

## **Central Line: The AAHA Podcast**

**Episode:** Vital, Not Basic: Elevating Veterinary Technicians Benefits Everyone

**Guests:** Julie Legred, CVT, FFCVP, Deborah Reeder, BA, AS, LVT, VTS-EVN(R), Shannon Thompson, RVT

**0:00:18.1 Katie Berlin:** Hi, welcome back to Central Line. I'm your host, Dr. Katie Berlin. And I have the special treat of being here in person at AVMA with three special guests today. We have Julie Legred, Shannon Thompson, and Deb Reeder. Thank you so much for making this happen. This is so exciting.

**0:00:39.1 Shannon Thompson:** We're thrilled to be here, honored to be here.

**0:00:42.3 Julie Legred:** I agree, and I'm glad we could work it out that we were all together in the same room and together.

**0:00:49.1 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. It feels so special.

**0:00:50.9 Shannon Thompson:** It really is, it really is. I mean, the bridge across the borders and...

**0:00:56.0 Katie Berlin:** Right.

**0:00:56.1 Shannon Thompson:** With passion that's still the same.

**0:00:57.9 Katie Berlin:** We're international right now.

**0:01:00.4 Shannon Thompson:** We are. [laughter]

**0:01:01.4 Deborah Reeder:** And we're all laughing last night. I was just... Had this observation, we're all three farm girls. [laughter]

**0:01:05.9 Katie Berlin:** Oh, really?

**0:01:06.7 Deborah Reeder:** Yeah, so it's like...

**0:01:07.2 Katie Berlin:** Oh, that's awesome.

**0:01:08.6 Julie Legred:** I didn't start out that way.

**0:01:11.5 Katie Berlin:** Well I can't ever say that I was a farm girl, but I did basically grow up on a horse farm, but it wasn't my horse farm. I just played in the dirt a lot and yeah, never washed my hands and... Yeah so...

**0:01:22.8 Julie Legred:** There you go.

**0:01:23.7 Shannon Thompson:** It was yours in your heart.

**0:01:25.6 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**0:01:26.1 Katie Berlin:** I wished it was mine. Well, it's great to have you and we're gonna be talking about one of my favorite topics today, which I know the three of you get so passionate about and excited about, and I've heard you talk about this before and it just really... You just light up the room when you talk about it, and so I'm very excited to be in that room. We're gonna be talking about technician utilization and empowerment and why we have everything we need right now and the technicians that we have. So getting into that in a minute. But first I wanted to have you three introduce yourselves and just say a little bit about who you are and what you do right now.

**0:02:05.1 Julie Legred:** I'm Julie Legred. I've been a certified veterinary technician from Minnesota for close to 40 years now. I don't feel that old, but...

**0:02:16.1 Katie Berlin:** Experienced.

**0:02:17.2 Julie Legred:** Yes, experienced, there you go. I have had a whole wide range of experiences throughout my career, small animal, exotic. My husband has a swine breeding stock company that I kind of moved from St. Paul and down into the Southern Minnesota and that's how I became my farm girl. I have four boys. I have done a wide, wide range of things throughout veterinary medicine, which I feel very honored and blessed to have done. So anywhere from the small animal practice to teaching, program director at one of the Minnesota programs, executive director for the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America, Winn Feline Foundation, which is now EveryCat Health Foundation, consulting Banfield, I've pretty much done the whole shebang and I still love it.

**0:03:15.7 Katie Berlin:** I was gonna say, Julie If only you would just do something with your life.

[laughter]

**0:03:19.3 Julie Legred:** It's... I'm one of the long-time, have held out my career and I still love it, so...

**0:03:28.9 Katie Berlin:** Love that. Yeah. It's too bad you can't do anything with a tech degree, right?

**0:03:33.7 Julie Legred:** Yeah, exactly.

[laughter]

**0:03:36.8 Shannon Thompson:** How true, how true.

**0:03:38.0 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:03:39.8 Shannon Thompson:** Hi everyone, I'm Shannon Thompson, I'm an RVT from Ontario, Canada. I've been an RVT for 31 years and I'm not done yet. I've had the great opportunity to have a career that ebbs and flows with your life, and I think that really says nothing... It's so close... It is the truth, really it is. So I've had the pleasure of being small animal, large animal, equine, emergency, referrals, specialty education, I had a locum business before locum techs were a thing, and now I

have my most recent, executive director for the Registered Veterinary Technologists and Technicians of Canada, and just being able to do what matters, what I'm passionate about and that's the people that we have in our field. As much as we care for the animals, it's really about the people that we work with every day and the teams that we work with every day and it's a career that you're only limited by your imagination. And whether it's mobilizing, whether it's utilizing, whether it's empowering, as long as we're talking about RVTs, I'm happy.

[laughter]

**0:04:49.9 Katie Berlin:** See what I mean? I mean, you guys just get so fired up about this and I love it so much. I just... Hearing the breadth of experience that you've had as technicians, I just love it. Deb, what about you?

**0:05:03.2 Deborah Reeder:** So I'm in this same realm. [laughter] And I wanna just take a moment and really truly thank you for this vested interest in our profession. It's refreshing, it's needed, and we're just applauding, we're applauding you.

[applause]

**0:05:18.7 Shannon Thompson:** It's been too long I think that we've not had these conversations enough, so it's time now.

**0:05:24.4 Deborah Reeder:** So I have been a registered veterinary technician since 1983, and now in Texas, I'm a licensed veterinary technician 'cause they've changed the terminology. [laughter]

**0:05:35.1 Katie Berlin:** That's a whole other podcast.

[laughter]

**0:05:37.5 Deborah Reeder:** But I have mainly been in the equine sector career for all of that, worked in equine referrals and ambulatory practices, and had an opportunity to join a corporate company back in the early '90s and I saw through that all the tools and resources that were offered in small animal that was not offered in equine. And so I came out of that fired up again, and went and started doing consulting work with equine practices to bring some of those tools. And then a group of us in Texas realized there was another missing in our profession and that was an association just for equine technicians because we are a different animal. [laughter] And so...

**0:06:26.1 Katie Berlin:** Equine people are different animals for sure. I say that as one. [laughter]

**0:06:31.8 Deborah Reeder:** So I formed the American Association of Equine Veterinary Technicians and Assistants in 2002 and I served as the president for a couple years till it got its on its feet and now I'm the executive director and have been since then. And I as well was an instructor at my alma mater where I graduated from, and then also taught at a online program, Equine and Large Animal. And we've formed the Academy for Equine Veterinary Nursing Technicians. We've created an equine manual for Equine Veterinary Technicians and Anesthesia Society. So there's... Like you say, there's just so many opportunities and you just have to look at those opportunities and take advantage of them and bring your passion to them and others will follow. And that's what's been an amazing journey for me. So I feel very privileged to be a part of it.

**0:07:31.9 Katie Berlin:** And that concludes our podcast. [laughter] Of all the things that you can do with a technician degree, we could just leave it right there. But I just love hearing about all of that, and it makes me inspired and it makes me hopeful because I think so many of these conversations have focused on what we're not doing. And I love hearing about technicians who have really taken that degree and taken your experience and said, "I see a need in the profession and I wanna help fill it," and you are all doing that so beautifully. Before we get into talking more about that though, I always ask one personal question of our guests. Sometimes it's about your autobiography and what it would be called, but I really wanted to know what breed of dog you would all be. So, one, two, three, go.

