

**0:00:00.0 Katie Berlin:** Hi welcome back to Central Line. I'm your host Katie Berlin, and I have one of my favorite people on the planet here with me today. Josh Vaisman. Welcome. Thanks for joining us.

**0:00:15.5 Josh Vaisman:** Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for having me on the show. Super excited to be here.

**0:00:19.3 KB:** I would just to point this out. I'm gonna just say this that Josh when we got on today, Josh was like, oh hold on. I have to go change my shirt. And like no, he was not gonna put on a tie. He was gonna put on a t-shirt that says, dude be kind on it. And I feel that is probably the best intro to Josh I could possibly give. And I love that shirt.

**0:00:40.6 JV:** Thank you.

**0:00:41.4 KB:** But Josh, I am going to ask you to tell us a little bit more about yourself than just what's on your shirt. So people who don't know you can get acquainted.

**0:00:49.9 JV:** Sure. Okay. So everything you need to know about me will be in this story which is related to the shirt. I wore a similar shirt like this at a conference. It was actually Connexity, I'm not gonna call out the person who said this, but I was attending a talk and after the talk the speaker came up to me and said, I was looking at you and I saw your shirt, and I really loved it. The only thing is it just says be kind. And it felt it should be kind... And I'm not gonna say what she said afterwards but just insert Samuel L. Jackson statement underneath it. And I really thought long and hard about actually getting a shirt like that made but then I can't wear it on shows like this. So dude be kind is the best alternative.

**0:01:33.5 KB:** I mean you could get it made and then just put a poop emoji in one of the spaces for the letters just so it's kind of a little bit bleeped out. You could do that that. I think you might need that.

**0:01:44.4 JV:** I think that's a great idea. Okay. Sold, sold.

**0:01:47.7 KB:** Maybe stickers.

**0:01:51.7 JV:** A bit more seriously, I am the co-founder and lead positive change agent with Flourish Veterinary Consulting. So I have worked in the veterinary space for 25-ish years. Most recently in practice was as a hospital owner and practice director. I was the managing partner in a couple small animal hospitals. Flourish exists for two reasons. The first one is that work shouldn't suck.

**0:02:25.8 KB:** And we're done.

**0:02:26.6 JV:** Yeah. Yeah. And we're done. I'm totally appropriating an Adam Grant statement there. Adam Grant talks about his work is meant to make work not suck. I feel like we spend so much damn time at work. Whatever our job is it doesn't matter what it is, in veterinary medicine it's a lot of our time. I had a call just before this with a technician with a hospital that we're working with and she was telling me about how her average day last week was 14 hours. We spent a ton of time working, work shouldn't be something we just survive. It shouldn't be something that we just

get through to get to the good stuff. Work should be part of the good stuff. So Flourish exists to try and translate what the science tells us can actually contribute to that experience at work. What does it mean to be thriving and fulfilled professionally according to research? How do we translate those things and then make it actually accessible and usable for veterinary professionals? So together we can create work environments that contribute to thriving, and then work becomes part of the good stuff that our whole life is.

**0:03:33.3 KB:** I love that because nobody got into vet med so they could just have a job, right? I mean especially in this field everybody should be able to enjoy themselves at work at least some of the time. But this is a field where people get drawn into it from passion and love and then we just kind of beat it out of them. And I love your mission and I also love that you call yourself lead positive change agent. I think that's great because it's exactly what you are. Yeah. Flourish is definitely a brand and a mission and isn't just Josh anymore. And I'm loving seeing it grow. So, okay. So before we get into... I mean, I was gonna say before we get into why you're here. But let's face it. Since Central Line started there's been a list of people that I knew who we're gonna have on the podcast and you were at the top. So you're just finally here. But with the timing of it is because of a certain event. So we'll talk about that. But before we get into that, I just wanted to ask you, AAHA we're known for our guidelines and our guidelines are branching out. So not just clinical anymore. And we have mentoring and tech utilization guidelines coming out this year. It's very exciting.

**0:04:49.4 JV:** Yeah it is.

**0:04:50.3 KB:** But I wanted to ask you, Josh Vaisman, in work or in life, what guides you?

**0:04:57.2 JV:** I think impact, the greatest sense of joy and fulfillment that I've had in my life is when I feel I've somehow positively impacted another human being's life. So whenever I can find evidence of that, somebody shares something or I could just see somebody light up from an interaction or experience that we've had together, that's what really guides me. That's what I'm sort of ever seeking. So yeah, those would be my guidelines.

**0:05:29.6 KB:** Well, that's a good guideline. And you're...

**0:05:31.2 JV:** Thanks.

**0:05:31.3 KB:** I would say that's every interaction we've ever had. So very good job there.

**0:05:36.6 JV:** Yeah. Thank you. Thank you.

**0:05:39.8 KB:** So you're here because and I have this written in my notes in all caps, you have a book coming out.

**0:05:45.0 JV:** I do.

**0:05:46.8 KB:** You have a book. You wrote a book.

**0:05:48.6 JV:** I do.

**0:05:49.0 KB:** And it is coming out very soon.

**0:05:51.5 JV:** Yes it is, it is. I'm so excited.

**0:05:54.8 KB:** So let's talk about it. The book is called Lead to Thrive, and that's the short version of the title. And it is coming out, our official launch date is May 22nd. It is 2023 right now, when we're recording this. And I think it will probably be available shortly before that. But I can't wait until it gets into everybody's hands because I've had the privilege of reading it and it is exactly what we need. Can you give... It's got that cover copy 'cause it's like a real legit book available from AAHA Press coming out May 22nd 2023. Just gonna repeat that a few times.

