

0:00:00.0 Katie Berlin: Hi, welcome back to Central Line. I'm your host, Katie Berlin, and my guest today is David Liss, who has a number of credentials after his name, and I'm excited to have him here and talk about one of my favorite topics, which is communication. David, welcome to Central Line.

0:00:18.2 David Liss: Oh thanks so much for having me, Katie. This is great. Happy to be here.

0:00:21.6 Katie Berlin: Before we start, I was wondering if you could give us a brief, little introduction to yourself, how you came to be here and what it is you're doing right now.

0:00:29.8 David Liss: Sure, so I have actually fun fact, never had a job outside the veterinary industry, so I've been very lucky to have done a lot of stuff in this world. I started out as a kennel kid when I was probably 14, I think, and essentially spent the first, probably 12 years of my career as a veterinary technician, veterinary nurse on the floor. Did an alternate path, became an RVT, and worked in exclusively emergency and specialty for a long time and obtained a BTS and then spent essentially the second chapter of my career in management and leadership. I ran a couple of 24-hour hospitals in Los Angeles and was the director of a technician program for a period of time. And then most recently, I've been working for two different corporate agencies, one right now is VEG, as a multi-site Veterinary Regional Director. So, overseeing, essentially managing managers and having moved up into that level.

0:01:20.4 Katie Berlin: Cool. Managing managers, that's not an easy task.

0:01:24.2 David Liss: No, it's not. And it's an interesting... I think of it like the executive coach, essentially. Managers and any professional operating at that level, you work with them, you coach them, you direct them and support them in a very different way than you would more of an entry-level staff member. They don't need to be told what the SOP is or how to do that. They have to be coached through how that gets done, or what the big picture is, or leveling up their skills, and we actually just went through a process where I was working with a couple of them on professional development. And I realize that they're well beyond the writing of SMART goals, that's more for somebody who's, "I want to learn, I do catheters by, you know, in 30 days so that I can XYZ." Right there, that's kind of a SMART goal, they are much more objective thinkers thinking about the vision statement and then figuring out ways to make that vision execute, so it's a very different and it's a very fun position to be in.

0:02:15.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah, that seems like it would be really inspiring because you're constantly having to level up yourself to be a good coach for them.

0:02:22.8 David Liss: Absolutely 100%. I'm constantly thinking and looking and re-evaluating myself and taking feedback from them as well. I think the other part about being at the level is that they have really strong and apt feedback to give, and so I listen and adapt, and I think that managers typically appreciate, you know, being able to essentially manage up and tell their boss like, "Hey, we need something else from you," or "Hey, this thing you did came off this way," or whatever it is, or "You could have approached this differently." And we can really just have that kind of very filterless conversation because we are both pretty engaged and strong management professionals.

0:02:57.2 Katie Berlin: Absolutely, very cool. Before we start, I'd like to learn a little bit about the guests that we have on the show, and you and I have chatted before, so I know you're a runner, and

I know you have a lot of things that you're interested in, but I didn't know that you actually had never had a job outside Vet Med. That's really neat. I don't know that I've talked to somebody who said that, and I love that. You really know this industry inside and out, and so I'm very glad that you're here. But I also wanted to ask you about your most embarrassing Vet Med stories, because if there's ever been a profession that has been guaranteed to knock us on our butts in front of people on a regular basis, it's Vet Med. So do you have an embarrassing Vet Med story to tell us?

0:03:40.8 David Liss: I do, and you know, people are gonna... They're gonna laugh, they're gonna cry, and they're also gonna probably think, "How the heck did you do that?" So the story is, I was working as a technician in an ER and we did basically... Most of everything, it was kind of like... We didn't do doctor stuff, but we did... We unblocked catheters, and we did all of these different things. And so I was having to go tell an owner that their dog had passed, and the reason I was doing that is because the doctor was in surgery, which is very typical. Doctor would be in surgery and a DOA or a code, or whatever you wanna call it would come in and we would literally be... The doctor be yelling us things to do and we would try and then we wouldn't and the owner would want us to stop. And so we would actually do most of that without the doctor. This was many years ago, and I'm not advocating for this, it's probably not legal, but like it was many, many years ago.

