

Central Line: The AAHA Podcast Transcript

Episode Title: Veterinary Visionaries: Helping Us Help Ourselves

Guest: Garth Jordan, MBA, CSM, CSPO

0:00:00.6 Speaker 1: Welcome to Central Line, the AAHA podcast. This is the official Podcast of the American Animal Hospital Association, dedicated to simplifying the journey towards excellence in veterinary medicine for every member of the veterinary team. Here's your host, Dr. Katie Berlin.

0:00:21.4 Katie Berlin: Hi, welcome back to Central Line. Thanks so much for joining us today. I am very excited to be here today with Garth Jordan, the CEO of AAHA. Thanks so much for joining us, Garth.

0:00:34.0 Garth Jordan: Hi Katie, thank you.

0:00:35.8 KB: Garth, if you wouldn't mind, would you just start off by telling us a little bit about yourself, what you do, and how it is that you ended up there?

0:00:45.1 GJ: Sure. I have a different background. The first third of my career... I'm closing in on 60 years old, if that matters, but... So the first third of my career was like an Australian walkabout. I worked for the Reagan era space laser initiative, it sounds like an Austin Powers film...

0:01:06.0 KB: It does.

0:01:07.9 GJ: Yeah. [chuckle] I worked in environmental chemistry on some of the most polluted land in the United States, back in the '80s. I helped start up a mail-order pharmacy, I was the fourth employee, and we got to 125. So I was kind of all over the place in my first third of my career. And the second third, I got into working with professional associations, just kind of fell in love with the idea of helping professionals in their life-long learning journey, and networking journeys, and that kind of thing. And so I've worked with OR nurses in healthcare, medical group management, as well as healthcare financing, even in IT and higher education. And so that path of working in sales, and marketing, and membership development, and all kinds of different careers within trade and professional associations, led me to the opportunity to work in this role as CEO at AAHA.

0:02:11.2 KB: Well, that is definitely a long and winding path to where you are now.

0:02:15.0 GJ: Yes. Exactly.

0:02:15.3 KB: [chuckle] Well-rounded, is what that is. [chuckle]

0:02:19.8 GJ: We'll call it that.

[chuckle]

0:02:20.5 GJ: That's generous, that's generous.

0:02:22.7 KB: I really think a lot of the most interesting people I know just have a bio like that, where there's just... You never know what the next twist and turn is gonna be, so that's awesome.

0:02:32.6 GJ: Random is good, sometimes.

0:02:34.7 KB: Exactly, and then we later find out maybe it wasn't so random. [chuckle]

0:02:39.1 GJ: Right.

0:02:39.7 KB: So Garth, what's your favorite thing about your job now at AAHA?

0:02:43.6 GJ: Well, I mentioned... This is off track for a second, I mentioned that I worked in environmental chemistry early in my career. I worked at Rocky Flats, which is one of when the... Actually, had the... Was known to be the most polluted square mile on earth. And I was in this self-contained breathing suit, in a backhoe, excavating a trench where the army had dumped lots of different wonderful chemicals, over many years of developing weapons of destruction, and we hit a pocket of pure sodium and it exploded. And so I just took off running, 'cause I was scared, and... [chuckle]

0:03:23.7 KB: I could see that.

0:03:25.0 GJ: I forgot I was at the end of an oxygen line.

0:03:29.2 KB: Oh, no.

0:03:29.2 GJ: So when I hit the end, I laid out flat and I broke a couple bones. But then the embarrassing part of it was, then this... After I laid out flat, this white fog wafted over my body like a Stephen King novel, like the fog and Stephen King. So my first reaction to your question is that my favorite thing about my current job is that it's not that.

[laughter]

0:03:57.5 KB: I thought that might be why you're getting through there. I used to work at an art museum, and sometimes on the worst days in Vet Med, my motto was just like, "Oh my God, nobody ever died at the art museum." [chuckle] And it's the same... Yeah.

0:04:12.6 GJ: Right. Yeah.

0:04:12.9 KB: Yeah, it definitely... That tops that though, for sure. That was...

0:04:17.1 GJ: Yeah, well, so in all seriousness, though, to answer that question, the answer should be... If you work in professional associations, the answer should be, the favorite thing is about helping your members and helping the ecosystem that they're in. And that is true for me. It's always been true. It's truer for me now, with AAHA, than it ever has been, for the most part, with our members and our not-yet members, as to being inclusive, right?

