

0:00:04.2 Katie Berlin: Thank you so much, Jessica and Jen and the whole CareCredit Pets Best team for making this possible. And I just wanted to give them a shout out, at the beginning anyway, because they are the sponsors for this year for the Central Line Podcast. So we wouldn't have a podcast if it weren't for them. And they were sponsors when there was no podcast, just the idea of a podcast. And they've been nothing but supportive and generous and kind and so willing to share all of the ideas that we want to bring. So thank you so much for being such good supporters of us and of the veterinary world in general. I'm sure that most of you have encountered these two wonderful people at some point. Debbie Boone and Josh Vaisman are our guests today, and they are published authors, they are prolific speakers, consultants, and two of the people that I go to when I don't know how to solve a problem. These two are there to help. And they always give really excellent advice that's thoughtful and that's grounded in story. They ask you questions 'cause they want to hear the answers. And so I think that's a really good place to start for today. So, Josh and Debbie, thank you so much for joining us.

0:01:20.1 Debbie Boone: Gosh thanks for having us. I'm excited to be here and sitting between two of my favorite people in Vet Med, so it's going to be fun.

0:01:27.5 Josh Vaisman: It is pretty awe inspiring sitting up here with the two of yeah, so thanks for having us.

0:01:31.0 Katie Berlin: This is kind of a dream. Like, this is not a job, this is a really fortunate thing to be able to do. I wanted to start us off with just maybe for people who don't know you that well yet, could you maybe, Debbie, start us off with a little bit of a brief bio, how you got to be here and what it is you love?

0:01:52.2 Debbie Boone: Okay. I am a veterinary management consultant, and I've been in the veterinary profession since 1985, even though I don't look it. But my family growing up was in the restaurant business and hospitality, and so I brought hospitality into medicine, and it was a successful play, let's put it that way, and our practice was very successful. And so for 16 years, I've been working to teach veterinary teams good communication skills, because when we learn to communicate well with the humans in our world, our practices flourish and our people flourish and our culture flourishes. So for me, that is my crusade, is to teach animal people how to speak successfully to humans.

0:02:40.1 Katie Berlin: And Josh?

0:02:41.0 Josh Vaisman: Well, Dr. Berlin, I was born in Brooklyn, New York, on a crisp March morning.

0:02:47.3 Katie Berlin: I thought he was a good storyteller.

0:02:50.4 Josh Vaisman: I stumbled into the veterinary space in the late '90s, in '98 when I convinced a very wonderful and very tall man to allow me to work at a PetSmart Veterinary Services in Boulder, Colorado and immediately got hooked on this community. I like to joke. I've done just about everything in a small animal companion hospital except be a full doctor. Because I was once the right hand of a doctor who broke her wrist when she made the not so smart decision of trying to play soccer with me once. Including hospital ownership, practice, management, and then about six years ago started a consulting firm called Flourish Veterinary Consulting to bring the

science of human thriving to the veterinary space in ways that we can use each and every day.

0:03:34.5 Katie Berlin: That was very concise, both of you, for two very sort of long and winding roads that led you here, but I'm very grateful that they did. Winding Roads are some of my favorite roads. But you both published books this year. Debbie, yours came out in July. Right about... It was launched during the AVMA convention. It's called Hospitality and Healthcare, and we'll have both of these books. They'll be signing books at the end of this event, so stick around for that. And would you give us the elevator pitch? What's your book about, and why should everybody here read it?

0:04:14.3 Debbie Boone: Well, hospitality skills play out not just in serving our customers, but they also play out in serving each other. And when we learn to anticipate people's needs, we learn to personalize the service experience for them, then we are making them feel valued and respected and important. If we consider the challenges that we have with well being, if we can do these things and make our lives better and easier, and when we don't have to battle our clients every single day or battle our toxic team members every single day. But yet we learn conflict resolution skills. We learn anticipation of need. We can solve a lot of problems that we have before they become problems. And that's the goal of the book, is to teach people how to be empathetic and to feel like what it's like to be that client or that new team member on the other side of the counter, and to use hospitality skills to make them feel welcome and engaged in the practice.

0:05:19.1 Katie Berlin: I read it on the plane on the way here, and I'm going to read it on the plane again on the way back because I feel like there's so much packed into that little book. So definitely I think it achieves that goal for sure, and we'll get into more about that. Josh, how about you? Elevator pitch time.

0:05:36.4 Josh Vaisman: Sure. So, Katie, I've had the honor of meeting quite a lot of people in this community over the last several years, including a lot of people in leadership positions of some kind, a technician, manager, a CEO, and pretty much everything kind of in between. And there's one thing that folks may accuse me of being a bit naive for believing, but I very firmly believe it, and I will carry it to my grave. In the wonderful profession of veterinary medicine, there is an abundance of really good human beings with really good intentions doing the very best they can every day to make the world better for the people around them. And no one's ever taught us those skills. No one's ever taught us what it means to be a good leader of human beings and to have a positive impact on the people around us so that we can all thrive together in our work. I was one of those people with good intentions who had no clue what he was doing and ended up doing it pretty poorly, despite all of the very best intentions to the point of causing harm to other people and myself. I wanted to make sure that the good people of Vet Med didn't have to go through that kind of mistake themselves. So that's what this book is. It's the science of how we do that, but translated in a way that's really really approachable and actionable that we can use each and every day.