**0:06:32.3 JV:** Thank you, Katie. [laughter]

**0:06:33.8 KB:** But can you give us the Josh Vaisman version of the back cover copy? It was the Josh Vaisman blurb.

**0:06:40.7 JV:** Yeah. The the Josh Vaisman version is that I was a person who stumbled into leadership positions in veterinary medicine as a hospital owner and practice director hospital administrator. And wholly sucked at it like really bad, thinking that I was doing a really good job. And then realizing at the end that I actually had led in a way that caused harm. Not intentionally. I'm not a bad person. I'm a good person with good intentions which I think is actually a reality for the vast majority of people in this profession. I really have not met maybe on one hand I could count actually truly bad people with bad intentions in vet med. So I was a good person with good intentions who led the best way that I possibly knew how and didn't do a good job of it and caused harm to myself and others. And that made me realize that we work with the tools that we have, and in vet med, man we are technically gifted human beings. We learn some incredible skills and we learn ways to apply those skills and really change lives.

**0:07:51.0 JV:** And no one ever taught us how to lead. No one ever taught us what it means to be a leader of other human beings. And every business endeavor, every purposeful mission, every meaningful goal is first and foremost a human endeavor. It requires people and if we don't know how to create environments that let people really thrive and unlock and unleash and realize their full potential, we are putting a cap on what we can accomplish. And the results will be suboptimal performance, suboptimal wellbeing and we'll suffer because of it. So this book is an attempt to fill that gap for our profession, to teach us how we can lead in ways that let people be the best parts of who they are. So that work does actually contribute to fulfillment. And the result of that is it turns out that when people are really fulfilled and thriving in their work, they do really good work and we solve problems together and we make a meaningful difference in the world.

**0:08:55.8 KB:** And they stay. Right?

**0:08:57.1 JV:** And they stay. Well said. Yes.

**0:09:00.8 KB:** We have so much now, so much focus on the trouble we're having finding and keeping people in vet practices. And we just had a veterinary visionaries event this this month, we're recording this in March and the event just ended. And we were asking people to share stories about why they fell in love with vet med and maybe if they've fallen out of love or if they've left the field. Like what would make them stay or come back. And my story when I shared it on the

platform was about that, it was because I've been exposed now to so much learning and teaching about positive leadership and about culture and what makes a good manager an actual leader and not just a manager. That was a big part of it, is that it wasn't through lack of intention or lack of trying but that is something that I found at almost every single one of my jobs even before vet school. Was just people don't know how to lead a team. And I felt overlooked a lot of times and my needs weren't being met. And if I didn't know all of that stuff, if I didn't know you and I hadn't been exposed to all of this material, I don't think I would know that that was why. I think this is a bad system. I'm burned out, I'm not cut out for this field. And maybe that stuff is true to some extent.

**0:10:31.9 KB:** But that was a key. And I wouldn't have known that I think without having been exposed to all of this. So I'm really hoping that your book can expose a lot of our people to this. Not just leaders, and we'll get into this more in a minute. But everybody on the team, if they know that's what's missing that's a key part of the puzzle, because then they're not gonna go looking for the solution somewhere else. So can you just talk a little bit about what positive leadership is? I know you you have given a lot of talks about this and if people have come to our Beyond Medicine workshops which were insanely popular, I think we had over 600 people signed up for your Last Beyond Medicine workshop that you did this winter. That is an insane number. And so many people may have heard you talk about the 4 P's but would you mind just going into that a little bit, and how you sort of weave a thread through those throughout the book?

**0:11:29.8 JV:** Absolutely. If you don't mind before I respond to that question and share a bit about the 4 P's, I just want to express, I am sorry that you had that experience, that you went through an experience of working in places where you felt you didn't matter. That happens far more often in our profession than anybody deserves. And you are a damn good person who's worthy of feeling like you matter 'cause you do. You're incredibly intelligent, insightful, kind, compassionate, gritty perseverer, doer who makes a difference in the world. And you deserve to feel that way. And that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to help leaders learn how to help people feel that way at work. 'Cause when we feel that way magic happens. That magic... Sorry. Go ahead.

**0:12:19.7 KB:** I'll Venmo you in a minute.

[laughter]

**0:12:23.3 JV:** No, no need, no need. You're an amazing human being Katie Berlin. I'm grateful to have you in my life. The magic that can happen, we have a term for it in psychology. It's called subjective vitality. So the way that I like to describe what subjective vitality is like, Katie, you were in small animal practice and you were a general practitioner. You've had days like this where you walk into the hospital and just as you're informed that two technicians have called in sick and emergency walks through the door and your first appointment the day is also 20 minutes late. And before you know it 12 hours have passed and your day is like just now, "ending?" And I'm putting that in air quotes on purpose because it's not really ending. You still have four hours of medical records to do. So you collapse into your chair in front of your computer to start those medical records and that's when you realize that your bladder is the size of a basketball, 'cause you haven't peed all day. Right? And you're literally... You're so emotionally exhausted by that point that you have a moment where you look around there's nobody else in the office and you think maybe I'll just pee in the chair, right? Because the thought of getting up and going to the bathroom is overwhelming.