0:04:40.6 KB: Right.

0:04:41.0 GJ: It's because there's... This is a very noble cause and noble profession, from my perspective, and so we spent a long time on our strategic plan, listening to hundreds of practice

owners, DVMs, vet techs, and what we heard is that they want someone to help them simplify their journey toward excellence. So I get to wake up every morning wondering how I can help simplify the journey. And those eight words inspire me. I don't need to seek inspiration, it's sitting right there, I will work my tail off for that every single day. So that's the favorite part of my job. That, and that I'm not exposed to toxic agents.

0:05:19.6 KB: Yeah, both things can be true, for sure. [chuckle]

[laughter]

0:05:23.2 KB: On the worst day. [laughter] Alright, well, thank you. I can say from my short time at AAHA that you don't need to look for inspiration for your job, but you are definitely inspiring people at your job.

0:05:36.6 GJ: Oh, thank you.

0:05:37.2 KB: There's definitely a mood of, we're going places, and helping people, and making it a safe place for us to do our jobs, and for our members to do their jobs better. So I can say that from my perspective, that's true.

0:05:55.3 GJ: That's great to hear. [chuckle]

0:05:58.2 KB: So, today, this conversation... What we really wanted to talk about when we talked about doing this, is ways that we can work together, and that's kind of the underlying theme, I think, with a lot of what we're doing at AAHA. And in veterinary medicine... You've worked in a lot of fields, but you know that in Vet Med we're facing a lot of tough challenges these days, and I was wondering in your time at AAHA... 'Cause I've been enmeshed in those challenges now, for over a decade, in veterinary medicine, but in the time you've been at AAHA, what are some of the challenges that you've come to feel particularly passionate about helping to solve?

0:06:38.7 GJ: I like that question 'cause there's so many. So I could talk about the staffing shortage, or inefficiencies, demand outstripping supply kind of stuff... Mental health challenges, which is just very significant, new technologies, consumerization of care, I don't like that word, but it exists and it's in human health too, I dealt with it there to some extent, access to care, rising cost, consolidation. I've even heard people argue that consolidation and this massive injection of venture capital into our ecosystem might even deteriorate because of care in favor of financial return. I'm not saying I agree with that, but... So all of these things are just broiling around in this soup. But if I distill it to one thing that I'm passionate about, and it's going to maybe seem a little trite, but it's very true, and that is our mission, so I'm gonna beat that drum for a second. Our mission, new mission is eight words, it's pretty straightforward, Simplify the Journey Toward Excellence For Veterinary Practices. So the reason I'm passionate about that is I truly, deeply believe if we could simplify the journey that our practices and are not yet member practices are taking, many of those other challenges become easier to work through. So my example is, what I do know is, for example, our data shows that turnover in accredited practices is lower than the ecosystem-wide average, right?

0:08:20.0 GJ: So we learned when we listen very carefully to our practices that are AAHA members, we found out that accreditation is not about earning a victory badge. It is, but it isn't. It's

also about the process, the process of improvement. So we have data that really shows that accreditation is educational, and it helps create and support a better team, that better teams lead to better run and more effective and efficient practices, better client relationships, increased loyalty, lower staffing turnover, better financial results, all of those things stem from a better team. And we've learned that the process of accreditation is really important in helping get there. So in my mind, I think about if I'm gonna simplify the journey, if that's what I'm gonna wake up and live and breathe every day, a simple what-if question is, "Well, what if we simplify the process of accreditation?" It doesn't mean we make it easier to pass, for example, right? But we can make the process simpler, more accessible, a better learning journey. If we do that really well, we automatically improve many of those other things that people are nervous about or are challenged with. It's not a panacea, but I think that it's nice to find one thing, this kind of a cause that has a positive outcome or effect downstream on a number of other things, so that's kind of where my passion is.

0:09:42.5 KB: Yeah, I love that. I love the idea of simplifying that journey towards excellence as sort of the keystone of all of that stuff. I love talking about habits and habit science, and we're talking about the keystone habit, for instance here. The one habit that if you do it, everything else sort of falls into place and...

0:10:00.8 GJ: Make your bed, right? [laughter]

0:10:01.7 KB: Yeah, right. Yeah, go to bed at a reasonable hour, that's mine. [chuckle]

0:10:05.8 GJ: Right. Yeah, exactly.

