



HERE'S A SECRET ...

Our Worst Days Are Someone's Best Days

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The tears were falling by the time I had pulled out of the clinic parking lot. It had been among my worst days. A patient had died in surgical recovery, I misidentified parasites in a fecal, and I had been “volun-told” to add another task to my already overflowing to-do list—and that was just the stuff I remembered. I recall shouting to the universe (also known as my car roof) that “it is all too much!”

That day had chipped a chunk of my confidence away. Never mind that I had completed 2 successful rabbit surgeries, had an owner gushing to the receptionist that I was “the greatest veterinarian” (I had identified the “growth” on their parakeet’s foot as dried poop and “treated” it with water), and had a colleague hug me for supporting them through a challenging procedure. To quote Julia Roberts, “The bad stuff is easier to believe.”

The truth is, the bad stuff *is* easier to believe. Evolutionarily, we are made to focus on and be hyperaware of threats to protect ourselves.

We have to actively reframe negativity while positivity tends to be fleeting.

My ugly cry that day was valid; the day had sucked. I regrouped over some very loud music on my commute home and made my way into the grocery store for the essential bad-day pick-me-up (a pint of ice cream—or 2). At the checkout, the cashier spotted the clinic name on my scrubs and went on to say how much she loved animals, how much she wanted to be a veterinarian, and how amazing my job was. I was able to give a polite smile and nod while internally rolling my eyes. Back in my car, I took a deep breath. My first reaction was annoyance and irritation. That woman had no clue how terrible my job could be or how overwhelmed, sad, and anxious I was. I thought to myself, “Ignorance is bliss.”

I once worked as a cashier. Every once in a while, on days like that, I think about returning to that job. The stakes just never seem as high because it isn’t my passion. I am not invested in being a great cashier. I had traded in my very best cashier day for this day. This “horrible, no good, very bad day.” If you asked me then if I would want a day like I had, filled with 1 profoundly happy client, 2 successful surgeries, a colleague I could help in a time of need, and a slew of incredibly stressful, unhappy, scary events, would I have done it? Yes. In fact, to quote Andy Roark, “You don’t have to look very far at all to find someone who would gladly trade their best day at work for one of our worst days.” Yeah, I, and I bet most of the time you, would make that trade too. That doesn’t make it easy, but I am still grateful I did it. **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.