**0:13:35.2 KB:** Because there's people out there. [laughter]

**0:13:36.9 JV:** Yeah. Exactly.

**0:13:37.3 KB:** It's like they might get me.

**0:13:38.9 JV:** I can't do that anymore. Right? Yeah. Yeah. So we've all had days like this. We know what that day feels like. So imagine at the end of a day that you look on your desk and there's a card on the desk. It looks like the outline of... It's in an envelope, it's sealed but it looks like a greeting card type of thing. You get curious, you grab it, you flip it over and it's handwritten address to you at the hospital. So you open it up and out comes like I don't know... It's just all pictures of different types of candies on the front and it's all the candies that you love and you're like, oh my God. You start to drool. Somebody knows who I am. Right? You open up the card and inside is a handwritten note of gratitude from a client of yours. Maybe it's Josh Vaisman. Last week you were on the phone with Josh and he had mentioned something about just how crazy his work schedule has gotten and he needs a refill of a medication for his dog. But he doesn't know when he is gonna get to the hospital. And so your immediate response 'cause this is who you are. I drive by your house every day on my way home from work anyway I'll just drop it off tomorrow. Don't worry about it. Right? This is the kind of thing that you do every day.

**0:14:46.2 JV:** It's innocuous. It's just part of who you are. But to Josh, holy cow, it made such a difference that he went to the grocery store and spent 30 minutes looking through all the greeting cards to find the one that like it's got the candies on it, and your candies. And so then he goes how many hand writes you a note of gratitude. You've just had 12 hours of utter chaos. You're so exhausted that the thought of getting up off your chair and going to the bathroom feels like too much. But you read that card. How do you feel in that moment?

**0:15:17.2 KB:** I probably would cry, let's be honest. I would probably cry, like somebody sees me and...

**0:15:24.9 JV:** Somebody sees me.

**0:15:25.5 KB:** I would cry.

**0:15:27.5 JV:** Yeah. That feeling of being seen, that feeling of... In psychology we call this aliveness energy. Right? That's what subjective vitality is. And subjective vitality is something that's it's possible even in very difficult high stress, high tension, high stakes, environments working in a veterinary practice. You can experience subjective vitality, that aliveness, that energy, that enthusiasm even in the midst of a chaotic crazy day like that. Well, we know what contributes to it. What allows for that. There are certain human needs that have to be met to allow for people to experience that kind of vitality. So the four Ps is about teaching us how do we enable that in our environment? We can't actually make somebody feel that. It turns out you can't, you can't make somebody feel alive and ready to take on the day. But you can make it significantly more possible. The four things that we believe will allow for that to happen are psychological safety. When somebody works in an environment where they don't just feel seen, they feel heard, they feel like I can speak up, I can challenge how we're doing things. I can be like, my bad. So sorry. And I know that I'm not gonna risk retribution or punishment. I'm not gonna be admonished or laughed at or just flat out dismissed. I'll be heard.

**0:16:49.8 JV:** And then I can learn things. That's psychological safety. When people feel like they matter and they're doing things that matter, we call this the purpose pillar. So when I feel like I matter to the people around here especially the people in leadership, that's the experience of interpersonal mattering. When I feel like I'm doing things that matter I can see the positive significance of the things that I'm doing each and every day. That's what we call meaningfulness. Those two things come together. You've got the purpose pillar. Path is the third P, path is really about achievement and growth. So I know the the puzzle piece that I am in this greater puzzle of what we're trying to do here. I'm empowered to actually fit into the puzzle. I have some level of autonomy and control over how I do what I do, and I've got the resources and tools and support I need to succeed. Turns out when you give those three ingredients to people they do amazing things. And when we do amazing things we feel a sense of accomplishment and growth and development that contributes to our sense of vitality. The last pillar is what we call partnership. Partnership is about the human element. As we said earlier every endeavor is a human endeavor and human beings are hardwired.

**0:18:05.9 JV:** Every single one of us, yes. Even the introverts out there in the audience. We are hardwired for social connectedness. We need to feel like we belong somewhere, that we are included, that we're a part of something. To people that matter to us, we matter to them as well. So partnership is when we feel this experience of that the people here actually really care about me as a human being. I'm not just a cog in the machine. I am a machine in and of itself. I am worthy because I am. In fact I know that they care about me because even if I didn't work here anymore they'd probably still care about me. And while I'm here they don't just care about me as a person, they actually care about my success. They're here to help me succeed in the meaningful goals that I'm trying to achieve and the meaningful goals that this organization is trying to achieve. So it's not just about where am I falling short? Where am I screwing up? It's what are my strengths and how can those strengths contribute to what we're trying to do together.

**0:19:02.5 JV:** We feel that when those four things are present, psychological safety, purpose, path and partnership, people feel vitalized in their work. They do better work, their wellbeing improves. They feel more committed and engaged to that work. And like you said earlier, they don't leave those workplaces because they feel so good and they feel so special to us. Why would you wanna go anywhere else?

**0:19:25.0 KB:** I'm just thinking as you were talking, I was kind of thinking through my own experience and realizing that I have been fortunate enough, at least to have pieces of maybe two Ps. [chuckle] At each workplace or in each position, but having all four together where you really feel like you belong and you're given, you're empowered to use your strengths, because that's something that I've found for sure at AAHA, where we do strength finder, when you join AAHA, so strength finder 2.0 is like a... There's a book and a quiz that you take online, and the quiz brings up your top five strengths, and then you can learn more about yourself by reading more about how to maximize those strengths, and the focus is really playing up your strengths and not focusing so much on your weaknesses and fixing them up, and then collaborating that partnership helps people use their different strengths and not focus so much on like, what I'm bad at, why do I suck at this? I can't believe that she can do this so easily, and it takes me all day, and I feel like that's something that in veterinary medicine, you just don't do very well.

**0:20:38.0 KB:** We expect people to fit a mold if they're going to be in a certain job, whether it's a

CSR or a practice manager or a veterinarian, like we think that you have to have these specific strengths, and then if you don't, there's something to criticize there.

