

Central Line: The AAHA Podcast Transcript

Episode Title: Changing the Narrative

Guest: Pam Nichols, DVM, CCRP, CFI

0:00:04.1 Katie Berlin: Hi, welcome back to Central Line. I'm your host, Dr. Katie Berlin, and I'm very glad you're joining us today for this special conversation with a guest I'm really excited to talk to, Dr. Pam Nichols. Welcome to Central Line.

0:00:15.9 Pam Nichols: Thank you.

0:00:18.0 Katie Berlin: It's so great to have you, and we have so much I wanna ask you about, and I wanna hear your thoughts on... You are doing some really cool stuff. You've been doing neat stuff in the veterinary profession, I have a feeling, since you started. But there's just some really great messages that you have to share with everyone today, so we'll get into that. But before we do, would you mind sharing a little brief snippet about yourself, how you came to be sitting here talking to me?

0:00:44.5 Pam Nichols: Oh, my gosh, pure beauty of the universe is how I came to be sitting here with you today. Really, it is.

0:00:50.5 Katie Berlin: It feels that way.

0:00:51.6 Pam Nichols: It's completely just amazing. Brief bio. My most recent fabulous accomplishment was getting to be President of American Animal Hospital Association, which has been my love and dedication in the veterinary profession for the last... This is my ninth year on the board, I think, and I'll be done at Connect City and it will be so sad, I'm already crying thinking about it. So that's been my most recent thing. I am the proud owner of a very brand new baby practice that I started two years ago, and it's going gang... Okay, it's two and a half years now, but it's going gangbusters. We're almost a four-doctor practice and hitting about four million in trailing 12 months revenue, and have a fully-staffed team that is freaking amazing, if they are watching this.

0:01:44.0 Katie Berlin: That word "fully-staffed," just that alone is just shocking. [laughter]

0:01:48.0 Pam Nichols: Right? No, and I seriously, I just hired two new doctors and one permanent part-time.

0:01:53.0 Katie Berlin: Amazing.

0:01:54.0 Pam Nichols: And I had somebody call me and say, "I know a vet tech who's moving to Utah, and I think she should come work for you." And I said, "Okay, that's really great, I don't need her." And when have I ever had to spit that out of my mouth? I'm like, "Can I find her some place until I lose somebody? 'Cause I don't have anything right now." Which is honestly never the answer. Yeah. So I have a great small animal practice in Salt Lake City, Utah, and I had a couple of practices before that and a couple of dog daycares. And so I got my fill of having 160 employees and I... Yeah. I raised my child in my practice, and a lot of animals and a lot of employees. And I have six kids who are now out, not that I birthed, but six children that I raised in my practice who are on now out in vet schools across the world.

0:02:40.8 Katie Berlin: Love that.

0:02:41.0 Pam Nichols: And one human adult daughter, who's 26, and she's an attorney and she's also a veterinary consultant. She's amazing.

0:02:48.0 Katie Berlin: Oh wow. That's great. She does law consulting...

0:02:53.5 Pam Nichols: She's an attorney, but she is doing consulting. She does P&L transformation and culture transformation, those are her two big things. And the reason she's good at it is 'cause she's been doing mine for a long time, doing my P&L.

0:03:06.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:03:06.9 Pam Nichols: Yeah.

0:03:07.1 Katie Berlin: Yeah, very cool. Well, it's so great to have you. And I think one of the things that just really caught me about when we first met, which was very recently, over tea.

0:03:19.9 Pam Nichols: Yes.

[chuckle]

0:03:20.5 Katie Berlin: But one of the first things that really just caught me was your energy, you just seem so energetic and enthusiastic and just have this zest for life, and for people and a love for what you're doing. And I was just wondering, I didn't prepare you for this question, but I'm asking it anyway. I was just wondering, has it always been that way for you? Or do you feel like you've evolved to be this person?

0:03:44.9 Pam Nichols: I would say it's always been the underlying theme of my life, since my daughter was a tiny kid and I was trying to raise her to have her own voice and her own choices about her behavior and telling her that we get to choose to have a great day. But also, as a practice owner and a single mom, I had a hell of a difficult, difficult life. And so the underlying enthusiasm for the profession and for my life was always there, but I would say it has gone amped up on crack without the crack, without the actual crack.

[chuckle]

0:04:14.9 Katie Berlin: Behind in life. [chuckle]

0:04:15.1 Pam Nichols: Yeah. Honestly, that sounds so stupid, but that's really it. I just feel that in the last two and a half years since opening Daybreak, my life has just completely blossomed. And I am so enthusiastic about the future, and so absolutely positive about the future of vet medicine, that I don't get drained by the profession, I get really just jazzed by it.