0:04:29.9 David Liss: I put on my somber face and I was... I hate to say that I was kind of playing doctor, right, like delivering the news and I was going into the room and just saying, "I'm very sorry that Fluffy died." And the owners looked at me and they just like their eyes got big and they said, "Fluffy died?" And I said, "I'm so sorry, we tried everything we could." And they said, "We just brought her in for a broken toe nail." And I went, "Oh, [0:04:50.2] ____ I'm in the wrong exam room." I realized I was like, whatever her name was, "Stephanie. Did you say exam two?" And she said, "No, I said, exam one." And I went, Oh my god, and I just looked at them and I said, "I'm terribly sorry. Fluffy is okay. Unfortunately, I have to give the news to another room." And they understood and were relieved, and I exited the room and went back in the right room. So that was my very embarrassing, horrible, Vet Med story.

0:05:18.1 Katie Berlin: Oh my god, I mean, we've all gone in the wrong room. If you're in this business long enough, you've gone in the wrong room and said the wrong things to the wrong person. But that is a particularly bad example for sure.

0:05:30.0 David Liss: Absolutely.

0:05:30.8 Katie Berlin: Well, yeah, thanks for sharing that. I haven't told my embarrassing Vet Med story on air yet, and I'm just gonna say that that will come at some point, but...

0:05:40.1 David Liss: Awesome. I want to hear that one.

0:05:41.3 Katie Berlin: It was definitely... Oh, I have many. I mean, it's so easy. Anyway, okay, so let's talk about communication, speaking of saying the wrong thing to the wrong person. Communication is a hot topic now, and I'm really glad that we're talking more about communication, I know it's still called a soft skill, but honestly, without communication, the medicine, all that stuff doesn't matter because we can't get to it, right. So I wanted to ask you what you think are some of the biggest communication challenges that you're seeing veterinary teams facing right now.

0:06:12.9 David Liss: Yeah, that's a great question. I'll start high level, I think, because we can talk about specific situations, and I think we're gonna probably dig into those later, but I think if we take a step back.

0:06:24.1 David Liss: When you say something to some other human being, we have a natural assumption that that person heard exactly what we said, all of the words, got all of the body language, picked up on all of the tone, and also essentially completely understood the intent. All of those things, we assume that all of that happens, and that is bull [0:06:47.2] _____. What happens is that person's... I'm not a neuroscientist, but I'm gonna just give you from what I understand as a communicator, that person's brain interprets it completely differently, assesses it in essentially the five, 10, 15, 20 or 50, or 75 years of life and lived iteration on their brain patterns, that's how they assess it. They hear what they wanna hear, and I don't mean that in a bad way, but they hear what they think they heard, which 'cause not what you've said. And so it just spirals from there. And this is I think where we get into a lot of trouble is we'll say something like, "Hey, the dog really needs a catheter, you've tried twice, let me jump in." What the other person hears is, "You're a big bully, you pushed me out of the way."

0:07:30.0 David Liss: I'm not saying that these are things that happen, and it doesn't mean that we can't adjust that communication style. But then the person that said the thing oftentimes is saying, "Well, I didn't mean it that way." Right, this is the mess we get into when we communicate. And so I think that it's important to just take a step back and realize that that's essentially what happens every time we open our mouths and the other person opens their ears. And so then you talk about stuff like active listening and ways that you communicate with somebody else. Recording yourself and listening to it, all these different things, and that's the reason why.

0:07:57.3 David Liss: So I thought it was important to just set the stage to say, "Guys, that isn't abnormal? That's actually exactly what happens when we communicate." And so you have to understand, especially as a leader or a veterinarian who's speaking to a customer or a client, that's gonna happen every time. And so if you kind of are aware of that, then you're almost, A, constantly thinking about how you're communicating. And then B, when there's a mess up in communication, you don't get into that cycle of like, "But I thought I said..." You just understand that it's part of the process and you gotta go clean up on the back end, and re-speak to the intent or re-speak to the tone of what you meant or apologize for how it came up, all of the things. But if we just understand that that's just the normal messy process of communicating that I think we could take the next step into iterating and improving on how we do that.

0:08:44.0 Katie Berlin: Yeah, that's all really good. I didn't really think about that as being such an issue where sometimes you can communicate really, really well, but that doesn't necessarily mean that your goal is just automatically achieved.