**0:20:55.2 JV:** Yeah.

**0:20:55.9 KB:** And I didn't feel that push to explore what made me unique and different, it was more like, oh, I'm not gonna do surgery anymore, 'cause I'm bad at it.

**0:21:03.4 JV:** Yeah.

**0:21:04.1 KB:** Which for the record is not quite accurate. I don't actually think I was bad at surgery, I just didn't wanna do surgery over other things, and we spent a lot of time as that's grappling with that because we've been taught to put our identity in a certain basket, and that psychological safety piece is being able to say, hey, I am really good on the phone. Now, I can't spend 12 hours on the phone, so I wanna put my ninja hand through the phone and strangle the person at that point, no matter who they are, but...

**0:21:37.2 JV:** Right, right.

**0:21:38.0 KB:** I am really good at talking to people. Maybe this is a strength we could build on versus having me feeling stressed out because I'm trying to see appointments in 20 minutes and I'm in treatment trying to get things done, and I am frustrated 'cause we're short-handed and I don't know how to express that to anybody in leadership, and they're not asking me.

**0:22:00.7 JV:** Yep.

**0:22:01.5 KB:** Yeah, it's just like, okay he's always in a bad mood.

**0:22:03.7 JV:** Yeah, I'm actually really glad that you brought that up. When I first started learning about the science of psychological safety, in particular the impact that it has on teams. And by the way, what really drew me to it initially was that some of the early work by Dr. Amy Edmondson, she's the Novartis professor of leadership and management at Harvard Business School and one of the preeminent scholars when it comes to psychological safety in work teams. Her early work was on medical teams, it was with registered nurses, and the impact that it had on patient care, something that's really important to us, right. When I first started learning about it, one of the things that really stood out to me was that often times we'll have an environment that's lacking in psychological safety because somebody there, whether they're actually this way or not, they're behaving in a way that is perceived by team as tyrannical. "Oh you screwed that up." That kind of thing right.

**0:23:00.3 JV:** And so then the fear of punishment or retribution because you screwed something up or fell short of expectations were so strong that people start withholding things. What I came to learn is that that is one of the more obvious signs of a lack of psychological safety, it's not the only one, and in some ways, it's one of the best ones, because we can see it clearly. There is another sign of psychological safety, which I think you were sort of alluding to, which is, if I don't feel safe to speak up and my voice is not invited by leadership, I just don't share it.

**0:23:31.7 KB:** Yeah.

**0:23:32.8 JV:** And so, oftentimes I'll work with leaders who have this false sense of calmness in their environment. They feel like, well, nobody's coming into my office, I've got an open door policy. Nobody's really sharing anything, you know at staff meetings, I always ask, well what questions do you have? What would you like? And it's like crickets, so obviously, everything is fine, and we don't have a psychological safety problem. Actually, if your environment is peaceful and calm, that is also a lack of psychological safety. In a psychologically safe team environment, we will have what Edmondson refers to as a lot of intellectual tension, because we should. Because medicine is a practice. It's not as much of a science as we want it to be. It's something we learn, we develop, we get better at, we play with it over time, we run experiments and we figure out ways to do it better because we develop that through the experience of doing it repetitively. The best way for us to get better over time is when it's a collective effort where all unique perspectives are allowed, where we explore all the different ways of seeing and doing things. And then come to a consensus in service to that higher purpose of what we're trying to do. If we're not having that kind of tension, "You know, I saw you do this this way yesterday. Have you thought about doing it this way instead?" If we don't have that, we're not learning. That's apathy.

**0:25:06.8 KB:** Yeah, I'm glad you brought that up because I definitely have worked in places, and I'm sure everybody listening has worked in places where there has not been that kind of productive conflict of like, "Hey, let's challenge this idea," and even if you're just dead wrong about something, even if you're just absolutely, completely wrong about the idea, it should feel like, oh, well, I'm glad I didn't let that idea take up any more space in my brain, 'cause I got it out and I realized why it just wasn't right. And there are so few things that are black and white like that too, that even in medicine that I think that's a really important point. And I have a question I was gonna ask you, but I'll just ask you now. So the thing that makes me pause always with leadership and management stuff, specifically relating to vet med is because I have worked in so many places where I feel like my bringing this up wouldn't have been welcome as an associate vet, as an associate, you don't see yourself as a leader, but technically, we're all leaders potentially, we can all affect that culture. And I was just curious to know, is this book, did you intend for the book to be for everyone or for people who are actually in leadership roles only?

**0:26:32.0 JV:** Yeah, that's a great question that I'm gonna give a, hopefully not annoying-ly nuanced response to. I am very driven by the impact of people in positions of authority, because I was in that position, and I saw the impact that I hoped to have, and the massive gap between that and the reality, I want to empower people who are hospital owners, practice managers, medical directors, CEOs, VMA leaders, whatever it might be, I want to empower them with the skills to have as much of a positive influence as they can, because those are the people that have the greatest influence. So an example of this from literature, psychological safety, since it's a topic that we've been talking a lot about, psychological safety is a team phenomena, and so it's a social phenomena. Everybody on the team is influencing it in some way, shape, or form. I don't know, you get a new CSR that joins the hospital and it's 60 employees at the hospital, and it's their first day. From day one, they're impacting the psychological safety within their team environment, and over and over and over again, we see meta-analyses that show the greatest influential variable is the leader of that group.