0:10:07.9 KB: And simplifying the journey toward excellence is certainly not as simple as just saying, "I'm gonna go to bed on time."

0:10:13.3 GJ: No.

0:10:13.8 KB: But it does encompass so much, that word excellence encompasses so much. You've also probably noticed in this profession, like we're a pretty scrappy bunch, we pride ourselves in being problem solvers, like you bring in a hamster with a broken foot and someone's gonna make an e-collar and a splint for that hamster.

0:10:31.3 GJ: Right.

0:10:32.6 KB: This is a profession of people that can fix stuff and get frustrated when they can't fix things, and yet certain problems in this profession, as a whole seem, to be so persistent and we just haven't figured out how to solve them. Why do you think that is? What are some of the factors you think that contribute to that?

0:10:53.7 GJ: I have two big factors in mind, so they are fragmentation and challenge definition. So fragmentation for the relatively small size of our industry. I mean, I've worked in human healthcare, it's 20% of our gross domestic product. It's an over \$4 trillion industry, which I hate, calling it an industry, ecosystem maybe is better, but for our relatively small size, we're pretty fragmented. We have 20,000 independent practices in the US and in Canada, another 10,000 or so corporate-owned. We have a lot of new entities scooping up practices every day, right? We have a

wide variety, by my count, well over a hundred trade professional and cause-related non-profit organizations, AAHA is one of them, of course, and we all represent specialties or geographies or trades or corporate interests, etcetera. We also have corporations, of course, pharma, device manufacturers, so it's good, it's a great big ecosystem, but there's this fragmentation. We have a lot of money also coming into our new ecosystem that creates even more noise being generated on this kind of cacophony of interest. So, all that to say, big problems or shared problems, those that exist across many disciplines, practices, and geographies, they're not being prioritized and addressed by us holistically.

0:12:16.9 KB: Yeah.

0:12:17.5 GJ: So, yeah, one or two organizations might pick up the challenge and try to develop a few solutions, write a whitepaper and publish it and say, "Here you go, everybody, do this and you'll be fine." That sounds kind of cynical, right? But if the process is not inclusive, if it's approached without considering the myriad of voices, it's more than likely going to fail. So I believe our industry needs to act in a more unified fashion for those persistent challenges that we can point at and we can define and then we can actually start solving together and not have it be, if you will, the purview or responsibility of one or two or three organizations, so it's on all of us together. My second one was about challenge definition, why are things persistent, so...

0:13:06.8 GJ: One way to think about this is, have you ever asked yourself why there are mirrors in an elevator?

0:13:12.0 KB: Actually, I asked myself that today. I was in an elevator with a mirror on the ceiling.

0:13:16.9 GJ: Yeah. Okay. [chuckle] Alright. Well, so when elevators started to become commonplace in high rises, people started to complain that they were too slow even though they were much faster than what it took to walk up stairs. So that sounded like a challenge for engineers but they realized, well, this means installing new elevators, upgrading motors, improving algorithms that run elevators, all these things are really, really expensive. So the landlords and the building people started to look at this challenge a little bit differently. They started trying to understand why are people complaining that it's too slow even though it was faster than taking the stairs and they realized that people just stood there without anything to do and they were bored.

0:13:56.2 KB: [laughter]

0:13:56.2 GJ: Right?

0:13:57.7 KB: They didn't have cellphones yet. [laughter]

0:14:00.5 S1: Yeah. It was mostly boredom. So with that in mind, they put some mirrors in and people started checking themselves out, fixing their hair, which I don't have that problem. And for those who are listening, I'm bald as a cue ball. So it was something you do...

0:14:17.0 KB: Low maintenance.

0:14:18.0 GJ: [chuckle] So it was something to do during the ride that tenants kind of lost track of time and perceived that the ride was actually really fast, right? So it was a great example of

challenge definition, defining the problem in a unique way that is really honestly, through the eyes of the person you're designing for. And that takes... We'll talk about this later, but that takes a lot of empathy, so. Some quote is attributed to Einstein about if you could save the world in an hour, he would spend 55 minutes defining the problem. So that might be an exaggeration or it might be really attributed to someone else, but you have to put a lot of time and effort into defining the problem clearly. Some people think about it as research, I think of that as human-centered design. I don't think of surveys and a whole bunch of data, I think of it as learning to see the world through the eyes of the people you are designing for. So, fragmentation and challenge definition, that's my answer.