[laughter]

**0:08:23.6 Julie Legred:** So somebody else asked me this question earlier this week, so I feel like I have a...

**0:08:27.5 Katie Berlin:** Really? How you know you're in a vet conference. [laughter]

**0:08:31.0 Julie Legred:** Yeah, I know. Yeah. So I came up with Golden Retriever. I love them as I have one. Remy is a sweetheart. And I have had Golden Retrievers most of my life. But I really... I like their personality. I think they're outgoing. Not that I'm all of that, but I love people. I love my profession. I love interacting and going above and beyond however I can help people in my profession. So that's why I chose Golden Retriever.

**0:09:04.8 Katie Berlin:** I love it. Who doesn't love a golden?

[laughter]

**0:09:06.7 Shannon Thompson:** I think I'm not gonna select a breed so much as I'm just Snoopy. I just love dancing in the rain, flying on the rooftop. It doesn't matter if someone wants to join me or not. I don't mind doing my own thing or being the strange one out. I just wanna have fun and just love everybody and like, let's do something.

**0:09:29.9 Katie Berlin:** Perfect. I've never heard anyone say Snoopy, so it's like you're also an original.

[laughter]

**0:09:35.5 Deborah Reeder:** That's the truth.

[laughter]

**0:09:38.2 Deborah Reeder:** So I would have to say an Aussie, and I've owned them for years, but wild, free, herding, loving, loyal, and independent.

[laughter]

**0:09:51.8 Katie Berlin:** There you go. Yeah. And... But with a really good joy instinct.

**0:09:57.2 Deborah Reeder:** Yeah, too.

**0:09:57.5 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. Alright.

**0:09:58.7 Deborah Reeder:** Let's go have some fun.

**0:10:01.3 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, perfect. Yep. Serious when you need to be.

**0:10:03.5 Julie Legred:** That's Deb.

[overlapping conversation]

**0:10:05.9 Katie Berlin:** Work hard, play hard, right? Yeah.

**0:10:08.2 Deborah Reeder:** We do that well too.

[laughter]

**0:10:08.9 Katie Berlin:** Alright, well let's get into it. So we've been... I first met you three... Well I knew Shannon before, but I first met the three of you together talking about this when you were presenting to the board of director, the AAHA Board of Directors about technician utilization. And that day, we had been seeing a lot of presentations about mid-level professionals and whether it was time to bring in somebody into the profession in a different role. But you three had so many amazing things to say about the mid-level professionals we already have, which are credentialed technicians, and the ways in which we could elevate that career and make sure that technicians can have all of the opportunities that they're already trained to take advantage of. And so that's what I wanted to talk about today predominantly. So I was just curious for an intro, how do you see technicians as actually being an answer to the troubles that we're having right now with staffing and retention?

**0:11:18.5 Julie Legred:** I can go. I know we're all like chomping at the bit to say something, but yeah. [laughter] I really think that if we are utilized correctly and are given the opportunity to grow in our career, that we're already there. And along with the veterinary technician specialists, we've already outlined that. I'm not against having that mid-level next tier eventually, but this is something we have right in front of us that we could be fixing right now and preventing some of the technicians from leaving the profession at an early stage. I think it can solve a lot of problems, solve team well-being. I think it's a whole solution to many of the problems that we're experiencing right now.

**0:12:12.5 Shannon Thompson:** We have a framework that's been proven. We have accredited education that over and over has repetitively produced quality knowledgeable and proficient skill sets. We have a framework that has over 30 years, being one of the first ones to write the VTNE. We have a proficiency there and a reliable product that's being produced for the lack of... Sorry, not that anybody is a product, but it's really tangible, it's proven itself. And the only challenge we have is we haven't all used them well. And we all know. We've all seen nuggets. We all know clinics that have zero trouble hiring, have technicians that are happy and grow within it. We know there's nuggets out there. How can we make those nuggets mainstream? And we talk about more, and it's

not about just putting more onto the RVT, it's about everybody working at the top of their license, the veterinarian working at the top of their license, the RVT or credential veterinary technician working at the top of their license, and the veterinary team that supports them all. I think it's really important that we're not looking to add more, we're looking to become more efficient in what we have.

**0:13:32.7 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, you're so right that we have so many capable people working in the clinics right now, and so many of them I feel like even don't know that we know they're capable. And I feel like I was trained in a way where we weren't trained to rely on technicians and trust what they've learned and what they know. And so it's very hard to get out of that mindset for veterinarians who got out of school and immediately, the first place they're thrown into might not use technicians in the way that the vet school did, or maybe the vet school didn't do a very good job, and that's the only way you know how to practice. So it does feel kind of like a paradigm shift, but it shouldn't be, to let people do what they're trained to do and to give them opportunity to grow just like we have. So it's definitely inspiring to hear about, and also I wish I had that from the very beginning.

**0:14:31.0 Shannon Thompson:** When I think to... I look back at what this profession has almost suffered through, at least in my 40 years out here, starting out at \$5 an hour and getting really excited when you made it to 11, and getting told you were the highest paid equine technician in United States, I'm like, "Well, that's wrong."

[laughter]

**0:14:50.8 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. "Is that supposed to make me feel happy?"

[laughter]

**0:14:54.1 Shannon Thompson:** But I think just looking back at that, despite where we have not been fully utilized and despite that we still believe in our profession and treat it as a profession, and others are joining it with that mindset that we need to turn around, okay, they persevered here, this is a group that has hung in there with you, even though we haven't been fully utilized, even though we've gone to school, and let's embrace them again and give them the opportunity to truly be team leaders with you and support you in your career as well. It takes all of us. It truly takes a village.

**0:15:42.8 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:15:44.4 Shannon Thompson:** Veterinarians cannot do this profession by themselves. Veterinary technicians...

**0:15:46.7 Katie Berlin:** No. I can't even do blood work by myself.

**0:15:48.1 Shannon Thompson:** Yeah, I can't do it either. And the animal... And I've said this to the AEP many times, the horse needs both of us. It needs all of us. Our animals need all of us. Our profession needs all of us.

**0:16:00.4 Julie Legred:** We need all of us. It's...

**0:16:02.6 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:16:03.0 Julie Legred:** It's very true because we have to lean on each other, not thinking that we have to do it all as an individual. It takes the entire team from front to back, back to front, and it I think helps with the well-being aspect of it too.

**0:16:21.2 Katie Berlin:** For sure.

**0:16:22.1 Shannon Thompson:** And if we all... If you think about it a little bit in all of our experiences, Katie, and I think you can appreciate too, when we first graduate, we depend on our team to grow.

**0:16:29.6 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:16:30.7 Shannon Thompson:** I can... I know myself, I've supported many new graduates, veterinarian graduates in being comfortable and confident in their skill and grow. And it's the same thing with our RVTs, they're coming in and they're new, and they're fresh, and they haven't had practice, do we expect them to do nerve blocks and epidurals on day one? No. But with a supportive team and goals and talking to each other and say, "How can we make our team more efficient?" And you talk about, where do you start, you start with your team and talk. Where do you wanna go? How can you do it together? Where can we get additional training and support? How can we utilize some other things? How can we elevate our care?

**0:17:07.8 Shannon Thompson:** It's... Gone is this gold standard. It's about the best care we can provide. What is the best care that we together as a team can grow together and provide? And it doesn't mean every single person have to do a nerve block. Let's try and tailor some of those skills to those that really want to learn it and are passionate about it. They're gonna do fantastic. They're gonna rock it out of the park, and guess what, they're gonna train the next one that comes in that is interested as equally.

**0:17:33.4 Julie Legred:** And you're right, the passions within each individual can be extremely powerful on a team. If you have somebody that's really passionate about, say, parasite control, use their passions and let it show throughout the practice, 'cause that's ultimately gonna help that pet and the owner understand what it is we're asking them to do.