0:06:53.0 Katie Berlin: And that book is published by AHA, so you can get it at AHA's website. It's called Lead to thrive: The Science of Crafting Positive Veterinary Culture. And it is also excellent. And I have read it several times, and not just because I had to. But your book really strikes me, as somebody who loves leadership books and management books, really strikes me as something that this world of ours has been needing for a long time. Because as organizational psychology and leadership become more popular in the world in general, we still feel sort of insulated from it. And it's because I think veterinary medicine tends to do that. We tend to sort of stay in our world and feel like our managerial problems as well as medical problems are not the

same as other industries, but they really are. And you take so much of that research that's become so popular now in the general lexicon and you put it all together in a veterinary context. I think that's really really important.

0:07:56.2 Katie Berlin: So anyway, both Josh and Debbie have been on Central Line before, so if you missed their episodes, definitely check them out. Actually, Debbie's a veteran. She just keeps showing up.

0:08:06.3 Debbie Boone: I do yes.

0:08:06.3 Katie Berlin: She keeps asking me, I keep saying yes.

0:08:08.8 Debbie Boone: Yeah, I have no boundaries. I'm sorry.

0:08:11.0 Josh Vaisman: One of my favorite things about you, by the way.

0:08:15.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah, same.

0:08:16.8 Katie Berlin: But Debbie, I wanted to ask you so when we think of hospitality and we think of the stories we hear about the Ritz Carlton, things like that, we... To me at least, the little gut reaction is the customer's always right. It's like, whatever we have to do to make the customer happy, we're going to do that. And a whole lot of veterinary people think about that and are like, Absolutely not. And sometimes teams I've even seen this, I mean, sure, we all have. We've seen teams come together over the idea that it's us versus them. It's like we're facing the world together and the world is difficult clients and it feels like sometimes those things are really hard, like they just butt heads. But why is that not what you're talking about?

0:08:57.3 Debbie Boone: When we set up an adversarial relationship with clients, they feel that and it's going to play out in having conflict. But instead if we can train our teams to be proactive, to be empathetic to the fact that our clients are not veterinarians and they don't live in this world and there's a lot of things that we do or events that happen with animals that cause people a great deal of fear. So a lot of conflict, really the root cause of that, is fear. Is it fear that I don't understand what the doctor is gonna say to me? Is it fear that I can't afford the care? Is it fear that I'll be judged as a poor pet owner? And so all those things are coming into play in the emotion of the client. So if the teams learn to give grace and to be proactive about heading those things off, then they find out that the client is not their enemy. In fact, we should be partners. This is a collaboration between us and what our job is, truthfully, is to be the coach. We are not the hero of the story. The client is the hero of the story. And our job is to be that wise counselor that guides them through this challenging process and makes them feel comforted, safe and secure that we got their back. And so that comes from building these trust relationships.

0:10:27.0 Debbie Boone: And when we do start to have negative conversations in our hospital and we make the client the idiot, the enemy, the fool, when we've all seen the memes that are putting our clients down, then we dehumanize them. And that dehumanization is exactly what happened in Nazi Germany with the Jews. It's what happens in multiple dictatorships when the other people become less than and it makes us feel like we are better. Human nature likes to be a little bit better than that person. I remember saying something to Katie about it. She just went, oh, I feel so called out here because when we are judging people and like, I would never do that for my pet. You're

such an idiot. But they don't know. They have no idea. And it's so unfair to measure them by our yardstick because we live in this world all the time. So we just have to give people grace and understanding and realize that we are not an expert in everything either. We are an expert in vet medicine, but I can't lay bricks. But somebody out there and our client can. And we need to understand that they are the expert in their field, we're the expert in our field and our job is just to be their guide.

[applause]

0:11:42.7 Debbie Boone: Oh. Thank you.

0:11:45.9 Katie Berlin: Yeah, absolutely. And it took a while for me to learn that in practice, it's very tempting to fall into that judging language, especially when it's a really rough day or a client's having a really rough day and we don't know why, and they take it out on us. And so it can feel like we have to give up a part of ourselves to provide the client with the experience that you're talking about. But what you're really talking about is that that experience can enrich the practice for everybody. Josh, on the surface, your two books maybe aren't totally related. Yours is about positive leadership of the team. Debbie's is about hospitality and empathy for the client. What does your philosophy and your study of the science of positive leadership, what does that have to do with Debbie's talk about hospitality?

0:12:34.8 Josh Vaisman: We're both talking about human relationships, and that's ultimately what it is. I'm a big fan of kitschy statements. One of the ones that...

0:12:43.2 Katie Berlin: You are not wearing a T shirt.

0:12:44.7 Josh Vaisman: I'm not yet. One of the ones that I find myself relying on often is this idea that in any business type endeavor, whether it's the delivery of service to a client, it's trying to get something from an Amazon warehouse to somebody's home. Any outcome that comes out of a business endeavor is the lagging result of a human input. So where the humans go, the business goes. It's no different internally or externally, how the team interacts and their ability to step up to challenges and be resilient to the barriers that they face, their sense of fulfillment and joy in the work that they have. How they interact as a team, their productivity, their ability to collaborate externally, what they do with and for clients, and how they respond to those challenging client interactions. All of that is determined by how the human being is doing. So it has to start with leadership.

0:13:44.3 Josh Vaisman: The reality is every organization is a hierarchical structure, and there are people in that organization who have more power and authority than others. And when there's a disparity of power, there's also a disparity of responsibility. Those in charge, those who have more responsibility, they're not beholden to the outcomes. They're beholden to the people that create the outcomes. I think they're wholly related. If there's no hospitality, there's no business. If there's no good leadership, there's no business. They have to go hand in hand.

0:14:22.5 Katie Berlin: That's a good answer.