0:15:18.3 KB: Yeah. You're so right, that if you ask 10 people in our industry to describe the biggest problems in our industry, they'd probably describe them all differently and that is obviously a huge obstacle when it comes to solving things, so. And I do feel that fragmentation from inside it and I don't know that we've all identified it with that name but it's definitely something we can sense pretty much on a daily basis just from the way that systems and things don't change, the way we hope that they would. So, one of the big reasons that we got together today was to talk about Veterinary Visionaries, which is super exciting. So, can you tell us what Veterinary Visionaries is and how it came to be?

0:16:06.4 GJ: Well, your previous question was a good ramp-up to this 'cause it simplified my answer and that is, Veterinary Visionaries is not a company, it is a space. So it's a space where many of our organizations, non-profits, for-profits, etcetera, can bring our members and our stakeholders together to de-fragment our approach to problem solving. Some people might call it crowd sourcing, and that might be kind of our first venture is crowdsourcing and being more inclusive and open with what we're solving and how we're solving, but longer term, Veterinary Visionaries can be a space where solutions are... Not just come up with ideas, but we can actually refine the solutions and get them back out to our whole ecosystem for use. So, it's not meant to be a place where intellectual property is developed and someone holds on to it like a miser, it is of, by and for our broader ecosystem to de-fragment and solve together.

0:17:09.7 KB: Love that. And Veterinary Visionaries, which we'll just call Visionaries for the sake of brevity.

0:17:17.4 GJ: Sure. Right.

0:17:18.3 KB: In 2021, you launched a project, a Veterinary Visionaries project, right? Changemakers, which I'm very sad that I was not around for. Can you tell us a little bit about Changemakers and what was involved in that project?

0:17:34.0 GJ: Sure, so two things. At that time, we had about 30-35 organizations involved including ACVIM, VECCS, AVMA, a bunch of state VMAs, AAHA, of course, and a variety of others. And I took, personally, the inspiration from an organization I helped start called Next Gen Learning, which was a place where K-12 teachers who are in and of their own right, incredibly entrepreneurial. They can MacGyver... I've heard you say this about vets, they can MacGyver anything in the classroom to teach a kid something, right?

0:18:09.3 KB: For sure, yeah.

0:18:10.5 GJ: So, especially with technology. So they were solving really cool learning challenges every day but their ideas weren't being surfaced for everyone else to use. So, like you are a teacher in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, teaching kindergarten and you have a great technology idea, how does it make its way to someone like me in Denver, Colorado? It doesn't. So the idea of Next Gen Learning was to discover and surface. And that's really what the first event was for Veterinary Visionaries, it was to prove that 30 organizations could create an event where none of us have financial interest in the event and no one's gonna try to take over and we can actually create a place where everyday veterinarians come to the table and say, "This is my solution; here, does anybody wanna use it? Please take it, because it works." And so that was... It's pretty simple. It worked. I think it worked relatively well and it was really a first step proof of concept for all of us to take a first step on Veterinary Visionaries together.

0:19:19.0 KB: Yeah, it looked really cool. I think on the AAHA website, there's a little e-book of takeaways from Changemakers and it's full of just neat little bites from some really inspiring people. And I just... I think the mood of that must have been really inspiring just to see people bouncing ideas around and talking about solving things, like you said, without anybody having a stake in the game other than just wanting to make this a better place for all of us. And that's super cool. So, since I missed it, if you could pick something out of Changemakers, out of that event from last year, if you could take one thing out of that and put it on a billboard and show it to everybody or send out a tweet that gets to the entire veterinary profession, what would it be?

0:20:15.6 GJ: This is gonna sound maybe a little, I don't know, cute, I'm not sure. [chuckle] But it would really be to ask everybody to help us help ourselves. Or let's help each other. It's pretty... Right? It's kind of crazy. But the world is really, really big, there's opportunities for everyone to learn and grow. Our ecosystem is growing by leaps and bounds. There's no reason for us to keep doing things alone in our own practices or in our own corners of the world, in our own states, whatever. So I'm a big believer. I don't know if anyone out there has read or listened to Simon Sinek's Infinite Mindset. So the infinite-minded person or player understands that sometimes, you may have a better product or process or widget or whatever, but then sometimes, someone else does, and there's really no such thing as just being the best at something 'cause it's an infinite game. The goal is, in this game that we're all playing here, if you wanna call it that, is to outdo yourself. But you can do that by helping each other and the ideas that make our veterinary practices and veterinary ecosystem better. So, to me, what that says is, we need to really be very purposeful, and I use that word very purposely, very purposeful about designing ways that we can help us help each other 'cause it's not happening naturally.