**0:17:58.1 Deborah Reeder:** It's almost like creating a triage approach to every appointment and every animal that comes in like, "Okay, who is the most qualified in this area? Who's the most qualified here? Who can handle this?" And making sure everybody knows where their arena is doesn't mean we don't cross-train, because we love being cross-trained and do that as well. But I think it's that approach instead of, "Okay, this is all on me." No. Who can help.

**0:18:31.3 Katie Berlin:** We don't all have to be everything to everybody and every patient. And that is such an important point because I know as vets, I can't speak for technicians, but as vets, we feel like we have to be able to do it all. And like you said, we all got out of vet school not knowing how to do almost everything.

**0:18:49.4 Katie Berlin:** I mean, getting out of vet school and going into the practice on the first week was terrifying because I was like, I don't even know how to treat this ear infection, I don't

even know what meds we have on the shelf to treat an ear infection, and then how to use them. And the technicians helped me with all of that. My first practice was in New York State, and so all the technicians were licensed and they knew their stuff and were utilized. And it was a model where most of the... Everything was done in the treatment area, so you didn't stay in the exam room very long. So not particularly client interactive in that way, but it was very helpful for a new grad vet because you could just whisk everything to the back and then the technician would be like, "Okay, here's what you do". [laughter]

**0:19:33.4 Katie Berlin:** And that happened a lot. There's my blocked cat tray set up before the blocked cat even left the exam room, because they knew what I was gonna need and I didn't. And I would be lost without the education that I got from those technicians and a lot of the technicians in vet school, and yet, then working at a couple of places where the technicians didn't have as much power to use their skills or we didn't have as many licensed technicians who had been trained in that way, I sort of got out of the habit of depending on them to do what they knew. And it was hard to adjust again then when I got to a practice where the technicians were fully utilized, we had a bunch of credential techs and they were fantastic, and they kept telling me to go away. [laughter] I was like doing the hovering, I was trying to log my own stuff and draw up my own drugs and take care of everything myself and they were like, "We got this. Go eat bonbons and come back when we're ready for you." And it was lovely. And I could get my calls done. Imagine that.

**0:20:40.7 S?:** Get your calls done.

**0:20:41.8 Deborah Reeder:** Do what you were trained to do.

**0:20:43.8 Katie Berlin:** Right.

**0:20:43.8 Deborah Reeder:** Yes. And why you went through veterinary school.

**0:20:46.3 Katie Berlin:** Right.

**0:20:46.9 Deborah Reeder:** And that's a huge burden to put on anybody that you have to know everything...

**0:20:50.4 Katie Berlin:** It is.

**0:20:51.0 Deborah Reeder:** And you are the end responsibility. Ah, no wonder we have stress in our profession. [laughter]

**0:20:58.2 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. Yes.

**0:20:58.9 Deborah Reeder:** That's huge.

**0:21:00.7 Shannon Thompson:** And that's one of the things is that as an RVT, and the same as a veterinarian, when you come out of school, you don't know what you know, really. It's all in there. And then that's what you've been taught. You've been taught the ability to learn. You've been taught... You're taught a lot of amazing information that you may not exactly use today, but once you start opening those doors, you're like going, "Oh yeah, this is what that's for, or that's how this comes..." You have all of this depth of knowledge and skills that are waiting to be explored and



developed. And...

**0:21:28.3 Katie Berlin:** Love that.

**0:21:31.9 Shannon Thompson:** And that's what it comes out of accredited education, whether it's a veterinarian or whether it's a technician, is that you have this depth that you don't even know exists until you start tapping into it and it was like, "Oh yeah," and then you're amazed. I remember my first job, the technician left for England for three weeks on the first day and I was the only RVT in two practices, and then they come to me and ask me questions. I remember going back to the kennel going, "How do I clean these kennels?" I know I need a disinfectant. I know I need an agent or somehow to apply it, but I'm going, "Where's the scrub brush? Where's the spray bottle? What is it? Do I have to make it?" I knew what I needed to know, but I just didn't quite know how to apply it yet.

[laughter]

**0:22:10.0 Katie Berlin:** Right.

**0:22:10.3 Shannon Thompson:** So, that's what it's all about.

**0:22:13.2 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:22:13.5 Shannon Thompson:** You have the information and the knowledge. You just need to have the team and the support to put it all together and have it grow.

**0:22:20.9 Deborah Reeder:** And you can learn from your mistakes.

**0:22:22.7 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:22:24.5 Deborah Reeder:** And be okay with those mistakes because everybody makes them.

**0:22:28.2 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:22:28.7 Deborah Reeder:** Hopefully not to the detriment of the animal or the client.

**0:22:32.0 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:22:32.0 Deborah Reeder:** But you know...

**0:22:32.2 Katie Berlin:** But that's why you have your team, right?

**0:22:34.0 Deborah Reeder:** That's why you have your team and the support.

**0:22:38.3 Julie Legred:** And resources.

**0:22:39.3 Katie Berlin:** Yes.

**0:22:39.5 Deborah Reeder:** Yeah.

**0:22:39.6 Julie Legred:** Don't be afraid to go back to a book and look something up and just know that you're not alone.

**0:22:47.0 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:22:47.7 Julie Legred:** I think it's important to understand. We take our own professions, we know and understand what it is we've learned, but we don't always take time to think about what the other, so like veterinary professionals learn in their career or in their curriculum, what technicians learn in their curriculum. You don't understand all of the skills that we actually have had to master in our programs to graduate, and then to also pass on the board for practicing in your particular state or province. So I think it's not wrong that you don't focus on what it is you're doing, but I think it'd be better if team members understood what each individual role do to get where they're at.

**0:23:46.7 Katie Berlin:** That is such a great point. And what Shannon said about what you've brought with you out of school is the ability to learn and the knowledge that you can learn and grow, because school is so much about challenging yourself to do things that you never thought you could know or do. And that mindset of somebody who goes through that education and willingly puts themselves through studying for the VTNE and getting through all of those labs and doing things that they were terrified to do the first time, that's something that I can really relate to. That feeling from vet school is so fresh of like being in the clinic, being like, "Oh my God, they're gonna ask me a question. Any second now they can ask me a question," and it all turned out okay, and then you come out knowing that you at some point can pick something up. Even if you don't know it now, you know where to go to get it and you know that you have the resources to be that person if you wanna be. And so I... That brings me to a question that I had, which is, we, I feel like a lot of times are afraid of overwhelming our technicians by asking them to do things that are harder or more. 'Cause they're so busy already, right? But they're busy doing things that maybe someone else could be doing.

**0:25:07.5 Deborah Reeder:** Exactly, yeah.

**0:25:08.7 Katie Berlin:** And do we wanna overwhelm them by saying, "Hey, I want you to learn how to do epidurals," when they're not even reading ear cytologies? I think some people are... Sort of put the breaks on there and they're like, "No, I can't ask that much of my technicians." But as technicians, what's your response to that?

**0:25:29.4 Deborah Reeder:** I don't think it's overwhelming them. I think it's giving them an opportunity and empowering them to step in to a niche where they are passionate about something, not... Again, the technician doesn't have to know it all, but give them some opportunities to find their niche and grow there. You know, I've always had this interest in this area, imaging, take it and run with it. Build an income center here for my practice. So the overwhelm comes from doing all the stuff that this is mundane and I'm not passionate about it anymore.

**0:26:04.8 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:26:05.0 Deborah Reeder:** But I think letting them channel themselves into a place that supports the practice more and supports them.

**0:26:12.8 Shannon Thompson:** I think having the conversation with the team. What are we doing right now? What can we do better? How can we improve as a team? And have a checklist. Start with a list. And some of them are gonna push the envelope and we need those. Because sometimes we're not confident in what our abilities are and what we can do, but someone else sees that in you. And we need that. So sometimes it's terrifying and some... And I've heard them say, "Oh, my technician doesn't wanna do that today."