0:14:23.5 Josh Vaisman: Thanks.

0:14:26.6 Debbie Boone: That's why we like him.

0:14:27.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah. And it sounds so simple, It's like, oh, human relationships. We know how to do that. Nothing is harder than human relationships. Like, nothing. And I'm thinking about teams that I've been a part of where clearly we did not feel safe together or aligned in purpose. Is it realistic to ask those teams to create the culture of hospitality that Debbie's talking about? Or does some serious work internally need to be done before we can expect that to start to grow?

0:15:00.7 Josh Vaisman: I'm curious to hear how Debbie responds to this, but no, I don't think it's possible, I think, that you can't ask of another human being what you're not giving to that human being. People live up to the standard of the context. People deliver value when they feel valued.

0:15:24.4 Debbie Boone: Yeah, well, businesses, there are very simple rules in business, and one is get the people right and the business shows up. And the leaders have to appreciate and value and guide and support the people. And they also have to, when we say, be subservient to them, but also be that counselor, be that coach, be the person who is lifting them up in their career. And when people feel valued, then they bring their creative juices to work, and that creativity comes out in the hospitality. Now, the question is, can you do hospitality without having that leadership? But everything starts from the top, and so there has to be buy in from the leadership that we want to make the effort to do these things.

0:16:12.2 Debbie Boone: And one of the things that we know from human medicines is we don't measure things as well on this side of the pond as the human side does. But one of the things that we know from the human side is that when we start to build hospitality into our workflows, that we have better culture, we have less turnover, we have client retention. In human medicine, it's patient retention. People are 85% more satisfied with their physician if the doctor just calls them by name. It's such a simple thing, but it's just looking at that person and saying, I see you as a person. And hospitality skills are between team members, too. They're not limited to just the person walking in the door, because if you have a new staff member coming on board and your team is trained in hospitality or has a hospitality mindset where they're thinking, how can I help you? How can I make it feel better for you to be here?

0:17:10.2 Debbie Boone: I've often told this story, but when I started as a new CSR in my practice, I'd been there about three days. It was a crazy practice because we didn't take appointments, and it was Katy bar the door. Everything was wild. And about three days into it, I was in a state of overwhelm because I was always also trained with the follow her mentality. Like, there was no list, there was no just follow her. And three days into it, Joanne, who had been working there for a while, invited me to lunch and made me a grilled cheese sandwich. And that alone cemented the fact that I was going to stay there because I felt like I had a mentor and somebody to go to, and that somebody that cared that I showed up for work every day. And that little bit of hospitality. She was, in her former career, a flight attendant, and so she had that hospitality mentality. But those little things can make so much difference when onboarding new staff and that is having your team understand hospitality and using it internally and externally.

0:18:15.4 Josh Vaisman: What I love about what you're saying, Debbie, is you're describing to me if we want to expect hospitality from our teams, we have to create hospitable environments for them to work in. And when we do that, they will, in turn, deliver on that hospitality.

0:18:28.9 Debbie Boone: Exactly right.

0:18:30.0 Debbie Boone: It becomes the way we do things here.

0:18:32.1 Josh Vaisman: Yeah. Yeah.

0:18:34.5 Katie Berlin: Okay. So I know that, I don't know if anybody in this room is thinking this, but if anybody here has tried to lead a team before, they're probably thinking about a situation where they like went to a conference and they came back with all this like stuff to make life better for everyone. Like, we're gonna implement all this stuff. And then they have a staff meeting and they're like, here's the stuff we're gonna do. Like, it's gonna make everybody's lives better. And the rest of the team is like, ugh. And the eye rolls and the sigh. Like if a team doesn't want to do these things, if a team is like, I don't really wanna create a delightful day for my client [laughter] I just wanna like, come to work and feed the pets and like, go home. Is that the wrong team? Or has that team been in maybe the wrong environment? Like, where do we start with that?

0:19:24.5 Debbie Boone: It's always tough to change culture, and when you have that kind of toxic environment, a lot of times it happens because maybe they've tried in the past and they've just gotten no recognition for trying, and finally they just get worn out of trying and they just start to show up to get a paycheck and go home. But again, going back to what Josh's points are always about the leaders, the leaders set the tone. And it doesn't take but one to start the ball rolling and that, but that person has got to be influential. And they've got to be consistent. That's the other thing you've gotta keep after it. As a consultant, we go into practices and we know people hate change. [laughter] They just really hate it. And it has a lot to do with brain science that we won't get into here.

0:20:15.4 Debbie Boone: But you have to be patient. And because change takes time and a little bit of success start with small things. One, change, two changes, show the value of those changes to them. If you're tired of having clients yell at you, watch this, let me show you how to do these things because it will stop the yelling. Well then when that happens, life gets better. You can have more fun at work when people are not screaming at you every day. And so just little wins help move the chain along.

0:20:50.5 Josh Vaisman: Yeah. Katie, that's such a wonderful, I love that question because I've seen it and I've been in it and I've been that person too.

0:20:58.5 Debbie Boone: Oh yeah. Same.

0:20:58.7 Josh Vaisman: It's like, ah, here we go again. Can we just get on with a day? There's stuff to do. My sort of response to that I think would be that the natural state of a human being is not apathy. We become apathetic. Our environment nudges us into a state of apathy, which means that the environment can nudge us into our normal state, which is achievement. It's growth. We are not built to be stagnant creatures. And so we can change the environment. You're right. I think I agree that most of the time when we come in and we say, Hey, big old change went to the conference, people start to get a little bit upset with that because they've seen it in the past.