0:21:38.5 KB: Yeah, that's really interesting. I feel like I would have picked all sorts of things for you to answer that question with and that one is so much better because it's just like some find the journey toward excellency. It just encompasses all of the challenge; almost every challenge that we're facing, it's just that we need to think about ourselves as a whole, and each individual person has a story and that story matters. And without thinking about the stories of all the other people that we interact with in this field, it's very easy to feel like we're sort of in a little bubble by ourselves, suffering or feeling like we're not heard, and that's just not the case. It helps so much to think about how our... What we're going through can relate to other people and vice versa. Yeah. So what do you think our profession does really well? What are we succeeding at already when it comes to problem-solving?

0:22:41.6 GJ: Well...

0:22:42.2 KB: Besides hamster e-collars...

0:22:43.8 GJ: Yeah. I don't want people to think that I think the willingness isn't there. It's interesting, when I talk about Visionaries itself or just the global concept of de-fragmenting our approach and being more inclusive, and designing ways that we can work together, finding that time and place, people are really, really willing. What we do well, I know that sounds kind of weird, willingness, how can you do willingness well? But the willingness is there. I truly, deeply believe that. I think what's missing are these kind of pragmatic vehicles or processes that help break down that fragmentation or de-fragment. To break down some of these artificial barriers we've created when you talk about one specialty versus another or one state versus another. I get the reason, fragmentation serves a purpose, but for these big challenges, it does not. It really doesn't. So thinking and acting purposely, very holistically is really, really difficult. It takes time, it takes effort and it takes a willingness, which I think we have. This maybe sounds a little too bold, but I feel like we have to conjure up our own version of the Arab Spring and design a new way to work together to tackle those challenges together. But again, the willingness, I really believe the willingness is there.

0:24:12.1 KB: And that's huge. There are definitely professions like my dad's an attorney and I know it would be... It was... When he was working and I was growing up, there was no talk in his profession about solving these problems. [chuckle] It was just like, "Put your head down and put in all the hours," and that was what you were gonna do.

0:24:31.8 GJ: So, a great kind of sidebar example is... And I think this might be an outdated or an overused example, but in the... I can't remember the exact decade, 1960s, '70s, too many airline accidents were going on, so we created this environment in the '70s and '80s where it was safe to report accidents, near misses and the things that degraded safety in the airlines. And because of that cumulative work and creating the database of flight safety, we have, worldwide, the safest mode of transportation by far is flying, which seems strange 'cause it's a big metal tube [chuckle] flying through the air at hundreds of miles an hour.

0:25:26.8 KB: Conceptually, it's still scary to me. [chuckle]

0:25:28.9 GJ: Right, exactly. But it's incredibly safe because people decided to not work in their silos, in their own airlines or in their own airplane manufacturing unit or whatever, they came together and said, "We can change this."

0:25:44.6 KB: That's a great example, yeah. And I feel like the veterinary profession probably does that really well when it comes to patient safety and patient care and how are we gonna get together to make surgery safer and perfect our procedures in a medical sense but when it comes to our teams and our people, it's been a little bit more of a challenge for us to do that. But you're right, I do see the willingness here so much more even than 10 years ago. I got out of school 12 years ago and the environment has changed dramatically since then, even in that decade, so that is a really big win, for sure. It means there's fertile ground to do all of this work.

0:26:26.8 GJ: Yes.

0:26:27.2 KB: Yeah.

0:26:27.5 GJ: That's a great way to put it.

0:26:29.5 KB: So what do you see in 2022 for Veterinary Visionaries? What's in store?

0:26:34.8 GJ: So we're gonna kick into solve mode. So that first event was finding what was already there and surfacing it, and really a pilot, an experiment. So we'll kick into solve mode, but it's another pilot, it's another experiment. We're doing the whole belly-crawl, crawl-walk, crawl-walk-run thing.