0:04:45.7 Katie Berlin: That's the dream, that is definitely the dream.

0:04:47.3 Pam Nichols: I have one quick example about that, and I'll tell you why because this morning I had a... Yesterday, I got a telemedicine notification that I had a telemedicine consult, and

the woman said, "I've been referred to you by this woman who's in St. George, she's a veterinarian and she's very holistic, doesn't believe in much that I do, but she's a great person." And she said, "I'm looking for a primary care practitioner for my pet, and I want you to be that person." And she paid \$89 for this telemedicine consult. And I called her and she didn't answer last night. So she called me this morning and I spent an hour on the phone with her, just talking to her about ongoing pet care. And when I got off the phone, I was so excited because this is a person who called me, who was willing to pay me for my time, but she wanted to ask my opinion about, was her breeder right or wrong about spaying or not spaying? And was her breeder correct or incorrect about feeding raw? And is her theory...

0:05:39.8 Pam Nichols: She hooked her up with an agility trainer and she has a duck tolling retriever, who's coo coo ca choo, and so now she's gonna be doing the tug and amping up this puppy. And we had to spend an hour that I... \$89 an hour is pretty cheap for me. However, I was so excited to get done with it. When I finished, I wrote my team a message and I said, "You guys, this is what individualized care looks like, this is what we do..." If we can connect with clients, and 97% of our clients want cookie-cutter care, more or less within AAHA guidelines. But then you get these people who are special and they're not butting heads, they wanna know, and they want your opinion, and they get excited and they go, "Oh my God, you have so much to teach me." And they get excited, and then I walk away going, "Hey, yay! I'm a vet. Yay! I'm so excited and life is grand." Anyway, and what I told my team is this kind of thing, doing telemedicine visits at nine o'clock on a, whatever morning it is, Monday morning, doesn't drain me. It energizes me. But that's also a choice.

0:06:40.8 Katie Berlin: It is. And I think, there are definitely clients that I would bend over backwards for and spend an hour on the phone with, because you know that that \$89 is gonna come back in dividends when that client trusts you to implement all of the recommendations that you made, and whenever they have a problem, you're gonna be the person they go to first, and I love that so much. And obviously not every client is gonna be that client, but don't the ones that want all that and so warrant that time...

0:07:08.7 Pam Nichols: And how cool that she was willing to pay for it, before she ever met me just to feel the waters out, and she said, "So can I send you information as time goes on? Can I send you pictures of my dog and make sure she's not..." I said, "Do telemedicine visits, that lets me know that you respect my time." And she said, "Oh, okay, great, I'm totally down with that." And I was like, "Okay, yay."

0:07:29.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah. Expectations set for both of you.

0:07:30.3 Pam Nichols: Right. Yes.

0:07:32.1 Katie Berlin: Love that. Well, yeah, I think we all evolve over time as veterinarians and veterinary professionals for sure, but I love that you have that love for the profession and love for what you're doing now, and that it's even greater than it was at the beginning. I just love that. So, personal question, before we go on to the meat, the major topic that we have today, what would the title of your autobiography be?

0:07:58.7 Pam Nichols: Probably "Learn, Grow, Change." Because...

0:08:03.6 Katie Berlin: That fits.

0:08:03.8 Pam Nichols: Yeah. I just started learning French about two years ago, it's something I just don't know how to do. I just started taking equine lameness courses 'cause I just don't do that. So why not?

0:08:13.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah. I'm addicted to certifications and... I don't ever wanna just learn about something, I wanna get certified...

0:08:20.6 Pam Nichols: Right. I want the letters. "I just became a professional coach." "I just got certified in acupuncture and chiro." I'm like, "Yes, give me the names, give me the letters."

0:08:27.7 Katie Berlin: Right [chuckle] Yeah. And it's about knowing that you could even go and teach somebody else about it now.

0:08:34.6 Pam Nichols: Right.

0:08:36.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah, it's to the next level...

0:08:37.8 Pam Nichols: Absolutely.

0:08:38.4 Katie Berlin: Yes, I totally feel that. Okay, cool. Alright. So today we're gonna be talking about an initiative, a project that you've been working on that means a lot to you, it's very close to your heart, can you tell us a little bit about what you've been doing?