0:21:40.5 Josh Vaisman: Like you said, ah, I've heard this all before. It's the same old round and round and nothing's gonna change. But in my experience, people get really excited about change

when they see that it's meaningful to them. Like the example you gave of you're tired of clients yelling at you, let me show you this. And then they get a taste of what's possible. That possibility compels people towards positive change. But it behooves us as leaders to prove it to them. Because they're apathetic for a reason, and we're probably in large part responsible for it.

0:22:16.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah. I would agree based on my experience that apathy is not a happy place for me to be [laughter] Like, I can't be apathetic about work and happy in the rest of my life.

0:22:25.0 Josh Vaisman: Yeah.

0:22:26.7 Katie Berlin: It just doesn't work that way. And most veterinary professionals don't choose this profession because it's easy. It's an easy way to make money, and then you can go do your other stuff. So, they care and they're passionate and we can sort of lose that in the wrong environment. So...

0:22:40.0 Josh Vaisman: Agree.

0:22:40.2 Katie Berlin: That's inspiring to hear. I as a lifetime associate, so I was never a practice owner or practice manager. And so I was paid on ProSal for the entire 12 years that I was in practice. And the way that I was compensated, the way that I was judged, my reviews when I was on a leadership team for a practice, the numbers that I saw, they were like what's your average client transaction?

0:23:05.4 Katie Berlin: Are you seeing? Are you going in and out of rooms on time? How much are you making on your surgery days? That kind of thing. How do we need to change the system of compensation and reward to take into consideration these acts of generosity that we could do a million times per day, but that don't generate immediate returns. So like, the spreadsheet's gonna look the same next month as it does this month. In a year it might look different because we've retained more clients and clients are telling other people about us, but in that moment, it probably didn't change how much money we made that day. Or at least not enough to make a difference. How do we adjust that system? 'cause that requires leaders to change. We all know that's tricky.

0:23:51.5 Josh Vaisman: It is tricky. Again, the kitschy statements, our culture is what we incentivize and incentives can, ProSal is an excellent example of an objective, tangible financial incentive. But that's not the only incentives. There are subjective incentives. What I pay attention to the things that when you come into my office, I sit up and I say, oh, okay, this needs some time and energy. And the things that I'm like, yeah. That we can deal with that later. That's also a form of incentive. I have opinions about ProSal and I know that there will be people who disagree with this.

0:24:27.5 Debbie Boone: Same.

0:24:27.7 Josh Vaisman: But I'm gonna be a bit provocative here and say, if it were up to me, that would be eliminated from our profession. You can't have a team-based approach to something that incentivizes individuals. They don't align. They just don't. So if your goal is to build a culture that is focused on the bottom line only, by all means, embrace those kinds of individual drivers and attract people who are drawn to that way of incentivizing. But realize that if you are heavily incentivizing individual performance, you will get individual performance. You will not get collaborative work. There's no reason to be hospitable to everybody. There's no reason to develop high quality

relationships. There's only reason to squeeze as much from the lemon as you can get.

0:25:19.3 Interlude: This AAHA podcast is brought to you by CareCredit. CareCredit understands that all veterinary teams are busier than ever. To help patients get the care they need, the CareCredit Health and Pet CareCredit Card allows clients to access a budget friendly financing experience anytime from anywhere on their own smart device. They can learn, see if they pre-qualify, apply, and even pay if approved, all on that smart device. With just a tap, they have a friendly contactless way to pay over time for the services and treatments their pet needs, whether it be a general referring or specialty hospital, as long as they accept the CareCredit credit card.

0:26:00.6 Debbie Boone: And I think for me, I managed hospitals for 23 years, and sure, I looked at the KPIs, but for me, they were more for coaching purposes, rather than kind of going and beating up going, Katie, you didn't do enough lab work. It's defined like why you weren't doing as much lab work as all the other five doctors or so what was the hold up for that. But business is a long game and there is so much short term thinking in business that, it's to the next quarter, it's to the next month, it's to the next P&L. And when you look at long game strategy, it's much more important to build a solid team, to build a great relationship with clients who become raving fans of yours, who send more people like them who want the services that you offer.

0:26:54.5 Debbie Boone: And over time you see that what you're gonna see is your bottom line goes up, your payroll goes down. Why? Because your people became incredibly effective and efficient. Because you are constantly training and constantly turning over. They have trust relationships with your clients because the clients see the same faces and for years they see the same faces that come in there and there's a great comfort in that. And so they start to say yes. And client retention matters because when we first see a client, they don't know who we are. They don't trust us completely. But 10 years in, we've been through several major things with their pets, and now let's dock whatever you say. So it really, you cannot look at short-term goals to make a successful long-term business.

0:27:46.3 Katie Berlin: I'm thinking about, we had Dr. Stacy Santi on the podcast and she said something, she was talking about how like her ideal day is a day that she planned months ago by trying, by ending up having like a bunch of long-term clients that she just loves book all on the same day. Those are like the Unicorn days. Where it's like the dogs and the cats and the pets that you can't wait to see and they come with really great people and you're not gonna have to argue about stuff and they're not gonna yell at your team. And those are just the best days. And she calls it not wanting to go on 21st dates a day because you don't have to sell yourself to those people. They already trust you. And I'm just picturing that when I listen to you is like, you're putting an investment into the bank.