[laughter]

0:26:55.8 KB: Yeah. That thing.

0:26:57.5 GJ: We're going to... We've already identified the challenge that we wanna tackle, we've done some research around the challenge, and the challenge question is going to be something like, how might we create systemic solutions and support for mental health challenges, and the keyword there is systemic. So when we look at things that have been published about mental wellness, especially in our industry, and some very recent ones, it's really all about, "Hey, practitioner, DVM vet tech, go learn how to deal with stress better", you need to have your own stress techniques or you need to... Your employer needs to give you more time off. They're very down to the individual or the unit.

0:27:44.3 KB: Yeah.

0:27:44.3 GJ: They're not picking systemically, which is okay because both sets of solutions are important, but what we realized in our research and why we wrote this question is that no one is really talking about systemic solutions. So I'll give you an example of one that's actually come up, and I love this idea, and I think could spark some of our listeners ideas as well, to solve that, how might we create systemic solutions for mental wellness and support. This idea actually came from me talking about this with a student in emergency med, he's in his third year.

0:28:26.2 GJ: And I asked him the question, he said, "Well, how much money does AAHA have in the bank?" And I said, "Well, we're a non-profit, but we have, I think, I can't remember eight or nine million in the bank", he goes, "Well, that's your members money, right?" I said, "Yeah," 'cause they're not shareholders, right? We don't have shareholders, we're non-profit, and I started to do the math and I'm like, "Well, you know AVMA, I think has about 50 million in the bank, so they're an order magnitude larger from us, I think ACVIM and VECCS together probably have 10 to 15 million." So a lot of non-profits have reserves. That's his point.

0:29:00.1 GJ: But then we also have a lot of for-profits who are putting money in the mental wellness, graciously, generously, Mars, etcetera, others. There's a lot of money that's sitting out there that is really about either making money with or off of practitioners or sitting there because our practitioners have asked us to do something for them. So his comment to me was, "Well, why not create a consortium of all those organizations and fund a universal Employee Assistance Program?"

0:29:30.0 KB: Yeah.

0:29:31.5 GJ: And I was just...

0:29:33.5 KB: Why not.

0:29:33.7 GJ: I thought, "Wow, okay, so if you've got 150,000 "employees" across our ecosystem with vet techs and DVMs and all that good stuff, or whatever the number is, and you fund that, how much do you need for that a year? Well, it's a number that's a lot smaller than what's sitting out there, and we're just not thinking and acting that way. So I loved... Just that was one of my first conversations about this topic. My hope... I'm gonna actually ask him to put that idea when we start to have our solving event. I'm gonna ask him to put it in the event.

0:30:08.6 GJ: But that's the type of thinking that we can bring to the table if we start to open our minds up to this word systemic. So I hope we can use this event, this next event, as a proof of concept, another step around solving and de-fragmenting our approach together. If we can do that once, then we'll be able to, I guess, wash, rinse and repeat and Veterinary Visionaries can do this on a regular basis.

0:30:38.1 KB: Yeah, I love that, and I love that you were talking with a student when that idea surfaced.

0:30:43.7 GJ: Yeah.

0:30:45.0 KB: And an EAP, Employee Assistance Program, it seems like such a given that if you have it, you should use it, and I know a lot of employers actually offer an EAP, and people don't even know about it. And so there's so much of this that's about creating systems that work, and then there's also the problem of awareness, which is that a lot of times people don't even know if there are resources available to help them. So I think a larger scale solution like that would be so much more visible too. Which can only help people. So a lot of times people just feel isolated. So that's really amazing, and I'm looking forward to seeing what ideas come out of that of the solving mode this year, and I want...

0:31:38.6 GJ: Hold on, time out, my dog is barking. [laughter] Hold on, one second, I'll be right back.

0:31:44.3 KB: What would a podcast be without a barking dog? [chuckle]

0:31:50.8 GJ: Yeah. He scared that bad Amazon delivery person.

[laughter]

0:31:57.4 KB: Yep, it's got a 100% success rate. They always...

0:32:01.6 GJ: Right. Exactly. [laughter] So he just keeps training himself over and over again. " I bark, they leave." It's amazing. It's awesome.