**0:26:38.4 S?:** Right. [laughter]

**0:26:39.2 Shannon Thompson:** How about we work them up to that, her, him, they? Let's work them up to it. Let's add them to their plate. Let them see what they enjoy when they can grow and see how that is. If you're providing a supportive environment, if your communication within your team is strong, you can do anything, and you can do anything together and I think that's important. And that goes so much that if somebody wants to learn or is not sure, send them to a conference, not just send them to the back room to listen to some online CE, send them to a conference where they can go to a session about epidurals or nerve blocks. They can be in a room with other RVTs, talk about it. They can learn from each other. They can bring it back and talk about, how can we make this happen in our practice. And support all the way around. Not just say, "Oh yeah, you can do it," support them in education, support them in networking with RVTs, send them on an intern with a clinic that you know does like 40 a day. Help them to set up a relationship where they can go and actually be immersed in it, learn about it, and really decide for themselves if it's for them or not. But show them that you're in a team that can learn. And there's so many options. I could go on all day. I'm sorry.

[laughter]

**0:27:52.3 Katie Berlin:** That's okay. That's good. Yeah.

**0:27:55.0 Deborah Reeder:** And I think it is helping practices with how to do some of this. They don't know.

**0:28:00.7 Katie Berlin:** Right.

**0:28:02.3 Deborah Reeder:** It's like creating a triage template, creating a self-assessment, something quick and simple. Not don't overwhelm the poor veterinarians, like oh my goodness. [chuckle] But we know some of the needs that practices need and how to do it. We've worked in those practices. We've helped them succeed. And so again, here's another area that your technician group can help the veterinary group.

**0:28:28.0 Julie Legred:** How to grow team... I mean, ask. Ask what their passions are. Where do they see themselves in five years? What do they wanna be doing? They don't always have to think that the only place to reach next is like maybe a practice manager. Maybe that's what they want to do. Maybe that's in their plan, maybe it's not. But let's not forget about the VTS, the veterinary technician specialties that do come into play and could really impact that practice if they were supported in pursuing those things.

**0:29:02.0 Shannon Thompson:** Yep. And that's a whole other level of education and commitment to the profession, research, expanding your own skill sets beyond, again, what you thought you

could do. But those are our next level.

**0:29:23.8 Julie Legred:** Yeah.

**0:29:24.4 Shannon Thompson:** We should all strive to hopefully get to those places because those are also specialties. Those people have found something they're truly passionate about. "This is where I wanna gear my career towards." And.

**0:29:37.4 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, there's something beautiful about just saying, "You know what, this is the area I really love and I'm willing to maybe not do so much of these other things so that I can become the person to go to for this thing." And that I would imagine gives a real sense of self-worth and empowerment that technicians often don't get encouraged to have.

**0:30:02.8 Deborah Reeder:** I'd just like to add that as easily as we can talk about it, it's not always that easy. And that's true. I think we'd be remiss in saying that this is hard. It's hard work. It's tough for teams to do it. And you may have all the passion and the desire in the world, and it may be... You may have hurdles. You may try and it doesn't work. Please try again. You can't do it alone. You probably need someone to come in and help you. You probably need to reach out to other clinics that you know are... Have these amazing rockstar teams and you wonder how on Earth they do it. Ask. I'm sure they will help you. There's so many out there. And it's tough, but it's so worth it.

**0:30:40.1 Shannon Thompson:** We're doing this road trip. So just put your clinic on the list.  
[laughter]

**0:30:46.7 Katie Berlin:** Can you just stop by my house? It's gonna make me really happy.  
[laughter]

**0:30:52.9 S?:** I'll bring wine. No. [laughter]

**0:30:55.1 Katie Berlin:** I love that too because it does seem like something where people will get easily discouraged if they approach... Maybe they don't have a lot of credentialed techs on their team, and so they approach their one or two technicians and they say, "This is what we'd like to do. Are you into it?" and the techs say, "Yeah, maybe, okay". But they didn't... They don't have a plan. You don't have a plan. And you're so busy as a practice owner or a manager or the associate veterinarians. You're just stretched. So what would you say are some of the first things that a practice could do? And I know this will be practice and person-dependent, but say you have kind of the "traditional" practice model, and I'm making air quotes here because I know everybody's different. In my experience, the traditional model has been sort of to have a mix of like, people who are called veterinary technicians but some of them are credentialed and some aren't.

**0:31:46.5 Katie Berlin:** They all do pretty much the same things. They do a lot of nail trims and blood draws and the doctor does pretty much all the other stuff. And the technicians are starting to feel a little bit antsy about maybe not being able to do all the things that they learned how to do. What would be a good first step for practice like that?

**0:32:06.8 Julie Legred:** So to me, I think it's implementing an onboarding system or process from the very beginning. Even if you don't have it now, with all the new hires moving forward, make sure it's in place and gain an understanding. Make sure you ask each individual that comes on your

team, "What do you wanna do? Where do you see yourself?" It'll change, no doubt, but at least you're asking and having an understanding that they do wanna grow and go somewhere. That's... I think it's part of the longevity thing too, keeping them in the practice and on their team forever.

**0:32:45.9 Katie Berlin:** Yeah big point.

**0:32:48.2 Deborah Reeder:** And what the veterinarian is comfortable letting go of.

**0:32:53.3 Katie Berlin:** Yeah [chuckle] that's a big one, right? We're not always good at that.

**0:32:58.6 Deborah Reeder:** No, but I mean, it's almost a self-assessment of the veterinarians themselves. "Okay, yes, this area, I'm willing to help the technician group to take this on. I'm willing to let go of that. Over here, I'm not quite sure yet. So I'm gonna have to build some more trust. We're gonna have to have some more conversations, demonstrations, training, whatever it takes." And I think that's ultimately our goal through all of these conversations, is allow the credentialed veterinary technician and VTS to be able to practice and contribute at the top of our license, thereby letting the veterinarian practice at the top of theirs so they're not overwhelmed doing things they don't enjoy doing.

**0:33:40.6 Katie Berlin:** Right, yeah.

**0:33:42.0 Deborah Reeder:** That's no fun.

**0:33:43.2 Katie Berlin:** No, I barely had to turn a nail in the last four and a half years and it's pretty great.

**0:33:48.8 S?:** That's awesome.

[laughter]

**0:33:51.4 Shannon Thompson:** And the other thing is protect your team. We are in a crisis. There's no doubt about it. I don't think we have to confirm that or not. But I think now more than ever, hospitals, hospital managers, owners, you need to step out of the box to... And I'm gonna say you need to, because you do. You need to protect your team.

**0:34:09.8 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:34:10.9 Shannon Thompson:** And protecting your team means you shut the phones off at 4 o'clock so you can finish the day by 6:00. If it means you shut down maybe two nights of the week, or no more weekend appointments, if you're booking appointments four and six or three months out, your business is doing fine. You're not gonna go bankrupt tomorrow by closing an hour early. Invest in your team.

**0:34:32.3 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:34:33.8 Shannon Thompson:** Protect them, support them. Is your manager in a place to lead something like this? If not, are they interested? If they're interested, help them with training, real training, face-to-face training. Bring in consultants, send them to conferences, send them to

training. There's amazing conferences out there that are specifically people managing training, supporting, growth, unique. We've been there. We've seen them. And then they're within a community that can support them because it's not just the training today, but do they have colleagues that they've learned in that framework that can support them every day? "Oh, I tried this but it didn't work. What else do I do?" "Oh, don't worry." Somebody just to bounce an idea off or whatever. So creating or helping them build a community to support them with their level, like a manager. If you don't have that framework, it's really hard for a team to grow and do some of these things. So really taking the time to protect your team and provide a framework that allows for learning, allows for training, and allows for communication today, next week, the week after, and the week after that.

