on, whatever you got from me, I'm up open for it within reason.

0:13:18.5 Katie Berlin: Love that. I mean, you're a veterinary technician specialist and emergency and critical care. If there's ever a person who needs to be adaptable and think quickly on their feet and take pride in being able to work without knowing what's coming around the corner any given second, it's a VTS and ECC, so. So that I'm sure has served you well, but I am very curious about

your journey to your VTS through being a credentialed technician. Because so many people think, "Oh, I wanna be a veterinarian, I'm just gonna go volunteer at an animal hospital, or I'm gonna be an assistant for a while and just see what it's like." And you said, "Oh, I'm gonna go get my technology degree. I'm gonna be an RVT and start there." And I was wondering why that is. Is that a route that was shown to you by someone? Or are you a person who likes to sort of say, "Well, I'm gonna do this, hit this goal first, and then maybe think about the next goal."?

0:14:18.3 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah, good question. I mean, part of it was I'm a small town girl, I grew up in a very small community on Vancouver Island close to here. And then I went... My first year of university was over in the city, and so it was just a lot of adjustments and whatnot. And I've always been a strong student in school, but it kind of... I didn't do the best that year particular, 'cause a lot of adjustments moving to the big city and whatnot. So it just made me think, "Okay, well what do I want to do?" And someone had mentioned this program. So initially it wasn't something on my radar, but just again, thinking about, "Well, do I really want another 8, 9, 10 years of school? Let's just make sure, again, this is what I really wanna do."

0:14:57.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: So it was kind of a, just happened, this opportunity presented itself. Someone told me about the program. And so I thought, "Okay, that's only two years. Let's try it out and see where that leads me." So, yeah, so that's kind of how I started in that regards. And then from there I ended up getting a job in the big city, in a local emergency practice. And that certainly sparked my interest in emergency medicine. And then as mentioned earlier, there was some associates of that emergency practice that ended up opening the specialty practice and invited me to go along. And right from the get go, I was always very supported in my career and shown that kind of commitment and dedication and investment in me as a person. And so I was really fortunate and actually the veterinarian that nominated me for this award has always... I still work with her, 26 years later. And...

0:15:54.4 Katie Berlin: Oh, I love that so much.

0:15:57.1 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah. And, yeah, so she's always been very supportive. So way back when when I was still a baby tech, she's like, "You know what? I think you should apply for this." And I was like, "I'm nowhere near ready. I don't have enough experience." She's like, "No, you do. And if you don't pass, if they don't accept your application, what's the harm? Right? Do it again next year." And so it was just that kind of encouraging positive, just very encouraging and supportive personality that just like, "Okay, well what do I have to lose?" Right? I'm not gonna get in trouble if I don't pass. They're not gonna look down upon me if I don't pass. And so that was kind of a lot of the motivation and obviously my love for it. I mean, I love emergency and critical care medicine. I think that has to be the forefront of the reason that you pursue a specialty for sure is 'cause it is a lot of work. I won't lie. But if you love what you do and you're passionate, then I think it just changes how you approach it and it makes it a very fulfilling process to go through. So, yeah, so again, it's just, yeah, I just happened to be in a environment that really encouraged me to, again, to do what I could and saw potential in me that I maybe didn't see at that time.

0:17:05.4 Katie Berlin: I was just about to ask you before you said that, there are people who just know that they have a certain amount of potential or that they are very high achievers from the beginning and they're like, "I wanna get the highest level of specialization that I can," going right from the beginning, they say that. And then, many, many people, most of us are not like that. And do you think that you would've ended up going for that advanced degree if you had not had so much

encouragement from the people that you work with?

0:17:37.3 Nicole Jameson Fritz: I think I probably would've eventually but definitely not so quickly on. I think I was really fortunate. When I took the tech program during schooling, I was actually told that the average career span was two to three years for a technician before they moved on to something different. So I think I went into that profession with the mindset, "Well, this is just kind of a stepping stone." But because of the opportunities that I was provided so early on and my eyes and my world was completely opened by the environment that I ended up being in, it definitely shifted my mindset and, I guess, my goal setting, I guess, if that makes sense.