0:08:50.8 Pam Nichols: Yeah. For about the last three years, I've been working on this project called "Change the Narrative," which sounds ridiculously simple when I say it out loud. It started on a AAHA pack trip, we were teaching... Darren Taul was another past president, he's teaching P&L, and I was teaching culture and leadership, and I kept hearing this thing over and over again, which was, "There are no vets, there are no staff. Life sucks. We can't make enough money. It's just too hard, I'm gonna sell." And I just kept thinking, "Can't we change the way we... At least change the way we frame it, at least change the way we talk about it so that it's not such a negative drain?" And I don't mean change it like, "It's gonna be okay, you're fine, you're so much better off than anybody else." I mean, really change the words that we use when we talk about stress, or happy, or good or bad, or clients or whatever. So it started three years ago, and it was... I always use affirmation cards and I use them in practice, but they're not veterinary-specific.

0:09:58.6 Pam Nichols: And my team just keep saying, "Dr. Pam, you need to make those that say something about that 18-month-old rottweiler in Room 5 that none of us wanna go touch 'cause the owner is clutching it, and we don't wanna touch it. You gotta do some affirmations about that." And I'm like, "Okay, I can try." And then it just evolved into Change the Narrative, and now there's cards that are real, that are actually real cards that are physical that I can sell and play with and donate and give out... It's fun. And there's a book in process about changing... The book is the... Well, it's actually done, but it needs some tweaking. It's about fixing a culture crisis, and how do we do that? And it's not how people think it is, it's not by scheduling a staff meeting in a month and talking about the culture crisis that's happening, it's about what you do every single day when you wake up and when you go to work, and when you talk to your team, and when you talk to every single team member. That's the gist of it.

0:11:01.6 Katie Berlin: That's a lot packed into one, [chuckle] one little nutshell there. And for those of you who are listening and not watching, Dr. Pam was holding up this, a little pink box that's got cards in it. It looks like a little... Like a note card box. And the cards are bright colors and you can shuffle them and just pick one out of the deck everyday, or if you're having a tough moment, and these are affirmation cards. And so, can you give us an example of one of the affirmations on a card?

0:11:28.6 Pam Nichols: Yes. Yeah. The first one happens to be my favorite, which is about, "Today my superpower is grace, with myself, with my team, with my patients and with pet parents, each one of us is doing our best." Most of them are shorter than that truly. I have a really funny one that's just... "Especially today..." Oh, this is a good one, "Especially today, I celebrate the soft silky ears of each of my patients." Right, ears are the best. And whiskers, kitty whiskers.

0:12:00.7 Katie Berlin: I know. Ears and noses. Yeah.

0:12:01.7 Pam Nichols: There's one in here about noses. But there's another one I love, "Especially today, I celebrate brilliance, both around me and within me." In hopes that we can stop saying, "I suck at this, I suck at cats, I don't do well with... I don't know anything about duck tolling retrievers, I don't know anything about savannah cats." "Stop, shhh. I'm gonna just celebrate how brilliant my team is, and how brilliant I am."

0:12:33.6 Katie Berlin: One thing that I love about these cards too, is they're not telling you "Your life is great, stop complaining," they're not telling you, "This job isn't hard." What they're doing is taking one aspect of maybe something you haven't been telling yourself enough lately or ever, and trying to get you to focus on that one thing. It's impossible... Those memes that are like, "All I'm trying to do is have a job and keep my car going and pay \$5 a gallon for gas, and exercise and eat healthy and take care of my kids and get to bed on time." It's so much.

0:13:08.5 Pam Nichols: It's so much.

0:13:09.2 Katie Berlin: And when you think about all the things that we feel like we're supposed to be doing everyday and we're supposed to be being everyday, it's completely overwhelming. But to look at one card and just look at that one thing, say like, "That's my affirmation for today, or for this hour, or this appointment."

0:13:24.2 Pam Nichols: Right, this moment. It could be this appointment. It could be... So I hear... What I hear when I'm in practices is, "I just walk away and I'm exhausted, I'm suck dry." And we talk about compassion fatigue, and I think it's more compassion resilience, it's compassion energy, because for me, my compassion is my superpower, it gives me energy, it doesn't suck me dry, but this one is, I care deeply for my patients, my compassion supplies me with an endless source of energy. So just changing the narrative. Stop talking about it like it's such a negative thing to have compassion fatigue, and recognize that being compassionate is a gift to share with the world and with yourself and to celebrate it, and that you care deeply, that's an endless source of energy.