**0:35:45.3 Shannon Thompson:** So whether it means you are closed every Wednesday for an hour and a half, period, you are closed, an hour and a half for one day a week for the next six months, the next year, you are doing that for your team to support them as you both... As you all transition to becoming more efficient, more collaborative, engaged again, and guess what, your business is gonna flourish as a result.

**0:36:09.4 Deborah Reeder:** And so many of these associations have amazing resources out there now that I think the membership forgets about. And so I think it's also reminding them again or making them a little more accessible again. So they go, "Oh, if I need that information, I can just go here?" "Yes." And if that doesn't work, "Oh, this group over here has it?" "Yes." So...

**0:36:34.5 Katie Berlin:** Yeah that's true. That's a really good point. A lot of stuff already exists and that doesn't mean we all know immediately where to find it.

**0:36:41.9 Julie Legred:** And it's a good point, Deb, because as we know, technicians don't always get the benefits or have the benefits that include much of what the veterinarians are... And I know not all veterinarians get everything, but think about the dues, membership fees that your technicians have to pay for their state association, the national association, any of the special things that they like to do, all of that adds up. And when some of the practices are giving \$200 a year maybe for continuing education, that doesn't even go to there. It doesn't even cover continuing ed. It doesn't include the membership fees that... To belong to your professional organizations. And those are a lot of great resources right there.

**0:37:33.0 Katie Berlin:** That's a really good point, Julie, because I don't think I ever thought about that. I have no idea what technicians I've worked with got for a CE allowance or dues, and I just assumed at every job that I would have all of that paid.

**0:37:44.0 Shannon Thompson:** Yes. Yeah.

**0:37:45.5 Katie Berlin:** And that's... I feel kind of ashamed about that. The technicians, thinking about it, impact the practice financially just as much as the veterinarians do. Like maybe I could do a surgery that a technician legally couldn't do and I could approve the blood work that gets run, that makes us some money. But the technician's drawing that blood. I probably couldn't hit the vein on half of the patients when the blood gets drawn. And the technicians are so much a part of the education and compliance that we have and the follow-up and the client loyalty, because they're the ones who really are taking care of those clients a lot of the time that I don't even see. And it doesn't make any sense to me not to invest in them just as much in terms of not just paying living wage,

which we'll get to in a minute, but things like dues and making sure that they get to go to a conference and not just sit in the back room on a webinar that was free.

**0:38:43.4 Julie Legred:** Right. And we have continuing education that we have to meet.

**0:38:47.6 Katie Berlin:** Required.

**0:38:48.6 Julie Legred:** Yeah it's required so...

**0:38:49.8 Katie Berlin:** Yeah it's required. Yeah.

**0:38:51.1 Shannon Thompson:** To this too... For a practice for their insurance, a lot of times if they can show they have vested interest in their staff, training and education, their insurance rates are reduced.

**0:39:04.4 Katie Berlin:** Interesting.

**0:39:05.0 Shannon Thompson:** Take note of that.

**0:39:05.9 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. [laughter]

**0:39:07.5 S?:** Replay. Replay. [laughter]

**0:39:11.2 Katie Berlin:** Luckily, this is being recorded. So that's on record. But I... Absolutely, that's very important. And clients notice too. They know if they call the practice and the only person who can ever answer any of their questions is a veterinarian. And just because they're used to it, because a lot of practices are run that way, doesn't necessarily mean it gives them the confidence in the practice that they need. They'll say, "I only wanna talk to the vet," or, "I wanna see my vet." They don't think, "This practice is who takes care of my pets." And that's really what we need to avoid, one vet feeling like they have to do everything on the planet.

**0:39:48.7 S?:** Yeah, that's right.

**0:39:49.8 Deborah Reeder:** One of the outstanding practices in the equine field does just that. They take their interns out with them to all of their calls so that their clients get to know the interns and the technicians and they tell them, "I am comfortable with this intern veterinarian. I am comfortable with this technician. So any questions you have, please feel free to direct them to them if you can't reach me."

**0:40:17.8 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:40:17.9 Deborah Reeder:** Again, why are you putting all the burden on one person? [laughter]

**0:40:20.6 Katie Berlin:** Right. Who wants to be that? Some people I feel like want to be that person. I do not ever want to be that person. [laughter]

**0:40:27.6 Shannon Thompson:** And I think, Deb, that's the message for even the [0:40:30.1] \_\_\_\_\_, how do I get... How are the clients gonna adapt to a credentialed veterinary technician doing an

exam or doing the history or doing the treatments or the follow-ups? 'Cause you're gonna tell them.

**0:40:41.6 Katie Berlin:** Right.

**0:40:42.4 Shannon Thompson:** You're gonna tell them this is an individual, a professional on our team that we train together, we support the same mission and vision throughout the hospital. They are representative of the quality of care that we are providing to our team. You will see them in the exam room and we have full trust that they will deliver the best medicine that our team can offer. Share that message. Tell your clients you're the one that's... That's where it's coming from.

**0:41:09.8 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:41:10.6 Shannon Thompson:** They just want the best for their pet, and if you tell them it's the best...

**0:41:13.2 Katie Berlin:** They'll believe you.

**0:41:15.5 Shannon Thompson:** They're game. They're game on.

**0:41:17.7 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, same way that I know a lot of vets like me will tell their clients, 'cause the clients sometimes are like, "Why aren't you doing the blood draw?" Dude, you don't want me doing the blood draw.

[laughter]

**0:41:26.4 Katie Berlin:** This technician next to me drew blood from a bald eagle in front of everyone yesterday. I would prefer that she do my blood draw.

[laughter]

**0:41:34.1 S?:** Exactly.

**0:41:35.1 Julie Legred:** When you think about it, do you want your own doctor?

**0:41:37.5 Katie Berlin:** No! When was the last time they had to draw blood? No. No way. I would do it once in a while, like to keep my hand at it, but like, no, under duress, absolutely not.

**0:41:48.4 Shannon Thompson:** As an association, we get asked all the time, "Well, why aren't you doing more public advertising? Why aren't we doing more media stuff about education?" We'd love to. Unfortunately, that's gotta be the one of the most expensive things for us to do.

**0:42:00.7 Katie Berlin:** It's so expensive, yeah.

**0:42:00.8 Shannon Thompson:** So expensive. But guess who is in front of clients every single day, multiple people multiple times a day. The veterinary team, veterinarians are number one client-facing, public-facing. If they can educate, they can help us share this message and...

**0:42:18.4 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, and it will benefit them immediately.



**0:42:19.1 Shannon Thompson:** It does. And it reinforces it when you say it once or twice and the next time they come, you're still toting the same message.

**0:42:25.2 S?:** Yep.

**0:42:26.6 Shannon Thompson:** That's worth than \$20,000 for a five-second commercial any day.

**0:42:30.9 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. I got a question to ask you that I didn't give you ahead of time. [laughter] Spoiler alert. Sometimes I give questions ahead of time.

**0:42:38.1 Shannon Thompson:** You know, we're really chill.

**0:42:39.6 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. But I'm just wondering, so I feel like, and I want this to come out the way I want it to come out, but I don't know if it will, but I feel like because of the way that we've treated vet techs for so long as sort of, I hate the word support staff, I just don't like that phrase very much because I feel like everybody's equally important in supporting each other, but I feel like we've encouraged vet techs not to treat themselves like professionals. I feel like we've treated it like a cutesy profession for so long that it's hard sometimes for veterinary technicians to say, "I am a professional on par with the doctor that I'm standing next to and I can comport myself in a way that conveys that I know that and I'm proud of it." And that's not because I feel like the technicians are deficient in any way or don't take pride in themselves, but just because we haven't treated them that way for so long that it's become sort of ingrained. Do you have a response to that?