0:28:27.4 Katie Berlin: That's gonna come back as just day after day like that on your schedule. When people just keep coming back and you don't have to do that dance for them all the time. It's just part of your relationship. That is veterinary nirvana as far as I'm concerned. [laughter] For a very non-emergency veterinarian [laughter] I like those relationships a lot, but they're, and they're worth gold. Debbie, you told a story in your book about a CSR team, where they were concerned, they were upset because they weren't getting a lot of feedback especially positive feedback from their leaders about like, if they did something good, if they had a good day, they didn't know if they were doing a good job. And you said, well, there's nothing stopping you from giving that to each other.

0:29:10.5 Katie Berlin: So like, if one of them notices that somebody at the desk did a great job handling an angry client, or diffusing a situation, going the extra mile, they could give that shout out to each other. And I love that. And I absolutely believe that's true. But Josh, you said the impact of a great leader cannot be overstated. And I'm just thinking about that team, and I wanted to ask both of you, do you feel like that can make up for a bad or absent leader in any situation? Like, can a team really support itself and each other through that situation if they're not able to convert leadership?

0:29:54.6 Katie Berlin: Start with that.

0:29:55.6 Josh Vaisman: I'm being pointed at.

0:29:55.7 Katie Berlin: Yes.

0:29:56.5 Debbie Boone: Yeah. [laughter], I could tell you had an answer for that. So.

0:30:00.4 Josh Vaisman: When Debbie Boone points at you, you respond.

0:30:01.5 Debbie Boone: You answer. [chuckle]

0:30:03.5 Josh Vaisman: Yeah. I think it's probably contextual. I think that there are probably some environments, and we've probably all experienced environments like this where we've worked for a less than ideal boss or in a less than ideal organization. But gosh, the team around us kind of buoyed us enough to get through. But it's that the buoyed us enough to get through. There's some interesting data that suggests that probably one of the top predictors of job satisfaction is not the work that you do, but the relationships that you have at work. And the relationships when we ask people to rate the quality of relationships at work, it turns out that almost 90% of what they're thinking about is not their colleagues. It's the relationship with their boss. So yes, it makes a difference if we work with good people who are kind and they notice things and they point those things out, that absolutely makes a positive impact. And there are environments where that's insufficient because so much of the responsibility falls upon the person with power, the person in charge.

0:31:10.4 Katie Berlin: So I'll have to tell you the rest of the story.

0:31:12.5 Debbie Boone: Yes. Yeah.

0:31:14.5 Katie Berlin: So I did talk to the CSRs because they were a great team. And they were magnificent at handling all the different challenges at the front desk, but they said nobody ever recognizes, and I said, recognize each other. There's no reason that you can't recognize each other. But then I went back to their manager and the owner of the practice, and I said, you have got to start paying attention and recognizing the effort of your team if you intend to keep them. Because otherwise you're gonna lose some really great people. So yeah. You can support each other. It's wonderful working in a team that's collaborative and works together, but it still comes from the top. That's where it matters.

0:31:56.6 Katie Berlin: That the rest of the story is very important there.

0:31:57.9 Debbie Boone: Yes. Yeah.

0:32:00.3 Katie Berlin: And I think we've all worked on teams where the people we work with have saved us in a way from ourselves as we like, tell each other these negative stories. We can also tell each other stories of good things that we've done and that we see others doing. And I wanna talk about storytelling now. This is the kickoff for the Express Yourself event. That's gonna be going on all year. I love that storytelling as, Jen and Jessica and anyone who listens to the podcast knows, like initially Central Line is gonna be like 20 minute episodes. And I was like, well, you got the wrong girl for that [laughter] [laughter] because to me, that story is so important.

0:32:37.4 Katie Berlin: And to get into that story, no matter what we're talking about, if it's like diabetes or communication, I think is at the heart of excellence in everything we do and also at the heart of how we can improve the way that we relate to each other. There's a ton of voices out there now. So storytelling's become kind of par for the course with social media. People have access to a storytelling medium that reaches the world all the time. And so we hear this chorus of voices and this chorus of stories, and a lot of times I feel like they fall into two camps. There's the extremely negative story. The story that is like, we are broken. Our profession is fragmented and fractured. Clients have never been this difficult to deal with. That may all be true, but the tone of that story is very negative. And then there's also the ones that are like, chin up. Nothing but good vibes. [laughter] I know you love that one. Good Vibes Only...

0:33:37.5 Josh Vaisman: No, that is a T-shirt you will never see me wearing.

0:33:39.4 Katie Berlin: And so there's this clash between this toxic positivity that isn't fixing anything. It's just telling you that your problems aren't real if you're unhappy. And then you have these negative stories that are planting all of these seeds in our brains that say, we are helpless. We can't fix this. We are victims potentially. How can an event like Express Yourself, move the needle and make a difference and be different in the realm of storytelling?

0:34:10.5 Josh Vaisman: I think there's a lot of value in being candid and including possibility. So clear examples of what's real and what can be, can be a really nice way to bridge that gap. It is real. We do have issues in this profession. This is nowhere near a perfect profession, and in many cases it is contributing to harm. We're hurting ourselves and each other. And it's not ubiquitous. There's so many examples of places that do it really well. Debbie's been in several ways, but she tells stories about these kinds of places. I mean, the story you just told is an example of this was a negative situation where people were feeling unvalued and hurt and then an intervention was applied that started to change the tide for them. And I think that we need to show that, be candid about what's wrong and also talk about what could be.

0:35:14.5 Debbie Boone: I think one of our challenges in veterinary medicine is you don't know what you don't know. And fortunately Josh has written a book to illuminate us [laughter], and hopefully mine will do the same thing. But when we've always done it this way, sometimes it's very difficult to move ourselves out of pattern. And we have to realize first of all, that it's necessary that we do it. And obviously we are hearing stories on that side of the coin. That's everything is, the sky is falling, but we can't be unrealistic about the fact that this is hard work. It is physically and mentally demanding work. It is emotionally demanding work. And I think being realistic about what it really is, I think we need to even start in before tech school, before vet school, we need to

set realistic expectations of what the work is like.