0:08:55.7 David Liss: Right, exactly.

0:08:58.3 Katie Berlin: You could be the best communicator in the world, but that doesn't necessarily mean that your message is getting across every time. It's complicated lives and full heads and tone matters and people communicate a lot in text right now too, which is...

0:09:09.3 David Liss: Yeah, absolutely. Whole other thing, yeah. And I think it's interesting for veterinarians who listen to the podcast, or technicians or anybody scientific or somebody that does

things with their hands or... So when you look at a piece of blood work and you see that the kidney values are high, you know that it's a kidney thing, and then you write a script for a medication. That's all things that you kind of control. And I think that when that's kind of your work and the world you live in, and almost the kind of communication that you feel that you live in when you then have another human in the mix and they don't understand it or don't get it, or are upset by it, or whatever it is. We get thrown for a loop as scientist, right? "But the blood work says the kidney's high, I gave you the medication. Why are you so upset?" And the client is like, "I'm just upset." And we have to talk through that.

0:09:53.3 David Liss: So I think that it's important for veterinarians and technicians and nurses and all of our people that work in our veterinary hospitals to understand that your world of, "I took the scalpel and I made the cut and I clamped the thing and I tied the thing, and the dog's okay," is your work, but when you start speaking to the other humans, it gets a lot messy and there's nothing wrong with it, it's fine, but you have to understand that that as you said, let's stop calling it a soft skill and start calling it a hard skill, it's a very important skill to have as well.

0:10:23.4 Katie Berlin: Yeah, and on that same note, I know you probably have to do a lot of CE, 'cause you have multiple credentials that you wanna maintain, and it's also valuable for your job. And as veterinary professionals, most of us who have a license of some kind do CE pretty regularly, but a lot of us don't get credit for doing CE and things like professional development and communication and management issues. As a veterinarian in Pennsylvania, none of those credits counted towards my CE requirement. And I'm in Colorado now, it's a little bit different, but it's still only a few credits out of 30 or 32 or something. And I'm just wondering how you feel about that.

0:11:04.0 David Liss: Yeah, I understand it from the lens of it being non-medical CE, CME, I understand that point of veterinarians needing however many credits to improve their... Technicians as well, nursing skills, diagnosing skills, all of that stuff. I do understand that lens. I do think though, that if we think about being in the 21st century and thinking about veterinary medicine as a Medical Science, first and foremost, I'm not debating that, but also an industry that cares about customer experience and cares about clients, and cares about their engagement with their pets and the role that we play, I think we have to talk about communication. So I've seen in crop up more and more, and I've seen a lot of State Boards and CE registration or regulations have a little extra bullet at the bottom that says, you know, "Two hours or four hours of non-clinical CE allowed." That type of situation. And so you can throw anything in that bucket, including management stuff, right, for veterinarians that own their own practices.

0:12:02.8 David Liss: But I'm picking up what you're putting down. And I feel like if the state boards are listening or we can advocate to either, and I hate to say it, maybe go from 24 to 28 hours, if they feel like 24 is still incredibly valuable scientific or just have 24 and have 20 of it be clinical and four be non-clinical, so that there's that ability to have some of that non-clinical CE and level up yourself as a person, as an owner, as a communicator.

0:12:29.8 Katie Berlin: Yeah, I would certainly say even if we had a non-clinical CE requirement in addition to the medical CE, as an associate anyway, it would have been... It was hard and sometimes impossible to have my employers pay for non-medical CE because they didn't see it as important, it wasn't required for my license. But if it's a requirement, then I can think of conversations that I've had with supervisors that would have gone differently because I would have been able to say, "Well, this... To get my management CE requirement or my communication CE

requirement, I'd like to do this workshop," or something. And I just... It sort of normalizes it and makes it seem like it really is important, not just some people are into it and other people aren't. And we are a medical profession, but I just... It doesn't do any good to know all the tests, if you can't go in and talk to the client and make them understand why you're recommending those tests and that you're not judging them if they can't afford all of the tests and all of that stuff that is sort of viewed as secondary, but to me is so, so important.