**0:44:00.3 Deborah Reeder:** The first thing that comes up to for me is cutting... I feel like some may have tried to create their own identity that they're comfortable in because that's the space they've been allowed to be in.

**0:44:15.8 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. Yes, for sure, that... I'm sure this isn't something that vet techs created for themselves.

**0:44:22.8 S?:** No.

**0:44:23.8 Deborah Reeder:** But if you saw us running through the practice with white coats... [laughter]

**0:44:28.2 Julie Legred:** What we used to do.

[laughter]

**0:44:32.6 Deborah Reeder:** There would be some eyeballs rolling.

**0:44:34.6 S?:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**0:44:35.2 Deborah Reeder:** What is going on here?

**0:44:37.1 Katie Berlin:** I don't even like wearing a white coat.

**0:44:39.3 S?:** No. You know what I'm saying is, it's...

**0:44:42.5 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, we've created a niche that involves cute scrubs and paw prints on everything that says, "We are here to pet your puppies and kittens," and in reality, they're doing so much of the hard work that it's unfair, but also sort of self-fulfilling.

**0:45:01.9 S?:** Yeah.

**0:45:02.4 Shannon Thompson:** Yes. I think we see that when somebody asks and they say, "Oh, I'm just a vet tech."

**0:45:07.0 S?:** No.

**0:45:07.2 Julie Legred:** Exactly.

**0:45:07.9 Shannon Thompson:** "I am a registered veterinary technician. I am an educated and knowledgeable professional dedicated to the care of your pet while in my hospital." That I would love to be the response. I can wear whatever I want, but if I can say that message, "I am a professional." But it needs to be supported in the team. So whether it's not the girls at the back, it's my RVTs, LVTs, CVTs, whichever, I'm sorry... I don't have them all, I'm sorry. [laughter] My RVTs are going to take the blood. Our RVTs are gonna meet. On our website, they're RVTs. Their credential's important. It's on their name tag, "Shannon, RVT."

**0:45:49.2 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:45:49.5 S?:** Yeah.

**0:45:50.2 Shannon Thompson:** I have a business card at the front I can share. It's about...

**0:45:52.0 Katie Berlin:** I love that tech business card.

**0:45:54.0 Shannon Thompson:** But it's about recognition across the board. Everybody says it. Everybody talks it. Everybody walks the walk. And that's something we're trying to do. And we're not... We understand veterinary technicians are not like extroverts like myself. [laughter] But we're still proud of what we do. And we've worked hard... In Canada as RVTTC, we've revived the Proudly RVT hashtag and we... But that's what we need to do as associations, we need to help, we need to support them. The teams need to support and we need to change that narrative. But it's not a visual thing. You can wear whatever the hell you want as long as you're clean. I have a thing about being clean.

**0:46:38.0 Katie Berlin:** Clean, yeah.

**0:46:38.3 Shannon Thompson:** I have a thing about being professionally presented so that you don't have ripped...

**0:46:41.8 Katie Berlin:** Have it fit and not be dragging on the floor.

**0:46:43.5 Shannon Thompson:** You're not walking out to the appointment room, or the reception room with blood or [0:46:46.9] \_\_\_\_\_, God knows what else on you. You're coming out clean and professionally presented. It can be patterned, it can be whatever, 'cause gosh, we love that 'cause we're fun and that stuff. But...

**0:46:57.3 Katie Berlin:** It's a cute profession. Like we vets, we're... Veterinary medicine has so much cuteness and sweetness and beauty in all of the appointments, even the sad ones, there's beauty in all of them and we embrace that really well.

**0:48:08.0 Deborah Reeder:** I think it really does go back again to taking pride in your staff and showcasing them and exalting them to your clients. From the equine side, the majority of our practices don't have credentialed technicians in them. They have assistants. But in that same vein, if that assistant is your top stellar assistant and they are your right hand, exalt that to your client, exalt that to the rest of your staff, and at the same time, support them and going, "There's other ways we can get you trained and educated as well." So I just think it's taking pride in your staff and showcasing them off instead of the separatism. [laughter]

**0:49:01.4 Katie Berlin:** Yes, we're all on the same team...

**0:49:03.3 Shannon Thompson:** All on the same team.

**0:49:03.7 Katie Berlin:** Here with the same goal.

**0:49:04.6 Julie Legred:** Exactly. Baseball players don't differentiate. They all wear the same uniform, or if you're on a football team or whatever. Why aren't we all wearing... You don't have to identify. As long as your patients and clients feel comfortable with your team, there shouldn't be an issue. Because I think for the most part, if somebody comes with a question that you can't answer, you're gonna pass it on and get the answer for them anyway.

**0:49:33.7 Katie Berlin:** Regardless of what role you are.

**0:49:35.1 Julie Legred:** Exactly.

**0:49:35.5 Katie Berlin:** 'Cause I'll do that.

**0:49:36.4 Julie Legred:** Yep. And none of us are gonna step into surgery as a technician and take over that. We're just... We're trained on the skills, a lot of skills that we have to master before we graduate and that's what we want to do. That's what we... That's why I... I get asked, "So when are you going to vet school?"

**0:49:58.9 S?:** Never.

[laughter]

**0:50:00.3 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:50:01.0 Julie Legred:** That was never my goal. In fact, I had looked at vet school and decided,

"Oh maybe veterinary medicine is not the career for me. I don't want to do a doctor's job." Thank goodness my high school counselor knew exactly, I walked in, "Is there a position that you can just take X-rays, do the lab work?" "Well of course, it's a veterinary technician." I'm like, "What?"

[laughter]

**0:50:26.8 Julie Legred:** I had no idea. And started down another path two weeks later and [0:50:32.5] \_\_\_\_\_.

**0:50:32.8 Katie Berlin:** I love how the people that always ask that, like when you go into vet school, it's like it never occurred to you that you could go to vet school. It was a conscious choice not to go to vet school, thank you very much.

**0:50:42.8 S?:** Exactly.

**0:50:43.2 Katie Berlin:** And one I greatly support because no one should go to vet school unless they're really sure they want to.

**0:50:48.6 Shannon Thompson:** Well, it's looking at all the core competencies, and we have focused on some core competencies that are a support to the veterinarian in their diagnosing, doing surgery, and they're core competencies. And without all of that, it doesn't work.

**0:51:09.1 Katie Berlin:** No it doesn't. It's a... It feels... I remember one time at a doctor's meeting, we had doctor's meetings on Friday evenings at a practice that I worked at, and yeah, it would go pretty late sometimes. And we had one of the clients call after hours while we were all in this meeting, like one of the clients that you drop everything for. And so they came in and we had to run blood work on this animal, and there were like six vets standing around the blood machine looking at it with the instruction manual. We had no idea what to do. That was a valuable lesson because sometimes you're going to need to use the blood machine. But it was hilarious because we were like, "Okay, we can draw the blood. Now what do we do?" [laughter] And it's on such a basic level, like we need each other.

**0:51:58.4 Katie Berlin:** Yes.

**0:51:58.9 Shannon Thompson:** And I don't see the veterinarian as any more essential to that patient than the technician because we are capable of making certain decisions, but we really don't have the skillset that you all have. And if we have it, it's probably because we've been doing the technician's job for too long.

**0:52:20.0 Julie Legred:** Yeah, and I was gonna say that... And that's not a bad thing, so... If that's what your passion is...