0:18:17.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah, it does make a lot of sense. And I know how that feels from... I was a veterinary assistant for a while. I've never been a credential technician and I've never... I haven't done a whole lot of other jobs, but I do feel like when I was working in vet clinics as an assistant on my way to becoming a veterinarian, people were more encouraging of me because they knew I was gonna go to vet school or I was already in vet school. And looking back on that now, that kind of sucks, you know? What about all of the people that I worked with who are not going to be vets? Where was their one-on-one with the doctor? Where was their... All the credit given for the work that they were doing and the wanting to send them to conferences and stuff like that. Where was that? And I think we're answering the question ourselves right now, which I was about to ask next, which is, what do you think is the key or what are the big keys to attracting and keeping technicians and assistants in the field?

0:19:23.3 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah, so that's a great question. And I think one of the privileges of being in the profession for so long is getting to see the changing opportunities for technicians and assistants. As mentioned, the average career span being two to three years 26, 27 years ago, and now just seeing the immense amount of opportunities for technicians. And that's, obviously, the area that I'm most familiar with. I think it's starting to change for assistants. So I'm gonna focus on the technicians, but I think it's really amazing to see the varying opportunities that have come about since I've been in the profession; whether it be a VTS, whether it be management or leadership or... I see these amazing technicians that are on speaking circuits and things like that, inspiring other people to do amazing things. So I think, for me, that's a huge component to the longevity of our profession is just having those abilities to grow and also pivot and change. I may be in general practice for 10 or 15 years and wanna try out a different avenue of medicine or do something completely different and be a rep for a company or...

0:20:34.1 Nicole Jameson Fritz: There's just so many different avenues that we can take now that we weren't able to take 10, 15 years ago and still be proud RVTs. So I think that's a lot of it. I think finding your passion, making sure you don't settle for things, I think, again, sometimes we get burnt out or jaded by the profession and just think that this is not where I wanna be, but there's so many opportunity, there are so many amazing people out there. And if one opportunity doesn't fit for you or a second or third even, don't give up on it, there's still so many different avenues pursuing... Some of it may require relocation, which may or may not be an option, but again, I think that's part of it. I think it's making sure that you're working for a facility that encourages you and supports you and encourage that collaboration. I think that's, again, where I've been... My hospital is part of me and it will forever be. I grew up there and I feel very invested in it, but a lot of that is because I've also always been able to collaborate. I've always felt like I had a voice and I felt like I'm an important part of the team. And I think that's really important as well too for longevity, is just feeling like you're part of something bigger and better than just what you're doing.

0:21:53.0 Nicole Jameson Fritz: It's not just a job. So I think that's part of it, and making sure that we take care of ourselves as well. And we all hear about burnout and compassion fatigue, and it's a reality. So learning how to take care of ourselves, learning the tools to be resilient, 'cause I think that's another thing as well too. Resiliency is something that you develop over time with experience, and it's so important. And I think that I'm just learning a little bit more trying to figure out, how can I help people, and teaching them that skill set, 'cause I think it's so important, not only with the work that we do, but just in life in general too. As I get older and dealt all the different things that I'm dealt with, with family life and work life and personal life. And I think those skill sets are really important to make us be able to survive the career that we've chosen and be able to remain in it. It was actually kind of funny, I've got some different family, personal things juggling around right now, and I had recently started seeing a counselor again, which I'm totally full-heartedly supportive. I think that...

0:22:58.9 Katie Berlin: Same.

0:23:00.3 Nicole Jameson Fritz: We all have moments in our lives where it's just nice to have that outside person that we can openly share, and I think that's part of that self-care component, and not feel bad about or not feel judged about. Anyway, so she was listening to all the things that I'm taking care of as a mom, as an employee, as a wife, as everything, and she's like, "Oh God, that's a lot. How do you manage all of that?" I was just like, "Well, I don't know, I just triage. I have to... I just look at the things that I need to do right now and what... There are things that I can just leave for later. I have lists." And she's just like, "Wow, I've never had anyone explain it to me like that." And I'm like, "Well, yeah, that's interesting. My life at the hospital has also actually trained me for life outside of the hospital too, so it's just kind of neat connection." So yeah.

0:23:46.4 Katie Berlin: That is fantastic.

0:23:48.7 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah, I know. I'm sorry, I got a little off topic, but I think it's...

0:23:50.8 Katie Berlin: No.

0:23:52.2 Nicole Jameson Fritz: All part of those skills that you learn to remain in the profession, that resiliency and ability to cope with things.