0:13:40.3 David Liss: No, absolutely. And so that's a huge aspect of it, and I think that thinking is of doctors, veterinarians and technicians who you know do client education and work with clients as educators and as communicators is a great first step. And then that means, Okay, well, if that's a skill set then we need to provide support and level it up. And then of course, the other side of it too, is understanding that we work in businesses and thinking about employee engagement and connection amongst employees and retention and all of those things many, many, many times people have left jobs because of communication, that wasn't the situation or the scenario, but probably at the root of a lot of it was communication. And a lot of times, you know, employees say, "We weren't heard, we didn't see change happen." They weren't feeling like they were heard and so there was some communication that didn't happen. So there's two aspects of it that I think are super important. Maybe the veterinary board draws the line of like, "Okay, we don't give you CE to take care of your business." Maybe that's your house, right? But definitely working with clients, and that being essentially a way to get to better medicine, I could definitely see the path for some requirements around making non-clinical CE required.

0:14:47.2 Katie Berlin: Yeah, that's a good point. Yeah, and communication issues. We talk all the time now about burnout and attrition, and everybody's working short-staffed, and there are numerous potential causes for that too, we'll get into obviously, but do you feel like there seems to be that always those hospitals that don't have trouble finding team members and their people stay forever. And do you think there's a correlation between teams that are constantly filled and their team members just seem to stay and the type of communication that they try to use with their team?

0:15:21.6 David Liss: Yeah, I think that companies or hospitals, private clinics, that have low turnover, low attrition, and essentially if you were to go interview there, they could say, "Hey, so and so's been with us for five years. So and so's been with us for 10 years." They have those kinds of legacy employees, there's some secret sauce there that I think you, as an employee, you definitely wanna try to find. And I do think that communication is part of... There's a lot of other pieces to it, but I think if you distill it down, even if you think about, for example, a hospital or practice where they have great retention and they have a great benefits package, well, that's part of it, and that's great, but how do they communicate that benefits package? I would be probably pretty sure that the manager does a big Hoorah at open enrollment and talks to the employees about why they offer what they do and how it's so important and how this can help them. There isn't just like a PDF that's sent via email saying, "Hey, here's our benefits for the year." And that's communication, so that's how you present that to your team. Using tons of different channels, email, text, Slack, phone calls, zoom, like all of the ways to get connected with your employees.

0:16:31.3 David Liss: Communicating with them about where the hospital is going, where the business is going, why decisions were made, what things are happening, having regular team meetings that are not just one man shows, meeting the managers, just talking at the team for an hour. And we can go through all those. But that idea of how do they think intentionally about how they communicate and how are they communicating is probably part of why people stay because

communication creates feeling. When you communicate with somebody, you absolutely imprint, you know, some sort of feeling and people have a subconscious kind of non-controlled feeling reaction to it, and then we start telling ourselves the story and then it goes from there. And so if you communicate in a way that makes people de-escalate and feel supported and all of the good hormones, the oxytocin hormones are flowing versus the cortisol and the stress hormones, you probably find that your employees stay with you longer.

0:17:22.3 Katie Berlin: Yeah, sometimes it's not as much about what you say as it is how you make people feel.

0:17:28.2 David Liss: Or how you say it. Absolutely, you're totally right.

0:17:32.5 Katie Berlin: Yeah, so I really like... I'd like people to take something actionable away from this conversation, and so I was wondering if maybe we could go through a couple of examples that I've seen unfold in front of me, and I'm sure in your management experience you've seen a lot, all of these examples unfold in front of you. So I just was wondering, sometimes broaching the subject isn't the hard part, sometimes bringing something up with your management is difficult, but doable, but then that initial reaction maybe is negative or is it kind of intended to shut down the conversation, and that's where I feel like a lot of people could have... Could really benefit from some training and tips. So the first example that I was thinking of was, say you have a CSR who's just feeling a little bit disengaged. CSRs there's a huge turnover rate in that position anyway, it's a really tough job. But say this person is interested in taking on some extra responsibility or doing some extra training so that he feels more comfortable with the current responsibilities that he has. What are some ways that you've seen this not go well, and how do you feel like team members should approach this?