0:14:13.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah. It seems like everybody is a little bit different too, in how they respond to stress and what in particular stresses them out the most, and I feel like that was never more evident than in the last week when there's been so much in social media about the puppy

surrendered in Maine, and the news article that reported that in the worst possible way. And it just... The comments on all of those posts and how much negativity there was just around things that really didn't have anything to do with that specific case anyway, people were so reactive to different aspects of that saga, and that highlights for me that maybe not every card or every affirmation is gonna resonate with every person. But at that moment, it gives you a focus and sometimes your mind's just swirling like crazy, and I would have liked to have that focus when I was in the middle of a busy day, just to look at that card and think, "Okay, for the next 20 minutes, this is... "

0:15:17.9 Pam Nichols: Exactly. You said a really important word in the middle of that, which was people around the situation in Maine... It was in Maine, right?

0:15:28.7 Katie Berlin: Maine, yeah.

0:15:29.3 Pam Nichols: Became so reactive. And I think that what the change... Change the Narrative for me personally allows me to be active. It's not about Pollyanna, everything's freaking perfect, it's that I can act the way I want, I can choose to use the words that I want. It's just like this a while ago, and you said, "I'm not very good at blah blah blah," and I said, "You used to not be good at it." 'Cause that's an easy... I hear my doctors say all the time, "I suck at cats." I'm like, "You used to suck at cats, if you wanna be good at cats it's super easy, you just learn right now, we'll figure it out right now." And then they go, "Oh, okay, that's really cool. Yeah, I used to suck, now I'm really good." And it's not rosy glasses Pollyanna, it's just, change the words, and be very, very specific about what comes out of your mouth, about yourself, about your team, about your clients, about your patients. I coach my team all the time on, "How do we talk about our patients?" It'll be a naughty rottweiler in Room 5 that has everybody twizzle because it's a jerk, it's a marlin on the end of the leash, the owner weighs 80 pounds and nobody can control this thing.

0:16:42.9 Pam Nichols: And my team is very, very, very, very astute with behavior, and so they pressure and release, and almost any one of my kids can get a 80-pound rottweiler under control in about three and a half minutes, really, really simply. Well, maybe not, but anyway. But they're very, very good. And I kept hearing people say, "Oh, God, it's that dog again," or "Oh, it's Mrs. Blah blah blah again," and kind of heavy sigh and roll their eyebrows and defeated and this, "I just don't have time for this, I just don't have energy for this." And talking to this team from day one, which was two and a half years ago about, "Look, we... " Culture, you'll hear me say this, if you ever hear me speak publicly, I say "Culture is behavior. We're gonna coach everything about our behavior, it's everything from our facial expressions, to our eyebrows, to our shoulders, to our tone of voice." I have a doctor who is brilliant, her name is Cassie, Dr. Cassie Eakins, if she's on, I hope she's listening because she's brilliant. And when she first came to me, she was a baby vet, maybe two years out and she'd been practicing in a different practice, not as... Just a very different practice.

0:17:53.1 Pam Nichols: And I coached her on tone of voice, just intonation, just changing the way the pitch, the way you talk to somebody, when somebody says, "My dog is really sick and they tell me I can't get in." "Yeah, that's right, we don't have time to get you in until Thursday," or, "Oh my God, I'm so sorry, I know that must be really awfully frustrating, how can I help you? What can I do for you right this minute to make your life better?" And just the change in, inflection changes what you're saying, "I can't get you until Thursday, but in the meantime, I'm here for you." There's just little things that you can coach and it's very, very deliberate behavior, rather than being reactive to the person who's screaming at you on the phone, 'cause they can't get in until Thursday.

0:18:33.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah. That is so true. And I've been in that position myself where I've wanted to scream at somebody on the phone because they were not, absolutely not sympathetic to my cause at all, even if I knew they couldn't help me, like just a little bit of sympathy or empathy would have gone such a long way. I had a hospital waiting... Or emergency room incident where, that I'm remembering now where, no one's happy when they're in the ER, but you just... The receptionist just wasn't having any of my stuff, and I just wanted to know how long I might be sitting there fasting.

0:19:07.6 Pam Nichols: That's right.

[chuckle]

0:19:08.8 Katie Berlin: In the ER waiting room. But just a little...

0:19:11.4 Pam Nichols: Just a tiny bit of empathy, which...

0:19:12.2 Katie Berlin: A little bit of empathy from her, just a little warmth in her voice would have made a complete difference, and we have such power.

0:19:18.6 Pam Nichols: Yeah, she probably was completely empathetic but she was so overwhelmed that she chose not to use voice inflection at that moment to say, "Hey, Katie, I got you. It's gonna be another hour. I got you. I know it's frustrating."

0:19:29.8 Katie Berlin: "Let me check with the doctor and see if you can at least get water," that would have been nice. [chuckle]

0:19:33.8 Pam Nichols: Right, that's the same message. Nothing's different about that message, it's just that she said in a kind tone of voice that actually showed she mattered... That you mattered to her.