0:23:57.8 Katie Berlin: You're so right. And I think we really do undervalue those skills when we're talking about ourselves as veterinary professionals, whether we're veterinarians or technicians or CSRs or whoever in the Vet Hospital, we have a very unique skill set and a very broad knowledge base in this area that most people have never set foot in, and those things intersect together in a way that makes us valuable, even if we decide that that environment isn't the environment for us or that we wanna try a different branch of the profession. Right now I'm not in the clinic, but I've never loved being a veterinarian more, because I feel like all of the experience that has built up behind me and the different feelings and situations that we find ourselves in in the hospital definitely translate into something that can bring a lot of value to an organization or a company or the industry in general. And it's really fun to look at those puzzle pieces and just rearrange them and see how they're gonna fit together at your next job or in the next thing that you try to do. And I love the way you described that, that you triage your life like you're used to triaging the ER. I'm gonna think about that now. It's like you see your life as a big white board, and what's

gonna get crossed off first, right?

0:25:23.8 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah. Yeah, and I hadn't really actually thought I... I hadn't actually acknowledged that that's the way I think about things until I was in the session, I'm like, "Ooh, that's kinda cool."

0:25:32.1 Katie Berlin: Yeah, it is. I feel like that's a lecture. I feel like if you ever wanna speak at a conference, that's your first talk right there. Okay, so as a veterinarian, I know that I have ticked off a lot of technicians that I've worked with in my life. And part of it is because I wasn't always happy in the hospitals. I was burned out for a long time, I'm not a person who thrives on unpredictability in my day-to-day. And so, I was anxious a lot in practice, and I identify a lot with people who say that that affects them too. I would have been terrible at emergency and clinical care, like the worst. But I'm just wondering, thinking back to all of those interactions and all of the technicians who are probably like, "Oh my God, there she goes again," what is something that you wish veterinarians did differently when it comes to working with technicians?

0:26:32.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Well, I guess what I'm gonna say wouldn't pertain to all veterinarians, 'cause I think there's a lot of amazing veterinarians out there, but I think in general, when I think of the veterinarians that I've appreciated the most...

0:26:44.7 Katie Berlin: We all have room for growth.

0:26:45.5 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah, yeah. But I think the ones that I have responded to the most, as simple as pleases and thank yous. I think being acknowledged for helping out in those situations, so just as basic as pleases and thank yous, encouraging the team to live to their full potential. So I think, again, sometimes it's definitely changed. Again, I remember when I first started out in the profession, you heard of a lot of veterinary technicians that were kind of glorified kennel staff. They were not doing blood draws 'cause the veterinarian was always doing that. They weren't... And doing anesthesia inductions 'cause they were holding for the veterinarian to do that. So, that's definitely changed. But I think having them know what the technicians are capable of and encouraging them to do that and live to their potential as technician is really important. And just realizing too that we're all part of a team.

0:27:38.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: You can be the most amazing veterinarian out there but you're only as successful as your team. I think back to... Yeah, well, and it's the same thing with us, right? Obviously, we couldn't do what we could do without having a veterinarian making the prescriptions or diagnosis and things like that. But I think back to even years ago in school, being taught how important the clip was for surgeries and how the client, that's how they're gonna evaluate how well that surgery is done, by how well the clip job is. It has nothing to do with what's done on the inside...

0:28:14.7 Katie Berlin: That's true.

0:28:16.3 Nicole Jameson Fritz: And so that's always kind of resonated with me. And communication as well too. You can have an amazing surgeon, but if the team aren't doing a good job at discharging the client and explaining those instructions, then it's the image that's going away with that client isn't the one of this amazing procedure that's just been completed. So I think it's just making sure that we all recognize that we have different contributions, but we're all an important

part of the team. 'Cause I think sometimes it's easy to get tunnel vision and just kind of focus on what we're all doing and kind of working in these little silos. But it's just important to recognize that we can all be supportive of each other and it's such a rewarding vision, I think, to realize how important we all are together, and we're for each other and with each other.