0:32:10.3 KB: I was gonna ask you, Veterinary Visionaries is your baby, at least, as far as I can tell you. Coming into AAHA, this is really a project that you feel so passionate about and you've

conceptualized it from previous experiences and said, "I think this is really gonna help our profession," and I agree. But why... When we talk about it, you take no ownership of it, you've conceptualized it and brought it into being, and then you are ready to sort of let it go into the universe and do what it's gonna do. Why is it so important to you that Visionaries not belong to any one particular person or organization?

0:32:48.6 GJ: Well, that's a good question. In our US, we're used to the thing being owned.

0:32:57.7 KB: Yeah.

0:32:57.9 GJ: Someone owns it...

0:32:58.5 KB: Capitalism.

0:33:00.2 GJ: And is making money off of it. I like it. [chuckle] Capitalism rocks. But I don't feel like this is mine to own. It doesn't matter that it might have been an idea that I came up with or anyone else. I would say, whether it's mine or someone else's, I don't feel like it's mine to own. I think it's for us to own it, nurture it and work on it together. That's the only way it will work long-term. So if I owned it and have to champion it and run it, run it every day, then our industry is just gonna look at it as a either Garth or AAHA side project, and that's, I like to say, "No bueno." It's not gonna work. So my hope is, it does take off in some way shape or form, become self funding maybe its own little non-profit with its own executive director and all that good stuff, but funded by those of us in the ecosystem who have a clear responsibility to be thinking and acting holistically beyond our traditional work. I think it's just getting more important that we do that, so all I'm here to do is to help us get started on helping us help ourselves. And if this is a pathway to do it, that's great, and fly little bird fly, it's all I could say. [chuckle]

0:34:22.1 KB: Yes.

0:34:22.8 GJ: But if it's something else, if this doesn't work, we'll come up with something else. That's okay, too.

0:34:28.3 KB: Yeah, evolution is good, right? Just like your career and my career. [chuckle] Evolution is good. Sorry, Garth, I didn't ask you this ahead of time, but how can people get involved in Veterinary Visionaries if they want to this year? Where can they find more information?

0:34:46.4 GJ: One easy way is to just email me, garth.jordan@, A-A-H-A, aaha.org.

0:34:52.1 KB: Just putting it right out there.

0:34:54.4 GJ: Just threw it right out there. I mean, why not? Trust me, if you email me, I'm gonna put you to work, so be careful what you ask for. We have now 50 different organizations involved, and their commitment to this project is when we have the... The event's gonna probably launch in about mid April, to solve that question, to work on those systemic solutions for mental wellness. The hope is, is that all 50 of the organizations involved, fingers crossed, fingers, eyes, toes, everything crossed, that all 50 of us market the event, not as our own, but as a Veterinary Visionaries event that is of by and for industry. In a perfect world, it'd be hard for you to miss it, to know that you can come in, and the way you can participate is by giving your ideas. And by

becoming part of this solving community. It's not a Facebook community, it's a solving community, come become part of the solving community, talk to people who are putting solutions in, put your own solutions in, give people encouragement in the community to finish their solutions, those types of things. 'Cause that event will last about three or four weeks, and then we'll be done, and then we're gonna assess what we've got and figure out what to do with the top ones. And by the way, there's a cash reward for the best idea.

0:36:22.0 KB: There we go.

0:36:22.8 GJ: We're going to be giving out about \$5000 for the top 3-5 ideas, so grand prize, probably in that \$2000 range. That's nothing to sneeze at.

0:36:31.8 KB: Absolutely not.

0:36:33.2 GJ: A financial incentive never hurt anybody. Right? [chuckle]

0:36:37.1 KB: That's right.

0:36:37.7 GJ: But that to me is the way, the main way. But if you email me and you say, "Well, I'd like to volunteer for something a little deeper, a little richer, or my organization would like to be involved." Hey, the more the merrier. We are an open, inclusive tent, so... Well, just leave it at that.

0:36:55.1 KB: Fantastic, thank you. To wrap up, I had a question that I wanted to ask you. We've been talking a lot about problem solving and about things that we want to help fix, which is excellent, because there's stuff that needs to be fixed, and we're fixers. But like I said before, I've been in vet med for over a decade. It's my world, it's the world I know. And so sometimes it's hard to see it clearly, I think, from inside, but you're a relative newcomer to vet med, comparatively, and you have so much experience in other industries. I was wondering, based on your previous experience, and coming in and getting this, you're drinking from a garden hose impression of vet med. What has really amazed you about it? What has really struck you as something that profession does, that you maybe haven't seen in other fields, or that we do exceptionally differently or well?