**0:27:58.1 JV:** Sometimes the leader of that group is actually by title, right. If you're the practice manager and you're working with your hospital team, you're gonna have the most influence over if people feel like they can speak up or not, but if you're an associate veterinarian and you're in

treatment working with a couple of technicians and a tech assistant, you're the leader of that group, you don't have to have the title, you're the one who holds the license, right, so you're the leader of that group, so you're gonna have the most influence in that context. Personally, I wanted to change how leaders, "true leaders" change things, but you're 100% right, Katie, everybody is influencing these things, everybody has the opportunity to give the gift of a positive workplace experience to somebody around them, so the book is 100% accessible to anybody who works in veterinary medicine, truth be told, it's really accessible to anybody who works. Period.

**0:28:57.1 KB:** Right. Yeah, this book has a massive potential audience. It is called 'Lead to Thrive, The Science of Creating a Positive Veterinary Culture,' is that right?

**0:29:09.1 JV:** Yes.

**0:29:09.5 KB:** I should know that by heart by now, I work at AAHA everyone, but anyway, but I love that title because it has the word science in it, and this is all based on evidence. This is based on actual proof that these things work, these concepts work, and I think that's really important because as veterinary people, we are science-minded. We like evidence based theories that will help us to know that we're on the right track. And I think one of the biggest problems that I've seen at least, and let me know if you disagree, but is the leaders who have good intentions and want to do things differently, or they know there's that gap between their intention and what's actually being perceived is just time, energy, bandwidth. I can see practice managers and practice owners thinking, I want to do this, I know my team isn't quite there, but I am so tired, I am just so tired, and a good leader in that case, may have somebody come to them with this book and say, there's an idea in here that I think we could use, could we start with a meeting and maybe we do this exercise together. And I as a leader, I think would be really happy to have somebody who's championing that in the practice, even if they can't put it into effect by themselves, it's still gonna take my demonstration of my leadership and my example, but I don't have to do all the planning and thinking and that would make a huge difference.

**0:30:55.2 JV:** Yeah, no, I totally agree. I think that there's always opportunity to inject some of these practices at any level. We have a propensity in our profession to think in computer language, one or zero, it's either I do all the things that I do them all perfectly. Or I'm a failure and I may as well do none. What you're suggesting is that there's actually quite a lot of space between those two things.

**0:31:25.0 KB:** Yeah.

**0:31:25.6 JV:** Yeah, you'd be wonderful. Listen, if you're a practice manager and you're inspired by these things and you wanna try and implement these kinds of positive changes, but you're just feeling so freaking overwhelmed, but your tech lead is like, oh, I wanna do some of these things. Great, absolutely. Empower them. That's gonna make a difference. Even a pebble thrown into a pond makes a ripple. So let's make ripples. Small ripples are still ripples.

**0:31:53.0 KB:** Yeah, I think there was a place in the book you said something like, we see the behavior we reward. And I'm just thinking about the leaders who say, well, I don't think there's anything wrong with my team, 'cause everybody is so quiet and happy. And thinking that that's gotta be one of the hardest places for somebody who's within the team to come to a leader and say like, "hey, can we try this." Because there is no outward proof that you can draw on and say like,

oh, these people are all unhappy, and that behavior clearly hasn't been rewarded before because people don't wanna make ripple.

**0:32:33.0 JV:** Exactly, exactly.

**0:32:35.8 KB:** So let's say that I am on that team. How do I bring that up? How do I go to my boss and say, "I feel really strongly that this could help us?"

**0:32:46.4 JV:** Yeah, I wanna preface this by saying that I think it would be unfair of me to set the expectation that it is an individual team member's responsibility to change their boss, that would be unfair.

**0:33:02.0 KB:** We've all tried. [chuckle]

**0:33:02.0 JV:** Yeah, yeah. And it is an opportunity. It is something that I would encourage every team member to self-advocate and find ways to do that. So my typical approach to that, 'cause I do get that question quite a bit from people. I love this stuff, I totally wanna do it, but I'm not the boss, how do I convince the boss of it? I think that you start by really trying to get a good, clear, objective sense of what drives your manager, what drives your hospital owner, what seems to be their key motivator? For some people, if you've got a manager like me, it's the people, they're driven by people, it may not look or feel that way, but that might actually be what they're thinking. For some people, it might be the practice performance, how many patients were able to see in a day, what our bottom line looks like, whatever it might be. For some people, it could be retention, figuring out what drives them and trying to find a way to genuinely tie the messaging to what's important to them, you know, Katie, I know that how the team feels is really important to you.

**0:34:23.9 JV:** You want people to be in this hospital and feel happy that they're here so that they can do the good work. I gotta tell you, I feel like we can do better there. I feel like there's opportunity for people to come here and feel even better about how they're doing. Do you agree with that? And probably you're gonna agree with that, and then great, I've learned about this evidence-based approach, this book 'Lead to Thrive,' and it talks about some of the science of how we can actually do that a little bit better. Would you be open to having a conversation about that? Yeah, I think that if we can approach a leader with framing it to what's important to them and inviting them to be a part of the conversation, no human being likes to be approached, like Katie, you're kind of a shitty leader, and I think that you could do better. Nobody likes that, right?

**0:35:18.6 KB:** Yeah, no.

**0:35:20.7 JV:** Yeah, so let's find a way to invite them to be a part of the conversation, tie it to what's important to them and encourage a two-way conversation about that too, that can also work with people who are money-driven. I know that the success of this hospital is incredibly important to you, and I get that, and I wanna help you succeed in that we're losing team members at... We've lost six people in the last six months. That's like 30% of our team. I know that it costs a lot of money to replace people, and I know that we're losing productivity when people walk out the door. What if there was a way to make them want to stay here, that's a way to approach somebody who is driven by money.