**0:52:25.3 Deborah Reeder:** Yeah.

**0:52:25.4 Julie Legred:** Then let's be a technician instead. Go for what you enjoy doing.

**0:52:31.5 S?:** Yeah.

**0:52:32.2 Julie Legred:** 'Cause some people don't even know the technician role is available to them before they start vet school.

**0:52:38.1 Deborah Reeder:** Or that they have possibilities to do things like you all have done and take it as far as they want to take it.

**0:52:44.4 Julie Legred:** Yeah.

**0:52:45.6 Shannon Thompson:** I wanna... Sorry, Deb. I wanna correct... I wanna catch a term. You mentioned the basic, and I understand where it came from. It's not a basic skill, it's a vital skill and it's a vital part of veterinary medicine.

**0:52:58.1 Deborah Reeder:** Yes.

**0:52:58.1 Shannon Thompson:** And I just like to... I know, I understand, but it's like it's not basic, it's not simple. It's... As you say, you have highly skilled doctors unable to understand how to do it. It's vital information and knowledge in your team.

**0:53:13.7 Deborah Reeder:** Yes, definitely true. And I think about a conversation that I had with Tasha McNerney. She was saying that when she was working at one practice, she would actually unblock cats. Like her doctor had so much confidence in her skills and training that the doctor would diagnose and talk to the client, and then basically it was Tasha and an assistant, and they would anesthetize, run the blood work, run the labs, unblock the cat, set the cat up with a catheter and fluids and everything, and the doctor would come back and check on it. And that was entirely technician and veterinary assistant after that appointment, basically. And that blew my mind because I've never worked in a place that let technicians do that and it made me just think of all of the things that could be so much easier in life if we were allowed to do those things. And that veterinary assistant probably felt good too.

**0:54:11.0 Shannon Thompson:** Yes.

**0:54:11.4 Deborah Reeder:** And that assistance is a whole other conversation about all the things that we don't let... They're doing certain jobs instead of doing other things to support technicians.

**0:54:21.8 Shannon Thompson:** It's finding the gaps in their practice...

**0:54:24.6 Deborah Reeder:** Exactly.

**0:54:26.6 Shannon Thompson:** And then going to your team and going, "Okay, where are you in overwhelm? Or what is not getting handled? Or where can we mesh this better?" And that's almost this triage template and self-assessment, just finding those gaps...

**0:54:43.0 Deborah Reeder:** Oh yes.

**0:54:43.5 Shannon Thompson:** That exist in your hospital or in your practice and trying to work with your team to fill those. Where are you in overwhelm? Or what is not getting handled during the day? Or what are you as the veterinarian just doing way too much of so that you're not concentrating on the things you're passionate about?

**0:55:02.5 S?:** Mm-hmm.

**0:55:02.8 Shannon Thompson:** And that's like this triage template or a self-assessment. I know it has to be simple and quick so that it doesn't take up overwhelming time and consultants knocking through your doors [laughter] all the time, but something simple like that. And that's where the credentialed technician can fill those gaps that exist right now if we communicate, collaborate and search those out, have those conversations. And I just think that's been missing. We've gone down this trail, ride your horses down here till they fall off the cliff. Well, no. [laughter]

**0:55:43.0 Katie Berlin:** Let's not do that. We like horses around here. [laughter]

**0:55:48.0 Shannon Thompson:** Let's re-assess here. There's answers, there's solutions that are right here that are willing to fill those gaps.

**0:55:58.1 Katie Berlin:** So I have one more big question to ask you guys and it's about money. Because obviously people are gonna be listening to this and saying, "Well, I would love to do that, but my doctors are the ones that bring in the big bucks." And they think about technicians who maybe wanna learn more skills and take on more responsibility, but they say, "Well I can't pay them any more than I'm paying them." How can practices think differently about finances to make it possible to compensate their technicians fairly and appropriately for doing this work and for the professional education that they have?

**0:56:44.5 Julie Legred:** So I'm gonna ask a question. Is it truly the veterinarians that are bringing in all the money?

**0:56:52.1 Katie Berlin:** That's a very good question.

**0:56:53.2 Julie Legred:** Because they have a whole team behind them. And I would say CSR, the assistants, the technicians, everybody has some touch point on that patient and client throughout their visit. And I get veterinarians come out of school with a lot of debt, but no one really points out that the techs also come out of school with debt. And I cringe when I see McDonald's paying 15 bucks an hour...

**0:57:28.8 Katie Berlin:** Yes, yeah.

**0:57:29.1 Julie Legred:** When some of the technicians aren't even making that. And I know that we did a survey when I was NAVTA executive director. Technicians, there were many of them that were making below poverty level. It broke my heart when I know that... Deb and I can relate. I started \$4.25 an hour back in the day and it was like, no benefits, nothing. But if you want your team to continue, you have to put some investment into... Health insurance is another one that...

**0:58:04.3 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:58:05.3 Julie Legred:** You want your teammates there everyday? Well then let's keep them healthy too. And I don't think that many veterinarians realize that techs have to work two to three jobs...

**0:58:19.2 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:58:19.7 Julie Legred:** To just make ends meet a lot of times. That's...

**0:58:23.2 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, I can imagine why they don't stay.

**0:58:25.1 Julie Legred:** Yeah. Well, and it's true. I mean, you don't see your family and it gets to be very hard.

**0:58:32.2 Deborah Reeder:** Well there's creative ways that you can re-work your financial plan and your practice. Instead of, well just paying a technician this amount of money, how do I know they're actually contributing to that level in my practice? Now, that's your own self-assessment, but you can charge for tech appointments. Anesthesia technicians. There's a charge on the invoice. Well, part of that should go to that anesthesia technician. Surgery techs, telemedicine techs, imaging techs, ICU, those are areas where we are taking the lead and probably doing the majority of the work. So look at your financial charging, whatever you're doing in your practice, and maybe allot some of that towards those people who are actually creating a sustaining income center for you.

**0:59:28.0 Shannon Thompson:** Veterinary medicine is largely set up in a production-based model... Production compensation. Why are your techs not involved in that? And especially now with the workforce crisis and you're short of veterinarians, you can't find it.

**0:59:40.5 Shannon Thompson:** You already have the framework of the budget for veterinary salary. Why not distribute that to those that are filling in the gaps? Find a way while you can. You've got this... You've got the budget for it.

**0:59:54.5 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. And losing employees and having to train new ones is extremely expensive from what I understand. I've never owned a practice, but I know there's some pretty good data on what it costs to lose an employee. And I can't think of a bigger reason why I would leave as a technician than feeling like they just keep looking for vets and looking for vets and looking for vets, in the meantime, I'm getting paid a salary that makes me have to go work at a restaurant on the weekends and that just... It kind of just feels super icky just to say that.

**1:00:30.3 Shannon Thompson:** And we have data, like...

**1:00:31.9 S?:** We do have data.

**1:00:34.0 Shannon Thompson:** In Canada, the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians, OAVT, they did the value of an RVT survey, an economic survey to investigate and collect data on the income generated by an RVT, having a credentialed veterinary technician in your practice to generate \$80,000 in revenue to your practice. So...

**1:00:58.6 S?:** If utilized appropriately.

[overlapping conversation]

**1:00:58.7 Shannon Thompson:** And that was a few years...

**1:01:00.1 S?:** Right.

**1:01:00.5 Shannon Thompson:** That was a few years ago even. So the revenue is there.

**1:01:06.0 S?:** Yeah.

**1:01:06.0 Deborah Reeder:** It's like an equine... Rewarding the technician for catching all the mischarges out in ambulatory, or even in the practice. Well, that money should go to the technician. Cut those charges. Well, guess who will wake up real quick when all those charges are going to the technician? [laughter] Veterinarians are gonna go, "Oh, I need to pay attention to what I'm writing down and not writing down."