0:36:08.3 Debbie Boone: Because when you look at some of the statistics just from the veterinary schools, the veterinary students come in first year and they're all enthusiastic and they're gung-ho and by fourth year their confidence level is shot. And they're kind of terrified to get out into the world because they didn't have an expectation that what it was really going to be like to do the work. And that alone sets us up for some failure. So setting realistic expectations, I think would be a big plus. We also have got to keep carrying on the conversation, but we can't let the negative people drag us down. When my staff used to come to me with a problem, I would go, okay, I understand that. What do you think we should do about it? Because when you turn the tables back and you make people think and problem solve, and they can be problem solvers, then everybody gets involved. If you just say, okay, I've got to fix it for you, then they're gonna dump that on you or dump that on me and Josh or Katie and say, okay, figure out, and then you tell me what to do. But that it doesn't work that way, and it never does. So we've got to get everybody's thinking about it and saying, how are we gonna fix it?

0:37:23.4 Josh Vaisman: I agree.

0:37:23.5 Katie Berlin: Love that. It makes me think about, Dr. Rebecca Hayes's keynote yesterday. It was fantastic. She's really good. And she's a stress researcher. I mean, that's what she talks about. And she was talking about how you can't be afraid and curious at the same time. And so, like asking those questions about like, what can we do to fix it? Where is this issue coming from? Like what as a group can we do to address this together can help flip that switch from fear and anxiety to problem solving?

0:37:53.0 Katie Berlin: And I love that. And Josh, you said one of a quote that I wrote down from the book is, our mindset about stress affects how stress impacts us, which is also very related to what Rebecca was talking about yesterday. But I'm just thinking, so thinking on an individual level now, rather than systems we've been talking about like, how can practice cultures change? Like people are struggling with the next hour the stories we're telling ourselves right this minute affect how we're gonna feel for the next hour. So when we express ourselves, whether it's to our coworker or to ourselves, in just like a story about what's happening right now, how can we set ourselves up for success and how we think about that stress? Fix it, just solve that problem right now in front of everyone.

0:38:41.7 Josh Vaisman: I recently had a conversation with a practice manager, might have been a medical director now, I'm mixing up stories, but what they ended up doing in their hospital, Katie, you might be familiar with like the emotion wheel. So there's some really interesting neuroscience research that suggests that this idea of name it to tame it, Brene Brown talks about this, There's some neuroscience behind that. When we verbalize how we're feeling, it can reduce amygdala response. And so we are actively de-stressing ourselves just by saying, describing your emotional state, what you're feeling. However, how many of us have had like emotion wheel training in our education? Hey, nice, very good. There's three people in the room. That's exceptional. Most of us, oh, nice. Okay.

[overlapping conversation]

0:39:31.8 Josh Vaisman: Most of us going through traditional education come out with about five

emotion words, And that's not, there's not a lot of depth to that. That's what the emotion wheel does. So in this practice, what they ended up doing was they had a conversation about exactly that in advance. We're gonna create an agreement here that we know these moments are gonna come up. There's gonna be hours where you're gonna wonder why on God's green earth, you decided veterinary medicine was a good idea. And when that happens, we're gonna give each other permission to notice it and ask to describe what you're feeling. And they passed out emotion wheel key chains to everybody. And so that was an agreement that they had and it gave them something that they could pull from a tangible tool that was part of their culture, now. Hey, Debbie, seems like you're having a rough time now. Can you tell me how you're feeling? Here's the emotion wheel.

0:40:20.3 Debbie Boone: I'm feeling disrespected.

0:40:21.8 Josh Vaisman: I'm feeling disrespected, And that's it. And even just having that agreement in advance gave them a way to kinda vent in a healthy way that tamped down some of it. It doesn't eliminate it. Nothing's going to like, like Debbie said, this is, damn hard work. What we're doing in vet med, it is challenging us every day. And it's so unpredictable and there's variability to it and all sorts of uncertainty. Listen, it's gonna be hard forever. We're never gonna make vet med the easiest thing on the planet. And the truth is that wouldn't benefit us, but we can have tools to respond productively when those stressful moments come.

0:40:58.3 Debbie Boone: Well, let's face it, life is hard and it doesn't matter what you do for a living. There's some negative aspects to any job that you have. I grew up in the restaurant business and I can tell you on Friday night, hungry people are rough to deal with. So Hungry is real. So everybody's got some challenges. I do feel like just as Josh has, I love the wheel of emotion. I showed it in my talk this morning and people would come to me as the manager and go, oh, Ms. So-and-so is so mad. Well, she wasn't really, she was aggravated, but she wasn't really mad. So we just defining where she really was also helps with customer service and hospitality because people gain emotional intelligence and they understand their own feelings. And so I feel like that is one of the things that we really need to work on too, as teams is emotional intelligence and understanding how we feel about things and being able to express those things. And it'd be okay because the, a lot of people, maybe they grew up in a culture that they were not allowed to express themselves.

0:42:04.2 Debbie Boone: And maybe we do have a good open environment in our practice, but that doesn't mean that the people that we hired really trust that. So we have to work with those people until the point where they feel like, okay, it really is okay to fail. It really is okay to make a mistake. I'm really not gonna get in trouble for that because maybe it was a teacher, maybe it was a parent and they learned that at an early age and as a child. And so we need to really understand humans in order to be successful in solving our problems. And so studying the people side of our business. I know Josh hired a lot of people. I hired a lot of people and it would always look at like, I like animals better than people. And I go, oh no.