**0:36:10.3 KB:** Yeah, the cost of burnout is very high. Just monetarily high. Not just emotionally.

Yeah, that makes so much sense. And I think I can picture leaders that I've worked under who would get... Their first instinct would be to get defensive, because they're human, like leaders are human, and I think that so often just puts us off from further conversations when it could be perfectly natural, if you look at your leader as a person and say, okay. Their first reaction might not be positive, but maybe that's not the end of the conversation. And we all know, right, we've heard it a million times now with regard to clients and parasite prevention, you have to hear something seven times to really sink in. And there's that gap, if you don't talk about it, they're gonna forget. And it's not to say go to your boss and knock on the door every day like, hey...

**0:37:12.0 JV:** Have you read that book yet?

**0:37:15.1 KB:** Given more thought to...

**0:37:15.1 JV:** Have you read the book yet?

**0:37:15.8 KB:** Right. Yeah. You obviously don't care if you haven't done this thing. But to not get discouraged and say, okay, if the first reaction wasn't absolutely let's do this, you're so brilliant, here's a raise, maybe that's not the end. And can we think about how to bring this up again? If you're a leader and you didn't like your first reaction when somebody came up to you with this and you're a little bit like maybe embarrassed about that.

**0:37:41.2 JV:** Yeah, yeah.

**0:37:43.2 KB:** Then you are human, it is okay for leaders to be human, and that shouldn't mean that now to save your pride, you can never talk about it again. And I feel like I've encountered that a little bit maybe. It's like, well we tried that, it didn't work.

**0:37:58.0 JV:** It didn't work. That happens a lot. Katie, that's really incredibly insightful. I'm so grateful that you're thinking ahead to the what next part, 'cause that's a 100% true. I hear that a lot in the consulting and coaching work that we do at Flourish. People will be like, "Yeah, well, we tried that." Okay. How many times?

**0:38:20.3 KB:** It's like the client that tried the elimination diet by feeding it for a week, right?

**0:38:25.3 JV:** Yes. Exactly. Exactly. If the culture of a veterinary practice, or really any organization is like the Titanic, it's a massive chunk of metal cruising along the water in a particular direction, changing direction of it doesn't happen because you throw a snowball at it. That's just not how it works. It takes a level of consistency, intention, repetition, and quite honestly, lots of failure along the way. That's how change tends to occur. So, yeah, I mean, I think you're totally right. I think a lot of times you're gonna get a blank stare or you're gonna get something that's gonna feel dismissive, or the leader might be defensive. So I'd encourage you to think about the possible responses. Literally sit down... We coach people to do this all the time. If your goal is to get your leader to embrace the practices of positive leadership in your hospital, think about how you can express that goal, what's important to them, how you can tie it to that, how you can invite them into the conversation. Write that down. Literally write it out. Write yourself a script, and then think about how will they probably respond to what I'm gonna say to them. You know them pretty well, you work with these people. You probably can anticipate that.

**0:39:54.2 JV:** Write down that potential response and then think of two other possible responses. Challenge yourself to think about, well, maybe they'll surprise me. They could say this. Right? Or maybe they're having a particularly horrible day, they could say this. Really think about potential alternative responses, and then take a few minutes before you talk to this person to write out a plan for yourself. Okay. If I go to Katie and she says, "This is the dumbest idea I've ever heard." Go back to what you do. Just be a tech for God's sakes, that's your job here. Right? How will I respond to that if my goal is to get Katie to embrace the practices of positive leadership? Not if my goal is to defend myself, not if my goal is to tell them what a jerk they are. My goal is to get them to embrace the practices of positive leadership. Katie says, "Go back to your damn job for God's sake." How will I respond to that? Come up with a plan for yourself, for all the possible ways that your leader might react to this messaging.

**0:40:58.4 JV:** And now you're prepared. You've got a script, you've got an algorithm. You've got what's the... You know, in the textbooks, right? Okay. If yes, no, and if it's this, then you do this, and if... That's all you're doing is writing out an instruction manual for yourself to make sure that you can stand in your strength and in your space and continue the conversation. So it's not just one snowball thrown at the ship.

**0:41:20.7 KB:** There's also some leaders you're not gonna get through to, right?

**0:41:25.2 JV:** Totally.

**0:41:25.3 KB:** Katie, in that situation, does sound like kind of a jerk. [laughter]

**0:41:30.0 JV:** How about we call her Karen instead of Katie?

**0:41:32.6 KB:** Yeah. Okay. [laughter] So, poor Karen. The Karen's of the world really just get them maligned. Like my mom was named Karen and I'm kind of glad she's not around anymore, to hear the name Karen become like that person, 'cause she was so not that person. But yes, I prefer not Katie. So you've seen a lot of leaders. You do a lot of consulting, you're very busy, you're always traveling, which is why I never see you, even though we live in the same state now. Are there practices out there that are doing this really well? These leaders exist, right? This isn't just theoretical. This is something that people are actually doing right now.

**0:42:08.7 JV:** A 100%. So I gotta tell you a story. This was something that was invigorating for me. It sort of re-inspired me on the Flourish mission. Towards the end of last year, towards the end of '22, we conducted some research. So with the 4 P's of positive leadership, we have an assessment tool, a way to measure whether it's actually happening or not in a workplace. And we put that into a survey with a whole bunch of other stuff too. We ask people about how often do you think about quitting your job? How often do you think about leaving the veterinary profession? How committed and engaged do you feel at work? How loyal do you feel to your organization? What's your current state of psychological wellbeing at work? How resilient do you feel? Overall, how happy and satisfied are you with the job? All those kinds of outcomes. We wanted to see if there was any relationship between, yes, my leaders do these things and how people responded to those things. The short answer is that yes, there is a very strong relationship. It turns out that positive leadership does actually seem to make a pretty big difference in the veterinary profession. But that's actually not why I'm sharing this.