0:19:42.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely. We have the situations all day, everyday. But you... Like you said, changing the narrative is simple phrase, it seems like it should be so simple to do, but sometimes it is so hard. Do you ever get feedback from people that you're over-simplifying the problem? They're like, "There's no way that they can just change the narrative because of X, Y, Z factors or because the situation is this complicated"?

0:20:09.1 Pam Nichols: I have heard that a few times, and I just... What I tell people is, "It used to be hard for you to change the narrative, it's just a choice." It's just a choice personally. It's a choice personally, how do I treat my team? It's a choice personally, what tone of voice do I use? So start with you, start with the morning, with you, and do your best. And it's not... It is super simple. It can't be over-simplified because I don't think it could get any more simple than just change your words. You don't have to change how you look at it, but just change your words. Your brain only knows what you tell it, and that's not quantum physics, although some people think it is. It's really not, that's just the way it goes. Whatever you say, your mouth says, your brain believes, and so you might as well say something positive.

0:21:01.9 Katie Berlin: Yeah, man, that was a big thing you just said there, that your brain and what comes out of your mouth, those are connected, not just because your brain makes this stuff

come out of your mouth, but the other way around, what you say can actually have a really big impact on how you think. I'm just thinking about running. I'm a runner, and I run in spite of nature...

0:21:26.0 Pam Nichols: Right.

[chuckle]

0:21:26.9 Katie Berlin: Because I'm not built to run, and so I'm uncomfortable a lot of the time and... [chuckle] But I still love it for some reason. And people are always saying, "Smile, because it'll hurt less if you smile," and it's absolutely true.

0:21:40.1 Pam Nichols: Yes.

0:21:40.8 Katie Berlin: I do not know why, but if you're running down the straightaway and you're like, "I cannot go another step," and everyone's like, "Smile!" and you do, you actually feel so much better. And I have a much easier time applying that to running than I do a hard day at the clinic, [chuckle] so... But I don't think I've ever thought about it that way.

0:22:00.4 Pam Nichols: It's the exact same thing. It's no different than us asking our receptionists to smile when they answer the phone, which is the oldest trick in the book. But it actually works.

0:22:10.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah, you can definitely hear that...

0:22:12.4 Pam Nichols: I love that you use that for running. I only run if I'm being chased. So...

[laughter]

0:22:18.7 Katie Berlin: Yeah. I think the world's greatest marathon runner, Eliud Kipchoge actually smiles when he runs, and he can run a marathon in two literal hours, like 26.2 hours [0:22:28.5] ____ Anyway.

0:22:28.7 Pam Nichols: I'd smile too. I feel like, "Look at me, here I go."

0:22:29.9 Katie Berlin: Yeah. I would smile after, but during, I just... But he does, 'cause he says it doesn't hurt as much.

0:22:35.9 Pam Nichols: I agree.

0:22:36.7 Katie Berlin: Anyway. Okay. So what about another aspect of that? We're talking about naysayers, you can hear people listening to this and saying, "Well, that's not gonna work for me because..." Or, "That's making too light of the problem because..." Do you feel like there are people who feel these affirmations are toxic positivity and trying to tell them to "Buck up, buttercup," when really, they're facing real issues and sometimes real trauma?

0:23:08.1 Pam Nichols: We all face real issues every single day that are freaking hard, hard, hard, and I'm not... I am not, "Suck it up, buttercup," that is not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is, you can make a difference in your life and those people around you if you just simply change the narrative, change the way you talk about things, and it's... I know, it sounds so simple, but it is. It's

no different than talking about... I had this client, Alice Malenstein, she's... Rest in peace, she was... Everyone used to say, "Oh my God, Crazy Alice is here," and I would say, "You know, Alice is quirky and she loves her dogs more than anybody I know. So let's just say we love her. Alice Malenstein is here and we love her, we're so glad she's here."

0:24:01.2 Pam Nichols: And if any of my team from Animal Care Center is here, they will vouch for me, we literally changed the narrative. And I was a baby vet 'cause I said, "You guys, I have to go on and deal with her, and if you talk to me like she's crazy out in the treatment room, and then I go in, what if that rubs off and I treat her like she's crazy. She will feel it from me." So we changed the narrative, and we stopped saying that. And she died... One of my vets lived around the corner from her, Dr. Verona, would go over to her house and do well-checks on her dogs and make sure that she was okay, and make sure that the dogs are okay. And it was a 20-year relationship with this client who started out with, "Oh my God, that Crazy Alice is in Room, whatever." And it's just... It makes your life easier to make it simple and just change the words. As you change the words, so will go your brain.