[laughter]

0:42:51.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah. Nobody ever told us we were going to have to study human.

[laughter]

0:42:53.4 Debbie Boone: There's a lot of human involved in this and attached to every leash and

every lead line. There is a human being that we have to work with. So when we learn the human side of it, our life gets better.

0:43:04.0 Katie Berlin: Love that. Okay. So one more serious question, which is there's a ton of anti-client messaging. We've kinda touched on that earlier. And sometimes clients really are kinda jerks to us. It doesn't mean they're jerks as people. It means they're jerks in that moment. And we don't know why, there's usually a reason, but, and it's usually not us. We might be able to do things differently, but it's usually not underlying because of us. And when we see this messaging out there, so say somebody is like an absolute devotee of your philosophy, that empathy, hospitality, understanding people and where they're coming from and trying to meet them where they are, that's the key. When we see this anti-client messaging, then we're kinda like tempted to fight about it. Should we be sort of trying to fight that messaging online or should we just be trying to drown it out? Like, is the best thing to do to sort of treat it like a bad review and just flood the site with good reviews or to have a discussion about that or post specific messaging aimed at those anti-client messages?

0:44:15.5 Debbie Boone: I think that depends on your communication skillset, because we all know that answering anything online can open up a can of worms we might want to get involved in.

0:44:24.2 Katie Berlin: Probably online's the wrong place.

0:44:25.4 Debbie Boone: Yes the wrong place to do that. But truthfully, when we do see somebody coming across with negative messaging, I do think it's important, especially within the team, that we step into it and say, let's talk about this. Let's talk about how you would feel if you were that client. Do you think this is an appropriate behavior for you? And is this the way that you want to be thought of as somebody who is really negative and kinda mean to people? Because do you think of yourself as that? So, I've always talked about curiosity and asking questions instead of ever making accusations, because they do open people up and they do enable people to examine their own actions without being the judge and jury. And I would much rather people judge themselves by me asking them open-ended questions than, and guiding them, than me coming at them and going, you are very, very mean to this so-and-so and I don't want to see that again. I am not your, you are not too, and I am not your mother. I am your coach and your leader, and I want you to examine this and explore for yourself how to be a better person, 'cause I don't think you're that person.

0:45:42.7 Josh Vaisman: Yeah. A good friend of all of ours, Phil Richmond, often talks about learning to take our thoughts to court. And we can give other people the gift of that. We call this perspective taking. That's kind of what Debbie is after here, I feel like. I love this idea of curiosity. So, on our team at Flourish, Andy Davison has this phrase that I steal all the time from her. She talks about Big C questions, Big C Curiosity, capital C. These are open-ended questions that give people the opportunity to examine what they're feeling. I think there's ample chance for us to use that to help guide people in those conversations. I can see that you're upset by what happened with this client. Tell me what happened. How do you think that occurred? Explain to me what you're feeling right now. These sort of open-ended that give people the opportunity to verbalize what they're feeling. That provides perspective. It also, name it, to team it, helps to tamp things down. And it validates that the way you're feeling, it is hurtful what happened to you. Of course, you're upset. And then we can get to the end part of, okay, well, what can we do about that?

0:46:51.8 Debbie Boone: And, not but.

0:46:53.0 Josh Vaisman: Yeah.

0:46:53.6 Josh Vaisman: And, not but.

0:46:54.4 Debbie Boone: And, not but. Yeah. I really feel like assuming positive intent is something that we should train everybody on our team. And the understanding that it's never about you. But we are trained diagnosticians. And asking questions and getting open-ended questions and so getting information from people is the thing that we know how to do. But we've got to turn that skill from medicine into human and go and diagnose the situations. Like Josh says, tell me how did it happen? Where was the tipping point? What do you see as where that tipping point was? What could have happened that maybe would have stopped it? How could we have intervened? How could we have maybe not blindsided the client that caused this sort of to flow downhill? And then that curiosity leads to problem solving and solutions for the future.

0:47:54.5 Josh Vaisman: Martin Seligman talks about it was originally developed as a self-tool to help with anxiety, that kinda thing. But I think it can be very helpful in these kinds of conversations. When you can get to the point after you validated how somebody is feeling, and you can get to the point of starting to sort of examine it and dissect it, Katie, if we're going to assume that this client really is just the rudest, most ridiculous human being on the planet, why do you think they behaved the way they behaved? And give you the opportunity to just verbally vomit all of that out. Okay. Now let's, let's put that aside for a second. Let's assume that this is the world's kindest human being that's having the worst day of their life. What do you think happened there? Okay. Now that we've explored sort of both ends of the spectrum, what do you think is, was really occurring? Like, what do you think is the most realistic explanation for why this client behaved unreasonably?

0:48:44.1 Josh Vaisman: And that can give us the opportunity to get all that stuff out that we're already getting out and then redirect it in a healthier way.

0:48:53.3 Katie Berlin: That's a really useful trick. I'm gonna remember that 'cause I tend to react. I'm a reactor.

0:49:00.0 Josh Vaisman: Sure.

0:49:00.6 Katie Berlin: So you've helped me a lot with that, but I still am a reactor. But I, and for anyone who's thinking like, gosh, these people would be great to know when I'm really stressed out. The answer is that is absolutely true. Because I would say Josh, especially has talked me down like many times because you ask questions that you legitimately wanna know the answers to and then make me wanna know the answers to them also. And this is something we can all do for each other is listen, ask questions, and then try to help our friends get out of that. Just like mindset, the rage, rage is real.