0:18:43.8 David Liss: Sure. So the good thing is that it oftentimes does go well because you get a team member who takes on extra assignments and is excited to grow and all of the positive things. But I do think that it's important to call out some of the negative. So I think just off the top of my head, a couple of things is one, you ask the team member to do more work. You either don't make it safe enough for them to have a compensation discussion or you don't offer them more money and they do it initially, and then some resentment builds up because they're truly doing more work for the same pay. So you gotta think about what does that look like? The second thing that I think sometimes goes awry is if you don't communicate that to the team and be transparent about what they're doing and essentially what their new stretched role is, then they end up with maybe a non-title title. Maybe this person throws their weight around and creates some ruckus. Or maybe they don't even do that, but then somebody else says, "Well, I wanna do accounts receivable or end of day reconciliation, and so why did they get that job?" Right, so it creates a lot of mess there too. I do think that the third thing that can sometimes happen is just not setting clear expectations with that employee and then them not being kind of a nasty employee, they're just sometimes worried about performance.

0:19:51.5 David Liss: So, "Oh my god, I didn't get that extra thing done today because I was working at the front for my full-time job. Am I gonna be in trouble?" Those are kinds of things you have to think about, what is the expectation. If you say to them, "You need to do the 30, 60, 90 like accounting stuff. Do they do it once a day, once a month, once a year? How often is it done? What is the expectation when they fall short of that, what job are they supposed to prioritize? I've also seen sometimes people will be like, "Well, I can't work the front because I've gotta do the books."

And it's like, "Well, no, your primary job is the front." So I say these things not because you're gonna get it right the first time, but because you're gonna have to clean this up on the back end, it's probably naturally gonna just devolve. You can't... You can't give them a 60-page cited paper on their new job and they're gonna be able to read it and know all the ins and out and like how we write our laws, and you can't have all the sub-foot footnotes or whatever. But what you can do is just kind of think about it.

0:20:40.1 David Liss: So one of the things I think you can do is the first step is just plan. So you know what is the conversation you wanna have for that person? What's the intent of the conversation? What are some non-negotiables? If you're going into a coaching conversation, what are some kind of blind spots or areas that you think the employee, for example, might be asking you questions like have come prepared with answers? Like, "No, I can't pay you more. Yes, it's gonna be a lot more work." And then be prepared to them to say, "Hmm, maybe I'm not gonna necessarily wanna do this." Right, but like have some of those questions. Think through that. And then I think the second thing you can do is start to employ some empathy and think about, "Okay, this is obviously a really cool conversation to have," 'cause you wanna elevate somebody, sometimes the conversations are not always cool. It's either taking those jobs back 'cause they're not doing them well, or demoting somebody or telling somebody their behavior's unacceptable, whatever that is.

0:21:30.3 David Liss: But think through like, Okay, what are they gonna go through? So any time you say, "Hey Jane, can you meet in the office?" It doesn't matter if you're gonna be giving them a promotion and 50 bucks more an hour, they're gonna have some triggers, right, that's just naturally gonna happen. So you have to think like, Okay, what is this person going through? And then you have to address that and make it safe for them, emotionally safe. So you do some body stuff, you do some tone stuff, you do some questioning, there's all the different... We can talk about these in a bit. But all the things you do for them to have that kind of fight or flight reaction toned down a little bit, so you can actually engage their frontal lobe and not their loser brain, they're amygdala essentially. And then you're engaging with the part of the brain that's curious and interested and intellectual and interactive versus the brain that's gonna be very resistant to hearing anything.

0:22:17.8 David Liss: And that's what happens, right. Messages bounce, you know, into the ears, and again, this is probably not totally Neuroscience crap, but this is the way I understand it, is if you're in fight or flight mode, the message kinda gets to the amygdala and doesn't ever get to your frontal lobe, and so you're never analyzing or assessing it, or even thinking about whether it's correct, or what the tone was, or what the intent was, or how big the decision is, right, like, "Am I getting fired or am I just getting written up?"

0:22:39.9 David Liss: It sticks in the loser brain. And so everything goes white, all that you see is... And how many times have especially managers or owners that listen that say, "I just told that person they just need to come in, you know, on time, so I don't have to fire them and they went crazy." Right. They're hearing it as, "I'm fired right now." So they're immediately triggered and reactive. So thinking about that and thinking that that could happen and letting that be a natural thing. Heck, when we get pulled over by the cops or you know, even, you know, when you weren't doing anything or you didn't think you were doing anything, your nervousness goes up. So understanding that person is gonna have that and how do you engage with that and allow them to have that space and let that calm down.