0:24:54.3 Katie Berlin: That's a great example too. I was gonna ask you for an example, and that is a fantastic one because haven't we all been the crazy client somewhere? When I went to the neurologist earlier this year, I brought a three-page Google Doc of my symptoms. You know what I mean?

0:25:10.5 Pam Nichols: You were that client. Atta girl.

0:25:10.6 Katie Berlin: I was that, I was that patient. Yeah. And I apologized to the nurse. He took my blood pressure and stuff, and I gave him the Google Doc and I was like, "I'm so sorry, but no one's been listening to me, and I wrote down all of my symptoms for the last five days or whatever, and I just wanted to make sure they were all here so the doctor would see them," and he was like, "That's totally fine, that's great. That's less we have to write down." And he took it away, and he gave it to the doctor, and the doctor came in holding it, and he had highlighted certain sections, and he went over it with me while taking notes on the computer. And he spent like half an hour with me doing all that, and I felt totally, like he had me. He had me. And he still didn't know what was wrong with me, but I didn't feel like it was because he didn't care. And that could have so gone the other way, with the three-page Google Doc. And we have all been in the room with that client and we're like, "Okay, they brought pages of handwritten notes," and it's just... It's a lot. Definitely they know. They know.

0:26:11.2 Pam Nichols: Yes. And I think... But here's the thing about you taking in your Google Doc and saying to them, "I just wanna acknowledge that I might seem like that crazy person, I'm not, I just... I haven't been heard." There's nothing crazy about that. That is absolutely, in my opinion, the kindest thing a client could do for me, so that, I'm busy, I don't have to say, "No, wait, was this the one that was eating raw and... Okay, wait, hold on, wait, which... Okay, wait... It's all... " I wanna just say, I think that's a really good thing, and if we change the narrative about that kind of client, about, "This is just a really helpful client, not a crazy client," that's not any different, it's still the same person doing the same thing with the three-page Google Doc, but you're really helpful in my opinion, and in my words, I'd way rather say, "Look what Katie brought us, she brought us three pages of stuff about her dog, somebody start reading it to me and tell me the important stuff."

0:27:07.4 Katie Berlin: Yup, scan that sucker in. [laughter]

0:27:08.6 Pam Nichols: Yeah. Exactly.

0:27:10.9 Katie Berlin: Yeah. I still have... I saved notes from clients too, during curbside, and some clients would send notes in, which just made it so much easier. And sometimes it would be from a spouse who couldn't make it, like, "Make sure you tell the vet this," and I just thought that was so helpful. And one of them, it was a cat, a 2-year-old cat in for a wellness visit, but he had some questions, it was his first cat, and he was like, "Thank you so much for your time," and he signed it, "Matt, cat dad."

0:27:37.5 Pam Nichols: Aww.

0:27:37.9 Katie Berlin: And I thought that was the cutest thing ever, and I saved it...

0:27:40.7 Pam Nichols: 'Cause you love him for being a great cat dad.

0:27:42.4 Katie Berlin: I know. That's just the beauty of... I just think that's so... Stuff like that is so beautiful, so...

0:27:49.1 Pam Nichols: We're so lucky to have clients like that that care enough to actually take the time to do that and... Yeah.

0:27:52.6 Katie Berlin: I know. And just be like, "I'm a cat dad, and that's how I'm gonna sign the letter." [laughter]

0:27:57.7 Pam Nichols: I think it's awesome.

0:28:00.9 Katie Berlin: So, Dr. Pam, do you have resources besides affirmations that you could recommend to people listening who want to work on changing the narrative, but maybe need to get in a little bit deeper?

0:28:12.6 Pam Nichols: Well, as soon as my little book is published, which ought to be September, mid-September.

0:28:17.3 Katie Berlin: Does it have a title yet?

0:28:18.9 Pam Nichols: I have about 20. I could list them all and you guys could tell me, you guys could help me just decide 'cause... 'Cause my answer is, "No, I don't know."

[laughter]

0:28:24.0 Katie Berlin: "Let's put it on hold."

0:28:25.4 Pam Nichols: Let's put it on hold, then we'll figure it out.

0:28:26.8 Katie Berlin: Okay. [chuckle] Okay.

0:28:29.2 Pam Nichols: But anybody who wants more resources can email me at

drpamn@gmail.com. Honestly, I... Between affirmation cards and finding a professional coach to help you kind of just re-work whatever you're going through, I feel like... So my daughter is doing this consulting stuff, and she told me yesterday, I was driving the car and she said, "Well, you know, my coach told me, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," and I said, "You're 26, why do you have a coach?" And she said, "Well, I have a business coach and she kinda helps me with just navigating my life, and my relationships, and my being an independent consultant." And I thought, "Okay, how come nobody told me to do that when I was a little kid?"