**0:43:17.8 JV:** At least in response to this particular question. When we put that out, we put that survey out by convenient sampling. Anybody who wanted to, could participate. It took about 10 minutes to complete. So people really had to commit to doing it. We got about 600 responses. So pretty good dataset. I expected, because of the way that we were recruiting and it being by convenient sampling, that the people who would respond would be the people who had something to say about our leaders. Right? I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I was anticipating that we would get a lot of bad scores. A lot of people who said, "Oh God no, I don't have positive leaders in my hospital." A little over 30% of our data set said, I do have positive leaders. A third of the people who responded to our survey said that I work in a place with positive leadership in veterinary medicine. It is not just possible. It's happening a lot and we can do it more. That's amazing.

**0:44:19.7 KB:** That is amazing. Yeah. Yeah. I would never have expected that. I wonder if those people are having the same trouble hiring and keeping staff.

**0:44:30.9 JV:** No. People who said that the 4 P's were happening in their hospital. So I.e, my leadership in this practice does these things were 2.3 times less likely to say, I'm looking for a new job. The average response to the question. So the question that we asked was, how often do you think of quitting your job? It's a five point scale. The options were all the time, often, sometimes, rarely, or never. People who said, these positive leadership practices are not happening in my hospital, which I wanna be clear about by the way, we were not asking people to say we have good leaders or good managers or not. We were just saying, these are 16 behaviors, do your leaders do them or not? That's it. So you can be a good leader, a decent manager doing a good job at a practice that's doing just fine and not be a positive leader. People who said...

**0:45:30.8 KB:** Yeah, thank you for pointing that out.

**0:45:33.4 JV:** Yeah, absolutely. People who said, "Nope, these behaviors are not happening." The average response to how often are you thinking of quitting your job was often, 4.2 on a five point scale. Often. I'm often thinking of leaving this hospital. The average response to people who said, "Yes, my leaders do these things to some extent was rarely 1.8 on a five point scale."

**0:45:56.0 KB:** Wow.

**0:45:58.7 JV:** 2.3 times difference. It's a huge difference. That alone should make this convincing. We have a huge retention problem in veterinary medicine. I often use this kitchy, I love kitchy little statements. I think retention is the new recruitment. If we're gonna put all our effort into recruiting people, I don't think we're setting ourselves up for success. First of all, the tools that we're using to recruit people are primarily financial incentives. It's a great look in the literature. I encourage anybody to just do a little bit of digging in Google Scholar, and you will find financial incentives are a wonderful recruitment tool and suck for retention, period. People do not stay because of money. They stay because of environment. They stay because of workplace experience. And so if we're gonna rely on those kinds of things to fill the empty seats, we're not setting ourselves up for long-term success. It's not gonna do anything for the retention difficulties that we have. Not to mention, I think we can all agree veterinarians and technicians are not growing on trees. I personally know hospitals who have had ads for an associate veterinarian for two years and maybe gotten one or two applicants in that period of time.

**0:47:10.2 JV:** We have to make environments that people want to stay in if we want to make our

business of veterinary medicine sustainable. So I think that alone should be a convincing case that you wanna think about positive leadership in your practice.

**0:47:26.5 KB:** Yeah. I mean, you convince me. [laughter] And like I said, that's one thing that probably could have kept me in clinical practice, if not forever, then longer. I love what I'm doing now, but there definitely was getting to the point where there wasn't a choice. You know, I was gonna have to leave. And that data is just staggering, to think about how much of an impact positive leadership can have on a team. We've heard that saying, right? People don't leave bad jobs, they leave bad managers. And you're talking about managers that may not be, on paper, bad. They might be doing everything they're supposed to do and checking the boxes they've been taught to check, or not taught as we like to promote people who don't have any management training into management positions in Vet Med. But I love business books and leadership books and so I've done management and I've done a lot of reading on those things. But in Vet Med, we really do have a unique perspective because our workplaces are healthcare sales. A regular, like the office that... Our workplaces are like this nick melting pot of all these different types of workplaces.

**0:48:48.7 KB:** And so reading something like Adam Grant, I always wanted to know how those concepts could apply to a veterinary clinic. I didn't feel like they were talking directly to me. And I think that's what makes your book so special, because you've taken Adam Grant and Brené Brown and Josh Weisman, and you've put them into a context that makes sense to our people, because this is a very rarefied world. And I think that's long overdue and so, so necessary. And I'm hoping that Lead to Thrive sparks that curiosity in a lot of people who are like, "Oh, what else can I read about this?" And then they're going off and reading all of those things. But they don't have to, because you've distilled it down into this very manageable book that also gives practical exercises and examples, so that people can actually... They don't have to think about how to apply the concepts to their team. They can just look at the end of the chapter and be like, oh, here's an example. I can do it. My team meeting. And it that's incredible. You've done so much of that work for us.

**0:49:56.2 KB:** So this book is your baby, right? I mean, you have worked so hard on this. And shout out to Nathan Davidson, our product manager.

**0:50:06.2 JV:** Yes.

**0:50:07.4 KB:** Who's, I know, been working really closely with you on getting this book done. And I really just... I think it could have such a huge impact on vet med. So it's my personal mission to get it into as many hands as possible, as much as I have the power to help do that. What is your number one wish for it as you send it out into the world?