0:37:57.4 GJ: My answer actually comes from something I've been practicing for, I guess, 12 or 13 years. So I've been practicing this process of human centered design. The maybe more common label is design thinking. So this is going to be a weird roundabout way to answer your question. But design thinking is really about designing with the humans in mind, as I just mentioned before, for whom you're designing, seeing the world through their eyes, understanding them as humans and the challenges that they face. Easy to say hard to do.

0:38:37.8 KB: Yeah.

0:38:38.0 GJ: You don't get it through surveys, you don't get it through traditional research. It is really through empathy based research. It starts with and ends with empathy. If you're gonna get into human centered design or design thinking, empathy has to be your superpower. Every industry I've been in where I've applied design thinking, it's actually been... I don't want to say it's an easy thing to learn and understand. It's a practice like medicine, but probably not as hard as medicine, but it's a practice like medicine. Because you never assume you know something. You're always working to see the world through someone else's eyes. The elevator thing was an example of that.

The elevator and the mirrors. But what I've realized about this industry that's unique, at least for all the ones that I've worked in, even in human health, is the empathy in our industry that the people have is intense. It is there. It is powerful. We're made up of empaths, right?

0:39:45.8 KB: Yes.

0:39:46.3 GJ: But it doesn't mean that we're naturally using our empathic powers [chuckle] to do human centered design for ourselves, to understand. So, it's a weird paradigm or conundrum, I don't know what the right word is there, but, you know, I would argue that like our ecosystem is changing so rapidly. It's almost being redesigned without the empaths in mind.

0:40:12.3 KB: Yeah.

0:40:13.4 GJ: So the question I... And that's a... It's an incredibly powerful tool that we have. So the question I have... And that's why Visionaries comes to mind and other things come to mind is, how do we... It's like a professional disconnect. My empathic world that I have is being redesigned without my empath in mind. So how do we take this industry of deeply kind, caring empaths that have true meaning, they have cause, they have eagerness to improve, they can fix a hamster's broken toenail. I mean, like crazy stuff, right?

0:40:45.3 KB: Crazy, yes.

0:40:46.5 GJ: We're the embodiment of empathy, right? So how do we take that and poise ourselves for empathic solving and demand that of the organizations that are solving on our behalf? Whether they're for-profit software companies and PIM systems or whether they're medical device companies. Take me, take the human, take my day-to-day into account, just design with me and my challenges in mind. And we can ask for that. And I'm not sure we do that all that well yet.

0:41:21.9 KB: No. I think you're absolutely right. Sometimes self-care is learning how to meditate and sometimes self-care is actually saying, "My needs aren't being met." And...

0:41:32.3 GJ: That's right. Right.

0:41:33.5 KB: And it's coming from a place of, "I feel deeply and I know that my needs aren't being met," but it hasn't always been okay to say that.

0:41:44.3 GJ: Right. Right. So I'm not suggesting that for-profit companies are evil or that none of them have empathy or they don't do human centered design, but the large majority, frankly, don't really get it and they don't use it. It doesn't make them bad, but I think in our universe, we as the core, the DVMs and the vet techs and the vet team, as the core of all care, boy, there's a hidden gem there just waiting to bust out to tell people, "Here's how you can design in a way that's really gonna make us just a force to be reckoned with."

0:42:25.8 KB: For sure. I love that so much, Garth. Thank you so much for your time and all those insights, and the work you're putting into Visionaries and so many other projects. Really appreciate you taking the time today.

0:42:38.8 GJ: Oh, so fun. Thanks, Katie.

0:42:41.3 KB: And thanks so much for listening. We will have some information in the podcast description for this show so you can find out a little bit more about Veterinary Visionaries. And don't forget, you can also just email Garth. [laughter]

0:42:57.8 GJ: Right.

0:42:58.8 KB: Thanks so much.

[music]

0:43:01.3 S1: Thanks for listening to today's episode of Central Line, The AAHA Podcast. If you love what you hear, please take a moment to leave us a rating and review. For more resources to help you simplify your journey towards excellence in veterinary medicine, we invite you to visit aaha.org, that's A-A-H-A.org.