0:29:09.6 Katie Berlin: I know. [laughter]

0:29:10.2 Pam Nichols: No offense to the 26-year-olds...

0:29:11.3 Katie Berlin: That wasn't even a thing.

0:29:11.9 Pam Nichols: Right. It wasn't even a thing when I was 26. It wasn't even thought of. And I feel like there are a lot of resources. I don't have a list of them for you, I apologize, but anybody... I'm doing staff meetings this week for a couple of teams in Arizona, one in Scottsdale and one in Flagstaff, one I'm gonna do in-person and one I'm gonna do virtually. And I'd love to do staff meetings about Myers-Briggs training, about talking to these people... I say these kids 'cause I'm old and they're young, but I wanna talk to them about, change that narrative. I'm mature and they are not. [laughter]

0:29:46.8 Katie Berlin: You're more experienced.

0:29:47.6 Pam Nichols: I have much of experience. But do we... Myers-Briggs training is this magically funny thing that you can do with your team to help them change the narrative and understand somebody else's narrative, "Why does she talk like that? Why does she act like that? Why does he treat me that way?" And so that's what I'm doing for these teams is Myers-Briggs coaching along with Change the Narrative. In fact, one of them... Can I do it... I know we probably are running out of time, but I wanna tell you this one thing.

0:30:13.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah.

0:30:15.2 Pam Nichols: My first pack trip, I met this practitioner from Flagstaff, and she's a mixed animal practitioner, lovely human being. She and her husband were on the trip. And I had in-depth conversations from horseback with her, which I think is... Where all learning should take place.

0:30:33.9 Katie Berlin: I would agree, that's good [0:30:34.7] ____ ...

0:30:34.8 Pam Nichols: On the mountain, walking up the hill at Jackson Hole. Alicia is her name, and she kept saying, "It just seems so simple to change the narrative, help me. If you hear me say something, just tell me." And so we were kind of the police, and if I said something negative, she would say, "Hey, Dr. Pam, change the narrative," because that was when I was first really talking about it, and it... And so I said, "I'll help you." And so we did it for anything, from talking about saying, "Oh, I'm such an idiot," to saying, "I just had a brain moment, so here I am," but not saying, "I'm such an idiot," or, "My daughter is 26 and had an eating disorder." Full disclosure, she shares that all over the internet. But she now doesn't like people... She doesn't like to hear women denigrate their bodies by saying, "Oh, my horse would be happier if I was thinner," or, "Gosh, my...

Blah... " And so, Change the Narrative...

0:31:24.6 Katie Berlin: Yeah, I hate that.

0:31:24.8 Pam Nichols: Is on a sign in my barn, because I don't want the girls in my barn who are coming to ride their horses to say, "Oh, my horse would be happier if I was 10 pounds lighter." "No, your horse loves you, and you're perfect exactly the way you are, so, shh, stop with that narrative." Anyway, so Alicia and I, this whole pack trip in the mountains, talked to each other about it, and I was really touched by how much she took it to heart, and I thought... It was the first time that I really thought maybe Change the Narrative had legs that I could go and create some product that could help somebody. And we were doing affirmation cards around the fire, but they weren't my affirmation cards, they were just somebody's affirmation cards, and they weren't that specific, they were just, "You are enough. You are good enough. You have what you need."

0:32:07.2 Pam Nichols: Anyway, fast-forward a couple of months and I was driving through Flagstaff and I thought, "I'm gonna go see her," so I called her and I said, "Alicia, can I come to your hospital?" It was middle of COVID, and she said, "Sure, come on in." And I went in, and we're all masked and everybody's kind of worried, "Is this person... She's..." I think it was when I was President of AAHA and, "We're not accredited, and why is she here? And what's she gonna do to us?" And I walked in and everywhere I looked, on top of her computer was a little yellow sticky note that said "Change the narrative," on their phone, where the people picked up the phone, it said, "Change the narrative," and I thought, "Holy cow, it mattered, what I said actually mattered to her and she's using it." She's the one that I'm gonna do a staff meeting for this week.

0:32:48.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah. As you're saying that, different things have impact on you, different points in your life, for a reason.

0:32:56.5 Pam Nichols: Right.