0:29:05.0 Katie Berlin: Well, as AAHA is saying this year, is calling 2023 The Year of the Team, and that's a pretty good mic drop right there. I think the clip job is definitely something I don't even think about. I think about the closure of the... The spay closure or whatever. It's so inconsequential, right? 'Cause they all heal so well and then the client sees that and like, "Oh my God, what did you do to my dog?" And I remember this one time... I just have to tell this story now because it just popped into my head. This one time, I had a... I think it was a cavalier puppy, cutest thing ever; skin like paper on her belly. She's so delicate. And I closed her up, her spay went great and she was a little pink there, a little puffy. And then I left for the day 'cause she was getting picked up late. And my coworker called me and she's like, "I just had to spend 30 minutes in the room with that woman because she thought that you sutured the dog's intestine into the closure," I guess 'cause it was pink and a little puffy, and I just... I was like, "Oh my gosh. I must have been absent the day they taught us not to do that at vet school." I don't know what she thought was gonna happen. But stuff like that doesn't even occur to me, and then to the client, that's the only measure they have to see whether we did a good job. And I never even thought about the clip job, so yeah. No pressure.

0:30:32.6 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Well, and then I'll take it even one step forward. Good for that staff member that you had that took that time with that client to explain it.

0:30:37.9 Katie Berlin: That was another associate, because she wouldn't believe the technician.

0:30:40.7 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Okay, sorry. Oh...

0:30:42.1 Katie Berlin: She was like, "I need to talk to a doctor." And so my poor coworker had to go in there and be like... But yeah, the technician, I'm sure would've spent that time with her if she'd wanted to hear it from her, but she did not. And then that's actually one of the few times a client has apologized for making a scene, because of course, it did heal fine, because it was a puppy. Healed great. And she came in, she's like, "You're right. I can't even see it." I was like, "I know." Who would've thought?

0:31:08.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah, no doubt.

0:31:08.5 Katie Berlin: Anyway. But yeah. It's a flashback I hadn't thought of for a while, that time I sutured the intestines into the spay closure.

0:31:21.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: I know, I've often thought I wish I'd kept a journal of all the stories, wild, bizarre things that have occurred, things like that. Yeah. It would be a very interesting book, I think.

0:31:27.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah. And I feel for that woman now 'cause you know that she went home and googled, "What happens if your vet closes your puppy's intestine in her spay closure?"

0:31:35.8 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Oh my gosh. Yeah.

0:31:36.6 Katie Berlin: Because why would she believe us? Of course we were gonna say it was fine. And as a client now, on the other side, I completely sympathize. My cat had 16 extractions recently and it was very stressful for me. They took wonderful care of him, but not being back there, my hands on him, is very stressful. So kudos to that woman for not totally losing her mind and for coming in and realizing it was okay later. Okay, so year of the team, last question for you because I know that we have a lot of discussion over veterinary technician week, and people expect free lunches and... But we also talk about how pizza doesn't solve all the problems when you're having a tough day or if the culture isn't conducive to wellness. So what are some of the ways that you've found either as a technician or as a manager now that veterinary practices can recognize and appreciate their teams, that make a difference?

0:32:37.4 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah. I think for me, probably the most important thing is to ask your team. I think that there's so many memes going around in...

0:32:46.3 Katie Berlin: That's a great answer.

0:32:47.1 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Healthcare about pizza, lunches and the joke of that. And we do a lot of pizza lunches in our hospital, so I...

0:32:53.9 Katie Berlin: Yeah, it's "pizza and," right?

0:32:54.9 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah.

0:32:55.9 Katie Berlin: Pizza is good. No one's saying you can't have pizza in the breakroom, 'cause that's changing today [0:32:58.0] _____.

0:33:00.2 Nicole Jameson Fritz: No, 'cause sometimes it's the most amazing pizza in the world because you haven't eaten anything all day. So I don't wanna devalue that, but I think one thing I've learned is everyone has... Different things mean different things to different people. And so I think that's part of it. So engaging the team and asking them like, "How does appreciation to you feel?" And again, what I mentioned earlier is just that pleases and thank yous, I think, go a long way. I think in our busy world, we're all guilty of that, you're just like, "Go, go, go, go." And especially since COVID, we're all busier than ever and overwhelmed with everything that we're doing, and so I think it's very simple, but it really seems to go a long way with anyone that I've ever spoken to, and really means a lot. And then I think just engaging the team and investing in the team, whether it be continuing education, investing in their future, showing that you believe in them and encouraging them says a lot about your sense of importance of the team.