0:23:16.2 Katie Berlin: Yeah, so thinking about this from the employee perspective too, is when

you're walking into that conversation, you should think ahead to, If you're gonna go in and have a conversation about something you're asking for, there's a good chance that the initial reaction may not be exactly what you're hoping it will be, or what you're prepared for. And my personal reaction, if somebody tells me No, or if somebody doesn't seem like... If the first reaction is anything, but, "Oh my god, that's a great idea, here's more money," then my initial reaction is probably that amygdala monkey-brain reaction where [0:23:52.9] _____. And then suddenly I... All conscious thought ceases and you're just reactive. And so you were just talking about some of the ways that you can sort of redirect and take them... Take a beat. I just bought this little Buddha that sits on my desk and he lights up and the color changes at four, seven and eight counts to help you time your breathing. So you can just take a minute when you're feeling that way. But assuming that you won't have a Buddha when you're in your boss's office, what can you do as that as you're sitting on that other side of the desk to sort of rewire your brain?

0:24:32.0 David Liss: Yeah, that's a great question. So I think there's... There's a couple of things that I can offer, and I also think it's important to realize... So owners and managers, I'm speaking to you as well as employees, I'm speaking to you as well, there's always two answers to a request, right? It is a yes and it is a no, and I think many, many times, especially owners and managers totally get it, and also sometimes it's employees. You make a request for a raise, you expect it to be a yes, and when it's a no, you're really, really, really pissed, right? And you just have to understand that there are two right answers to every question, and so you have to be... You have to mentally think about it. So for employees, if you're going in to make requests of your employer, which is great, please do that, they're great, and I don't wanna discourage you from doing it, you have to be ready for a no. And so you have to prepare yourself for a no. And so you have to just literally tell yourself like, "If I get told No," you can't control the feelings, those just come out there hormonal, but if you can think to yourself, "Am I gonna quit over this? Is it a deal breaker?"

0:25:32.4 David Liss: Let's say you're gonna ask for \$2 more and hour. Would you accept one? Would you negotiate? You have to think through that, you can't go into a conversation and say, "Hey boss, I want two bucks more an hour." And the boss goes, "It's a no, we just don't have it in the budget," and then you completely fall apart, and then they're the bad guy for saying no. No is a completely reasonable response. Right? So you have to understand that there's those two questions, or those two answers. Owners and managers, same thing. If you make a request for an employee, if you say, "Oh my god, so and so quit and I have an overnight shift to cover, and can you cover it?" And that employee says No, they're not a bad employee for saying No, that's a reasonable response. You can order them to do it. I guess you could say like, "You have to work." But if you say, "Would you work?" And they say, No, then that's also okay. We don't think humans do not like being told No, because we associate no with essentially loss, we're not getting something, and then our loss aversion kicks in and it's a very, very powerful motivator to not lose something, which is also very kind of hormonal.

0:26:28.9 David Liss: So a couple of things that I just personally do just being transparent with the audience. I have this, I absolutely have the fight or flight like, "Oh my god, I can't believe it." One thing, and these are just silly, these are not scientifically proven, the one thing I do is I will just gently bite my inner lip, and I kind of use that as a little not create blood, but just very gently put a little pressure to basically tell myself like, "Where do I put my anxiety? Where do I put my nervousness right now rather than pushing it out on the to other person?" So I'll just kind of gently do a little bit and it's weird, you'll probably see me doing that and going, "What the heck are you doing?" But it's just something, it's a little tic, it's a little something to kind of get some of that

anxiety or nervousness out.

0:27:07.5 David Liss: The other thing that I'll do is I force myself not to say anything. So if somebody says to me, if I say, "Hey, tomorrow or next Thursday, there's an overnight shift, can you cover it?" And they say, "No, I'm going to a party, I just can't." I sit there and I just do not say, [0:27:20.6] ____ I just sit in the like, I'm really upset right now, and just start to breathe and I breathe through pursed lips, so you just kind of keep those lips really tight together and hold yourself in that really, really awful place, but you have to have to kind of feel that wave and then if you give that like 30 seconds, usually it will wash through you and you can get your frontal lobe going.