0:32:57.0 Katie Berlin: Right, and so you having that conversation with her, could have been the thing that had the impact that she needed at that moment. And for me, it was gratitude practice, which, I feel like has caught on a lot in the last five or 10 years or so. But it's the same thing, right, instead of thinking, "Oh, I wish things were different all the time." You spend a little bit more time thinking about what's going well and what you're really, really grateful for. And it does change... It changes a little ticker running through your head, at least temporarily, if you keep doing it, the ticker's gonna run gratitude longer and...

0:33:33.4 Pam Nichols: Right.

0:33:33.4 Katie Berlin: And wants less. And this is so, so similar to that. And I just, I'm thinking of all these... I'd love to know if people listening could think of veterinary-specific affirmations...

0:33:46.2 Pam Nichols: And then send them to me and I'll print them. And I'll give you credit.

0:33:48.4 Katie Berlin: There you go. Yeah. Send them to Dr. Pam, send them to me at podcast.aaha.org. I would love to hear that. For me, I'm thinking, one big one that I feel so strongly about would be, people love their animals differently, doesn't mean they love them less. Because you go in those rooms, and it looks different every time. And man, that just has to come with time, I

think. You get out of vet school and you can be so judgemental of how people choose to love their pet. And just because it looks different doesn't mean that it's any less.

0:34:25.0 Pam Nichols: That is brilliant...

0:34:25.9 Katie Berlin: And I don't want that...

0:34:26.4 Pam Nichols: Brilliant, brilliant, beyond brilliant. And when we get done, I'm going to go pound it out on an affirmation card and have it printed.

[laughter]

0:34:31.9 Katie Berlin: Okay.

0:34:33.0 Pam Nichols: Because truly... Another one that I just love is, today I celebrate every naughty pet and their parents, in parentheses. Or no, every pet and pet parent, even the naughty ones, is I think how it goes, because there are naughty pets and we just wanna say, "Really, I don't have time for this," or a naughty client. And I would rather say naughty than [0:34:54.1] _____. Sorry, but that's... I would just rather say that they're just naughty, they're having a bad day, maybe their mom has cancer, maybe their kid is autistic or on drugs. Who knows what somebody's going through? So I'm not gonna say that they're just a jerk. I'm gonna say they're having a bad moment, and hopefully the next person gets a better one.

0:35:08.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah. And just assume everyone's doing their best.

0:35:11.3 Pam Nichols: Right. And have a little gratitude that they're there at your practice. And even if they are being naughty, at least they chose to come to you.

0:35:19.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah. No, you're so right, Dr. Pam, and thank you for sharing the stories and just a little bit about your journey and your team's journey, using the idea of changing the narrative to make each day a little bit more beautiful. Because we really do... This profession is really very beautiful, but it also can be very tragic and hard. And these things, I think, help us remind ourselves that there's beauty even in those hard days.

0:35:48.1 Pam Nichols: I think every single day in this profession is a gift. Honestly, I can't see it any other way. And when I talk to kids, a kid called me on Sun... A kid, a young woman, 19 years old, on Sunday and said, "I wanna volunteer, but I can't get anybody to let me in to volunteer." I'm like, "What time can you be there?" And she did. She showed up to volunteer. She wants to be a vet. I want her to love this. I want her to go, "Oh my God, I wanna be just like Dr. Pam, I wanna change the world, I wanna do that."

0:36:20.1 Katie Berlin: Love it. I love that. Maybe she'll be on the AAHA [0:36:22.5] ____ board one day.

0:36:22.6 Pam Nichols: I hope so.

0:36:25.8 Katie Berlin: Dr. Pam Nichols, thank you so much for your time and your positivity and all your energy. And if you want to reach Dr. Pam and get a hold of the affirmation cards, if you

wanna be informed about some of the other resources that she might have to share, including her book when it comes out, she has graciously invited you to email her. So, that is drpamn@gmail.com. Correct?

0:36:50.5 Pam Nichols: Yeah. No points, no dots, no nothing. Just D-R-P-A-M-N@gmail.com.

0:36:56.0 Katie Berlin: Awesome.

0:36:56.5 Pam Nichols: Dr. Katie, thank you. And AAHA is so lucky to have you. I am...

0:37:01.2 Katie Berlin: Thank you.

0:37:01.8 Pam Nichols: Over the moon delighted that you are on the team. I'm so excited for Central Line. Can't wait to see what happens.

0:37:08.6 Katie Berlin: Thank you so much. That means a lot to me because AAHA is fantastic and I feel really, really lucky to be there.

0:37:14.3 Pam Nichols: Number one most important professional association of my life has been AAHA.

0:37:20.2 Katie Berlin: Love that. Well, thanks everyone, for listening. Thanks again, Dr. Pam. And we'll catch you next time on Central Line.