0:34:01.8 Nicole Jameson Fritz: And then I think obviously the right tools to the job are really important as well too, because again, I feel like if I have the right things to do my job properly, then you value me, you value what I do, because you're investing in me personally, or you're investing in the things that I need to do to make my job go smoother and easier. So to me, those are things that I take as things that show that I'm cared for and that I'm appreciated. But again, I think for everyone, that's a little bit differently. For me, it's always been CE. You're investing in me, you're sending me to conference, you're paying for my different CE memberships. Those are values to me...

0:34:41.3 Katie Berlin: That's my love language, sure.

0:34:44.7 Nicole Jameson Fritz: And get me really excited... Yeah, yes. And make me really excited. And I used to say that a lot to our upper management team, like, "Oh yeah, I know people need to learn and they wanna grow." But then over time, I realized that that's not necessarily the same... Doesn't hold the same weight or the same value for every individual. So I think the best thing is just to talk to people and figure it out. But I think, again, not to devalue the pizza lunches, they're always so great, or donuts. That time the hospitals brought in donuts and cookies, those are always amazing too.

0:35:14.7 Katie Berlin: Yes, yeah. The emergence of Crumbl. I don't know if you have Crumbl in Canada, but Crumbl is like... It's a cookie chain, and sells these ginormous cookies.

0:35:23.0 Nicole Jameson Fritz: No.

0:35:24.7 Katie Berlin: You can eat a quarter of the cookie and it's like it's a lot of cookie. Yeah, the emergence of Crumbl has totally changed the metaphor now because it's not always pizza now, it's also Crumbl. It's just really good. Next time you're in the US, try it.

0:35:40.3 Nicole Jameson Fritz: I will have to look it up, yes, for sure.

0:35:41.6 Katie Berlin: I'm sure they're planning to take over Canada soon. Anyway...

0:35:46.3 Nicole Jameson Fritz: No doubt. I think they'd be successful here, 'cause somebody told me.

0:35:51.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah, well, they have their own app. You can get it delivered...

0:35:54.5 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Oh, okay.

0:35:56.0 Katie Berlin: Gift cards that way. Ugh, it's genius. I wish I'd thought of it. Anyway. Oh, Nicole, I can see why you were nominated and won the 2022 Vet Tech of the Year award, because I really do feel like you... We were talking about love languages and ways people like to be appreciated, and you don't strike me as somebody who wants your face on a poster as the Vet Tech of the Year. You want to be Vet Tech of the Year quietly, because you know that it means that the right things are being recognized. And I think that just speaks volumes about who you are and about what the profession needs. As our technicians' roles change, evolve, grow, we start to realize that a lot of technicians are not getting what they need at work, and we have to figure out a way to give it to them. Because without the technicians, like you said, we can't have a team, and we really... We need to figure this out, because I really do believe that the technicians are the solution to a lot of the crises that we're having in Vet Med now, and we need to turn our gaze that way collectively. And who better to ask? Like you said, sometimes you just gotta ask the technicians. So thank you for being such a wonderful spokesperson for the tech profession.

0:37:17.8 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Oh, thank you. Well, I'm generally passionate for what I do. I love to share my experiences, I love to encourage and support even new people to the profession, so I appreciate you saying that. I guess it makes me feel good 'cause that's generally who I am. I'm exactly like you said. It's kind of embarrassing a little bit, this whole process.

0:37:37.4 Katie Berlin: You don't want us to make a bubblehead of you.

0:37:42.7 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Oh yeah. But if I can inspire or encourage or share my experiences, then that makes me really excited and really proud of what I do and what I get to do. 'Cause again, I couldn't imagine doing anything else. I truly passionately love every aspect of what I get to do, so feel very fortunate and very lucky.

0:38:03.4 Katie Berlin: Well, we're lucky to have you in the profession and to be a leader, so thank you. Nicole Jameson Fritz, congratulations on your award that you didn't ask for but definitely deserved, and thank you for your time hanging out with me and chatting about this. I'm really optimistic about the future with people like you leading it, so thank you.

0:38:28.7 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Thank you, Katie.

0:38:31.2 Katie Berlin: And also as a disclaimer, there are no animals visible in this podcast episode. My little guy isn't here, Nicole's dog isn't here, and so I just have to say that no animals were harmed in making this episode, but some of them might have drugs.

0:38:44.9 Nicole Jameson Fritz: Yeah, little trazodone.

0:38:49.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah, better living through chemistry, and better podcasting too. Thanks, everyone, for listening and we'll catch you next time on Central Line.