0:27:43.7 David Liss: And then the third thing that I do is I almost... It's like a technique for me to calm down. The person doesn't always realize that I'm doing that, but is I ask questions. When you ask questions, you divert blood from your amygdala to your frontal lobe and you're also doing the same thing for them, and that's why we use... That's what we talk about leading through curiosity or managing through questions, is that you're getting them to also circumvent the amygdala by getting their frontal lobe to turn on and drive some of that blood flow. So I just say something like, "Well, you said you have a friend? What time does your party end?" "Oh, it ends at 10." "Oh, would you be willing to work 10 to three?" You start to engage with them and that will bring the level down like no other when the frontal lobe is starting to fire up. So those are just a couple of things that I personally do for employees or anybody that's going in, you've gotta figure out some sort of way to hold the nervousness or the anxiety if you're told no, 'cause you gotta be prepared for that.

0:28:37.6 David Liss: And so however you kind of approach those other situations in life, if you... You've been through really nervous situations, like tough situations, that would be... You could do that same thing, but I think one of the biggest ones would just be to ask questions to follow up. It'll get your frontal lobe going and it gets their frontal lobe going.

0:28:53.1 Katie Berlin: I love that, I've never heard that before, that when you ask questions, it kind of changes the focus in your brain and then for the other person as well, but it makes perfect sense 'cause you have to use your frontal lobe to formulate those questions. Like if you let the amygdala do the questioning, it's not gonna be...

[overlapping conversation]

0:29:11.1 David Liss: Yeah, no, exactly correct.

0:29:11.2 Katie Berlin: It's gonna be yelling. So my other example that I was gonna give you was, this is coming totally hypothetically. [chuckle]

0:29:23.5 David Liss: Sure, of course.

0:29:24.7 Katie Berlin: Let's say that an associate is asked to, like we were talking about, cover extra shifts 'cause another doctor is on vacation and she says no. And then she finds out that management has been talking to each other about how she's not a team player hypothetically. So say that in this situation, whether or not the associate should have said yes, or whether or not no is a reasonable answer to these requests, that all depends on context, I think. But the fact is that there are situations where team members will feel like they're not being respected by management, but they

find this out second hand. And it's really hard in those situations to know, do you bring things up and have a hard conversation that you probably could get by without having, or do you not have the conversation but take the risk that the resentment will kind of fester? And I was wondering what you think about that, like conversations that maybe aren't strictly necessary and are gonna be unpleasant, how do you do make that decision as somebody who's not in a position of power? .

0:30:28.6 David Liss: Yeah, so the first thing I'll say, I definitely don't defend those managers for somehow leaking information about your performance to you without speaking to you about it, so that's not cool. And so we're not gonna address that today. But that is not cool, guys. Keep it to yourselves or keep it confidential or whatever it is, and then just go have a conversation with that employee about their performance and talk to them. On the employee side though, absolutely get that it's really difficult. I don't think any great or wise or sage advice, I think that it just has to kinda do with the end game. So if you know yourself well, and you know that now that you've heard this information, it is going to lodge in your brain like a shard of glass, and it is going to make you a probably worse employee, like you know you're gonna start being resentful, you know you're gonna start being sharp, you're gonna be brooding on it or whatever, then I would say to salvage your job, you probably need to have the conversation.

0:31:22.6 David Liss: And the reason why I say that is because, let's say you have this thing that has created resentment and built up, and I'm not making excuses for it, I'm just saying that this is what could have happened, and then you start to perform poorly at your job, you snap at people, you show up late, you do not so great things, you're gonna get coached and you're possibly gonna get coached out. And then sometimes those conversations happen where it's a difficult conversation, and then you say, "The reason I'm like this is this thing that I held on from three years ago," that doesn't go well for anybody. So I'm not defending the managers that that happened, but I have had employees that have come and said... And have said basically, possibly borderline unprofessionally, but they're upset, and I understand where they've said, "I heard from so and so that you so and so," and I go, "Oh my goodness, right. Let's have this conversation. I apologize, you shouldn't have heard that from somebody else, but we need to talk about it." And so if you're able to... Obviously, I'm not suggesting you go in and yell at your boss, but if you're able to go in and say, "Hey, I heard this stuff and I kinda wanna talk about the impact on me for hearing this stuff that you didn't tell me directly."