**1:01:25.0 Shannon Thompson:** Like, there's no reason for an efficient veterinary business model to be rewarding and productive for everybody. There's no reason why not. And if you're doing...

**1:01:39.4 Katie Berlin:** Mic drop.

[laughter]

**1:01:41.0 Shannon Thompson:** Exactly. There's no reason. We see it happening. We know, we know, we see some unique models that are just brand new and blowing the numbers out of the water. It's working. It works. Are you courageous enough to try something different?

**1:01:58.0 Deborah Reeder:** And it's not always about just the money. Like you were saying, there's other benefits that you can reward your staff with, the CE allowance or being able to go to a special conference or workshop or whatever, or insurance and even paying for those scrubs that don't have the little cutesy puppy, depending on what they do...

**1:02:24.2 S?:** Or do. [laughter]

**1:02:25.7 Katie Berlin:** Whatever works for shoes.

**1:02:27.7 Shannon Thompson:** Shoes yeah.

**1:02:28.8 Deborah Reeder:** When I was working with practices too, and I would ask the staff what meant something to them, again, don't assume, go ask your staff, "What means something to you?" and sometimes it was, "Can I just have an afternoon off during the week so that I can go take care of my children's," whatever's going on with them. "I can go to the dentist." "I can get my car fixed."

**1:02:50.1 S?:** Yeah.

**1:02:50.9 Deborah Reeder:** They don't ever have any time to do any of that. And so it's, again, just checking in with your staff what means something. Now, granted, \$5, \$10 raise will mean a lot. [laughter] However, again, be creative with how you can make it work so that everyone feels like they are contributing and reaping some of that reward. And that's how you create loyalty on your teams.



**1:03:18.4 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, that makes so much sense. And there was one other thing that was popping into mind when you all were talking about this, which is the communication aspect of our jobs as veterinarians is exhausting. I mean, I have spent so much time talking to people, and at the end of the day, it makes you feel like, I'm just exhausted. I don't wanna go home and talk to my partner. I don't wanna talk to my friends on the phone. And oftentimes those conversations were happening at 8:30 or 9:00 at night because that's the only time I had to do it. And it was expected that I would have those conversations. And I just think about... I mean, the technicians at our practice spent so much time listening to me talk. There's no possible way that they did not have the ability to go in and say the exact same thing, only with the technician spin on it, which oftentimes is more approachable to the clients right there in the exam room.

**1:04:19.4 Katie Berlin:** And clients accepted it. They... When we had technicians go in and talk to clients, they... I rarely heard a client complain that they didn't get to talk to me because our technicians did such a good job. And that I think is something else really important to point out, is that it is absolutely possible to have trained technicians doing epidurals and unblocking cats and doing all of those very technical jobs that veterinarians may not want to do or have the time to do, but it is also possible that you have a technician on your team who loves talking to people and would be a fantastic person to say, "Hey, can you talk about pet food to this client?" or "Can you talk about heartworm prevention to this client?" and know that they're gonna do as good or better a job. And so for practices that aren't utilizing their technicians and maybe don't have the resources or capability to train them, in say, epidurals right now, that can also be a very empowering thing.

**1:05:18.4 Shannon Thompson:** Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Team approach again.

**1:05:21.9 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**1:05:22.5 Shannon Thompson:** Find out what your team loves to do and let them do it.

**1:05:24.9 Julie Legred:** Just even the simple, "Hey, you did a great job today."

**1:05:28.8 Katie Berlin:** Oh yeah.

**1:05:29.6 Julie Legred:** Or...

**1:05:30.2 Shannon Thompson:** Yes.

**1:05:30.9 Julie Legred:** "Great job on that black cat, or catheter, whatever." I mean, it's just the little bit of recognition and recognizing of what we're doing together as a team.

**1:05:43.6 Shannon Thompson:** A simple thank you, and that goes both ways. We need to also thank the veterinarian for... "Thank you for showing me how to do that so that I could be better at it and help you be better." It goes both ways and we need to be respectful of that so much more than I think we are, how much those two little words can change your day.

**1:06:05.7 Katie Berlin:** Yeah we need to be colleagues. Yeah.

**1:06:07.8 Shannon Thompson:** And support each other.

**1:06:09.1 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, absolutely. Well, I can't think of a better way to end on that. I had 382 other questions for you all.

[laughter]

[overlapping conversation]

**1:06:21.2 S?:** We already have 'em answered.

**1:06:22.5 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, I know. We'll just keep you here all day. But I think all three of you raised such great points today and that's really what I wanted people to hear, is I wanted people to hear the passion that you have for this topic and for your profession and your colleagues and hear just... It feels... I know it's not easy or simple, but listening to the three of you talk about it makes it feel easier and simpler because we have everything we need right now. And that doesn't mean there isn't room down the road for more, but right now we have tools to make our profession better and solve some of the problems we're facing and there's nothing that feels better than that. It's an optimistic outlook and I love that. So thank you so much for spending the time.

**1:07:11.0 Julie Legred:** Thank you.

**1:07:11.5 Shannon Thompson:** Thank you. This was just outstanding.

**1:07:15.4 Julie Legred:** Yeah, has been great. And thank you for letting us chime in and be heard.

**1:07:21.6 S?:** Please chime in again.

**1:07:23.1 Katie Berlin:** Oh don't... I was gonna say, don't think this is gonna...

**1:07:25.4 S?:** Oh no.

[laughter]

**1:07:28.8 Katie Berlin:** No. Okay, we did our episode. Bye.

[laughter]

**1:07:31.6 Katie Berlin:** No, we wanna hear more about this from you and I'm sure we will down the road because I know this is a big priority for AAHA too, is we want AAHA to be an organization for the entire team and not just veterinarians and practice managers. And I think there's an opportunity here for us all to work together and really elevate all of the different roles in the veterinary team. So that's a big goal I think for us for next year and hopefully you will be, all three of you a big part of it.

**1:07:58.2 Shannon Thompson:** Excellent.

**1:07:58.6 Julie Legred:** Awesome.

**1:08:00.4 Shannon Thompson:** Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure and it's been an honor and

we're just happy we can share. 'Cause I don't know about you guys, but I'm not done yet. Are you?

**1:08:06.4 Julie Legred:** No.

**1:08:06.7 Shannon Thompson:** Well, and what's really cool about all this...

**1:08:08.2 Deborah Reeder:** [1:08:08.5] \_\_\_\_ I don't know for certain, whatever. But the three of us have just created this bond and relationship that never would've happened potentially without the instigation from AAHA. And it's been one of the blessings I'm going to put on my board out of this journey.

**1:08:29.1 Katie Berlin:** Love it. Yeah.

**1:08:29.2 Deborah Reeder:** Absolutely.

**1:08:30.5 Katie Berlin:** I love it. AAHA is an instigator.

**1:08:32.5 Deborah Reeder:** Yes. [laughter]

**1:08:34.0 Katie Berlin:** In a good way.

**1:08:34.6 Deborah Reeder:** In a good way.

[laughter]

**1:08:38.3 S?:** Absolutely, no doubt it.

**1:08:53.6 Shannon Thompson:** It's a wrap for now.

**1:08:54.7 Katie Berlin:** Yes.

**1:08:54.9 Shannon Thompson:** Well you were awesome too, Katie.

**1:08:56.6 Katie Berlin:** Thank you.

**1:08:57.2 Shannon Thompson:** You were just very relaxed and I loved how you contributed to the conversation and got us thinking and you got thinking and it was fun... Your energy played here very well.

**1:09:07.0 Katie Berlin:** It's good to have different perspectives and it's energizing. So I hope people listening feel energized too. And to everyone listening, thank you. We'll catch you next time on Central Line.