



HERE'S A SECRET ...

You Aren't an Imposter If You Are Already Doing It!

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Do you ever picture yourself as a cartoon character? That afternoon I felt like a combination of Calvin or Hobbes (maybe both—which was the tiger!), Bart Simpson, and Cathy. I was moderately confident that I had just burst into the room, making too much noise and creating an unignorable disturbance for everyone around me. I was even more confident that everyone could tell I was sweating, out of breath, and disheveled. I was completely confident, as I looked around the room full of veterinary industry leaders, that I wasn't really supposed to be there. I was an imposter!

Now keep in mind that I was invited to this event, and it is definitely part of my job to be in those rooms, to listen and learn from those leaders, and perhaps most importantly to contribute to those discussions. But did I feel like I belonged? Nope!

At some point, I really thought this feeling would go away. It is a unique combination of anxiety, dread, and uncertainty that at best is uncomfortable and at worst is paralyzing. Will I ever feel ready? Will

I ever be part of the “in-crowd”? Why had my usual self-confidence evaporated in a wisp of cartoon puff smoke? I could get lost in analyzing why veterinary professionals are plagued by imposter syndrome. We are accomplished, educated, and trusted; yet, here we are, the proverbial nerdy, leftover-when-teams-get-picked-in-gym-class kids.

Luckily, inspiration to fix my mindset came just a few hours later. And it didn't come from one of the wise, sage leaders in that room. It came from a veterinary student, Alyssa Crenshaw (Tuskegee University, class of 2024). Her story recounted a time when she didn't think she could get into veterinary school, wasn't sure she could pass this class or that rotation, and wasn't sure she merited inclusion in the scholarship recipients presenting to us that very day. But there she was.

I remember sitting there in shock. How can you be pretending to do something when you are actually doing it? Alyssa's story is uniquely and wonderfully her own, but I don't think she realized how much it meant to me that day. I remember thinking that being a veterinary student might not happen for me. I remember thinking surgery was too scary and too hard. I definitely didn't think of myself as a leader. But there I was. It was too late to pretend. I was doing it.

The next meeting of that leadership group came, and while I was still a little surprised that they invited me—still my usual disheveled self—back, I reminded myself of what Alyssa had taught me. I wasn't pretending to be a leader; I was one. **TVP**

Ben Kirchner

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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.

