



HERE'S A SECRET ...

You Don't Have to Always Have Goals

Dana Varble, DVM, CAE
Chief Veterinary Officer, NAVC

Like many veterinarians, I chose my career path at an obnoxiously young age, around kindergarten. From that point on, I began to climb a relentless ladder I imagined was golden and would lead to a cartoon-esque magical land of veterinary bliss. There would be puppies and kittens that never age, diseases that all have cures, and colleagues that sing songs perfectly in tune—equipped with capes, wings, and a variety of useful magical powers.

In reality, the ladder is more like a thorny vine with missing and broken sections. Plus, it's a vine with no end. For overachievers, the need to achieve never actually ends. For each level or landmark in my career, I—like many—myopically continued to only look up... until 2023. Sick of all the climbing, I decided 2023 was my year to

stop climbing the vine and instead wander down a different path.

For the first time, I simply didn't set any goals this year. That doesn't mean I didn't achieve anything, but I didn't try to force a path through 2023. I just let the bricks fall in front of me. As I took a breath to examine each brick, I took advantage of those that were opportunities. Some bricks didn't fit into that path this year and I tossed them to the side as I continued to stroll. Occasionally, the bricks didn't match and I had to slow down to find ways to make them work for me. I wasn't thrown off a course I had predetermined or stressed over a timeline that I created. I didn't smush extra tasks into an already packed schedule, into an already full life. My path is wide enough and comfortable, and I don't need to rush or cram more in.

Despite, or maybe because of, my laissez-faire career plan this year, I had the time to check out new opportunities I might have missed or even dismissed. It turns out when I am not hustling and rushing, I am actually a better listener, more creative, and a better judge of my abilities and capabilities. As we head into the season of "R&R"—reflection and resolutions, not rest and relaxation (your holiday season must be much less hectic than mine)—rather than resuming a relentless climb heading into 2024, I might just build a few staircases on my yellow brick road. Using intentionality in my goal choices, rather than chasing a utopia we all know doesn't exist, I will work to achieve a balance between chasing new goals and enjoying the goals I have already achieved. **TVP**

Ben Kirchner

Dana Varble, DVM, CAE

This column is titled "The Secret Life of Vets" so I can talk about the secrets that really should be considered well-known truths. These are the not-so-secret secrets that can help change our thinking and our profession for the better.