0:49:36.9 Debbie Boone: But don't try to fix it for...

0:49:39.3 Katie Berlin: Right. Yeah.

0:49:40.0 Debbie Boone: That's the other part of this is don't be the fixer.

0:49:40.7 Katie Berlin: Oh yeah. That's raging...

0:49:41.0 Debbie Boone: Yes. Just let them explore and fix themselves.

0:49:46.2 Katie Berlin: Okay. So we're getting ready to wrap up here. Last couple of minutes. I wanna make sure everyone knows we're gonna be signing. You guys are gonna be signing books later. So stick around for that. And we have some amazing stories to come in between. But I wanted to close out with a story from each of you, a little mini one, because I was, I had somebody new cut my hair last time. And so she didn't, it's the whole thing like, oh, I'm a vet and we have to talk about it. And I was hoping she didn't have any pets. She did. And it was bad scene. There was a wolf hybrid involved. Anyway...

0:50:19.3 Debbie Boone: Oh, God.

0:50:19.5 Katie Berlin: But...

0:50:19.8 Debbie Boone: At least you weren't on the airplane.

0:50:22.5 Katie Berlin: Right. Yeah.

0:50:23.6 Katie Berlin: I mean, it wasn't a color appointment. So, but she, she said, okay, tell me what the weirdest story was that you have from working in a vet clinic. And I knew she wanted like the really bizarre stuff. Like the kid who was peeing in the litter box. And so the owner thought it was a cat that was like super pupd but it's a six-year-old human.

0:50:44.2 Josh Vaisman: Wait, is that real?

0:50:44.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah, that's real. But that didn't even come to mind right away. Like all I could think about were the bazillion beautiful little things that happen every day. That was what I wanted to tell her about working in a vet clinic. And I've heard those called glimmers, like just the little things that is the opposite of a trigger. It just makes you feel like just that little bit warmer and happier about your life. So I wanted to just close out with a glimmer from each of you, Debbie, you wanna go first?

0:51:10.3 Debbie Boone: Sure. Well, the one that came to mind was I had two clients and they were childless and they had this little miniature poodle, whose name was Gator, aptly named. Gator was one of the dogs that they turned the rear to you, Before you take them away for boarding. Well, Gator passed away and they wanted a little black poodle. And just one day I happened to be having a conversation with a new client who had a little black poodle puppy. And I said, where did you get this poodle? And she told me. And so I called the couple up and I went, I think I found you a black poodle puppy. And they were so excited about it. Went right out, got the poodle and came into the clinic a couple of days later with him. And they named him Boone after me. And so that I always remember that.

0:51:57.4 Katie Berlin: I love that.

0:51:58.7 Josh Vaisman: That's absolutely lovely.

0:52:00.0 Katie Berlin: Everybody in the room just went, ah.

0:52:02.8 Josh Vaisman: And we're done.

0:52:03.1 Katie Berlin: Yeah. That's a wrap. Josh.

0:52:07.1 Josh Vaisman: Okay. So I want to tell a story about impact, but it's not mine. So I'm in Vegas for Western and I randomly wake up at three in the morning. My wife may be watching this. So she'll recall this and look at my phone, which was on do not disturb. And there were 32 missed calls from my wife. Yeah. This is generally not a good thing. It turns out there was an emergency at home with our 225 gallon fish tank and she didn't know what to do. So this is the day before I'm supposed to deliver four hours of content. And we just happened to have Andy Davison at the conference with me, but Andy was not on the speaker's docket. Now I'm in this kinda rough space. So at 6:00 in the morning, I waited till 6:00. I called up Andy and woke her up to ask her if she wouldn't mind filling in for me in four hours so that I could go home to help my wife. So she did, which was amazing.

0:52:55.7 Josh Vaisman: Today, after I spoke this morning, somebody from the audience came up to me and said, I saw Andy speak at Western. I know it was supposed to be you, but you had an emergency and I gotta tell you, she changed my life.

0:53:11.4 Katie Berlin: Yes.

0:53:12.0 Josh Vaisman: Afterwards, I came up to her and I told her about some struggles I was having and she gave me advice that made everything better. That's a glimmer.

0:53:21.1 Katie Berlin: Oh, that is. Love those two stories. And also that's an excellent plug for next week's episode of Central Line, which features Andy Davison.

0:53:29.6 Josh Vaisman: Oh, that's awesome.

0:53:32.2 Katie Berlin: Anyway, and Andy is indeed wonderful and perfect, perfect compliment to the Flourish team. So definitely check her out. But thank you both so much for sharing your wisdom here. And in the books that are waiting for us at the back of the room when this event wraps up later, definitely check them out. Also, audiobook. I know Josh's is available on audiobook. Debbie, do you have that yet?

0:53:57.9 Debbie Boone: No, not yet.

0:53:58.6 Katie Berlin: Hopefully soon. But Josh reads his own. So if you want Josh Vaisman to read his book to you, it is now possible. So I just, I can't say enough about how much the two of you have given to veterinary medicine so far, and I just can't wait to see what's next. So thank you so much for spending this time.

0:54:16.9 Debbie Boone: Thank you for having us. I enjoyed it.

0:54:19.5 Josh Vaisman: Yeah, this is delightful. Thanks, Katie.

0:54:22.2 Katie Berlin: And thanks to CareCredit and Pets Best. And we'll throw it back to Jessica.