**0:50:26.1 JV:** Can I have two wishes?

**0:50:28.3 KB:** You can have two wishes. Yeah. You're allowed to have two.

**0:50:31.7 JV:** Thank you. Thank you. First and foremost, you said this is my baby. And that's accurate. I mean, this is definitely something I've poured a lot of time and my heart and soul into, but it is not a baby that was made by immaculate inception. There were a lot of people involved in making this book what it is today. Nathan was instrumental in bringing this thing to life. His guidance, his support, his insight, his pushback sometimes really honed it and made it a lot sharper message than I could have made it on my own. And then we had six amazing expert reviewers look

through the original transcript and Nathan sent me back, when I first got it, it was really daunting. It was this huge document with all of their comments collated into one. And at first, yeah, it was a little bit overwhelming, but oh my gosh, I have to tell you, those six human beings, there's no way the book would be as good as it is now, if they had not offered their time and their insight and their energy and their dedication to really cutting through it and surgically improving it. And then, the copy editor and the development editor and you and just that so many different people have really helped it be what it is.

**0:51:53.8 JV:** So I owe an incredible debt of gratitude. My hope is that those people can feel some pride and sense of meaningful impact because of what they did to help make the book what it is today. My second hope is that the people of veterinary medicine can find a little bit of vitality in reading the book, 'cause they deserve it. I mean, it's probably a little bit cliché to say and I hope it comes across as genuine as I mean it. This really was intended to be my gift to the profession. And I hope they receive it that way.

**0:52:32.0 KB:** I have no doubt that they will. And I think the book will give people hope that things can be different. And if their own situation where they are now can't change, it gives them an idea of what to look for in the next situation.

**0:52:43.0 JV:** Yeah. That's great.

**0:52:45.5 KB:** Yeah, people should feel empowered to go find these cultures, because as you say, they're out there and they're happening and they're thriving and they might not have an open position because nobody leaves. So you might not find them in the back of JAVMA. You just don't know. And so, but having those nuggets in your head to know where to look when you visit a practice or when you're talking to somebody who works there and knowing the questions that you want answers to. That is so valuable. I did not have that, and life would've been very different, especially for me as a new vet, if I had been armed with a little bit of that.

**0:53:22.0 JV:** Totally.

**0:53:22.4 KB:** I hope vet students read this. I hope new graduates read this. New grad technicians, technicians who have just gotten credentialed but have been in the field for a while. There's no reason why this book can't speak to everybody on a certain level. So definitely, they can check it out. And you just finished recording the audio version.

**0:53:42.8 JV:** I did.

**0:53:42.9 KB:** So people can actually hear you read the book yourself, which is so exciting.

**0:53:47.9 JV:** It was fun. It was a lot of fun.

**0:53:50.5 KB:** Yeah. Yeah. And I have a wish for it aside from that, just as many people as possible get to see it. You said something in here too. I wrote, I made a note because I just have to show everyone. This is my copy of *Lead to Thrive* that I actually printed out because I like to read books in my hands and on the screen. And I had to take too many notes on it, so I just printed it out. But I couldn't wait. But you had said that we have to shift our thinking from perfectionism to continuous improvement. And that right there speaks volumes in a field where so many of us

succeeded at school and got to be veterinarians at least. Because we're perfectionists. We would describe ourselves that way. And the idea of there never being an end goal can be a little bit terrifying, 'cause you're like, oh my God, how do I know if I've gotten there? If there's never a there to get to. But there is a positive culture, where everybody is striving together for that feeling of what can we do better tomorrow? What can we do better today?

**0:54:56.3 JV:** Yeah. Yeah.

**0:54:56.4 KB:** So that's my hope is that people recovering perfectionists like me can say, "Oh, okay. So my goal actually is different and it's already achieved if I'm constantly looking for how our culture can improve." It's like a sigh of relief.

**0:55:14.4 JV:** It is, right?

**0:55:15.9 KB:** Yeah.

**0:55:17.0 JV:** Yeah. Oh, that's awesome. Thank you for sharing that.

**0:55:20.7 KB:** Okay. So our last question. The post-it question, I wanna know if you... Besides dude be kind or be kind Samuel L. Jackson.

**0:55:29.6 JV:** Samuel L. Jackson. Yeah. [laughter]

**0:55:32.5 KB:** If you could put a post-it on, say on the dashboard of every veterinary professional's car, so they'd see it when they get in the car to go to work in the morning, what would it say?

**0:55:42.6 JV:** Okay. So it would have like a... Okay, you know the central line stickers that you have? Those graphics, right. It would have that version of graphic, but it would be you and it would be you pointing with a really happy look on your face. And under it it would just say, you matter.

**0:56:00.0 KB:** Aw, love it. Yeah. I don't think there's anything I can add to that. Sounds great because you do, everybody does.

**0:56:12.4 JV:** Everybody does.

**0:56:14.0 KB:** And everybody deserves to go to work and not feel like they're counting the minutes until they get to leave.

**0:56:18.7 JV:** I agree. Totally agree.

**0:56:21.6 KB:** Yeah. Josh Vaisman, thank you so much as always. I could talk to you forever. I'm sure we'll have many other chances to talk about Lead to Thrive, but I'm planning, we're planning. We've got some stuff in the works, so everybody stay tuned for some events where you can hear Josh talking to other people, other leaders and just talking about how to apply some of the concepts in his book and in all of your talks to other areas of Vet Med, 'cause it's all connected. So stay tuned for those. But for now, Lead to Thrive, The Science of Creating a Positive Veterinary Culture by Josh Vaisman. We'll be in the AAHA Store. It's the exclusive location where you can find this book, starting May 22nd. And you can get your hands on a copy or the audio book through our store

links. So check it out and share with your friends for sure. Thank you Josh.

**0:57:22.9 JV:** Thanks Katie. Appreciate you.

**0:57:25.9 KB:** And thanks to everyone for listening. We'll catch you next time on Central Line.