0:32:19.7 David Liss: I would just highly encourage you to do that because I think most people would have a problem letting that go and would feel hurt and disrespected and all of those things, and then to be completely honest, you're gonna see who your employer's true colors are. So if they say, "Oh my god, we are so sorry. Yes, this is a performance issue, I'm holding that line. This is unacceptable, but like, look, the way you found out about it is not acceptable," that's probably an employer you can be vulnerable, transparent with and hang in there with. If they shut down or they wanna... Whatever all these other not so great employer things that they do, you should probably start looking for another job because you're just not gonna last there. You were disrespected and were treated poorly and they're not gonna respond to it. But what I would say is that these convers... This is a very important lesson for everybody, and I get it, it's tough, but it's very true. These conversations do not kill you, they do not cause you any kind of physical harm. God forbid, I hope nobody is swinging at you, but they don't open up your skin, they don't... Your heart beating a little bit faster does not hurt you, so it is just scary for scary's sake. And I think in a lot of times in life, and especially in the workplace, we avoid scary when it's not physically scary, it's just sitting in front of somebody and having a whole kind of shower of emotions that you have to work through.

0:33:38.7 David Liss: And so I would encourage people to just do it. And the reason I say do it is 'cause you could only get better, and if you do it, and if you do it, you'll get better at it, and you'll realize that you lived, you came out the other side. It was fine. And yes, of course, I understand that if the employer does something crazy, it threatens your security and your paycheck or whatever, but most of the time they're probably just gonna be a little defensive, a little bit unprofessional, and you can kinda work through that. But this also goes for when you have issues with co-workers, it's the same... It's the same hormonal mechanisms and the same fear. If you were to say like, "Hey, Katie, that thing you said to me yesterday, really, really frustrated me, can we talk in the break room?" Saying those words, the courage to say those words. The same mountain to climb to get there is the same mountain to climb to say, "Hey boss, I need to talk to you for a minute, can we set a meeting for next week?" And that's all that it is.

0:34:25.7 David Liss: It's literally getting the courage to open up and say those words, because once you're in it you're in it. You're gonna be talking and you're gonna be engaging and you're gonna be feeling all the things, it's literally just opening the mouth or sending the email to say, "Hey, I need an appointment, I need to talk to you about something."

0:34:39.5 Katie Berlin: That's such great advice, yeah. And sometimes holding on to resentment or anger can physically hurt you, because we all know the effects that stress can have on the body now and that stress of holding that in and working in a place where you don't feel respected or where you feel like there is toxicity that's not being addressed, that is potentially physically harmful...

0:35:00.7 David Liss: That's a good point.

0:35:01.1 Katie Berlin: In the long run. So that's really great advice. So these conversations may be emotionally painful for us, but they're not gonna kill you, and it's just better to get it out in the open. I love this, you have so much amazing advice to offer, and we could talk for 100 years about communication. I will be respectful of your time, but I'm really, really grateful that you took the time to come on today, and you have a podcast yourself.

0:35:26.8 David Liss: I do, so I co-host the PAWSitive with a PAW, The PAWSitive Leadership Podcast with Andrea Crabtree, who is also an amazing human being SPHR, PHR CVPM, she has her own management consulting business, and we do the same thing, we have guests on. And so you can find us at PAWSitive, PAW, PAWSitive Leadership Podcast, it's on iTunes and all of the different sites, and we have a website as well to be able to stream the episodes. So, so yeah, it's been really fun. I'm usually on the other side and am the interviewer, and it's great. Yeah, thanks for bringing it up. We'd love to have our listeners check it out.

0:36:04.8 Katie Berlin: Definitely, it's a fantastic podcast. So if you're interested in leadership management in the veterinary space, I highly recommend. So thank you so much, it's always great to have a fellow podcaster on and especially one with so much to offer. And David, I really, really appreciate it, thank you so much for coming on.

0:36:23.8 David Liss: You're welcome. It was great to be here, thanks for having me.

0:36:26.1 Katie Berlin: And thanks to all of you for listening. We'll catch you next time on Central Line.