



HERE'S A SECRET ...

Each of Us Is More Than “Just a Veterinarian”



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Imagine a gathering of friends. Among them? An award-winning artist, a qualified wine expert, a local chamber of commerce-recognized small business owner with a growing enterprise, an adjunct graduate-level university professor, an award-winning columnist, marathon runners, a philanthropist, a local musical theater performer, the managing editor for an international scholarly journal, past presidents of an international veterinary association, and past presidents of state veterinary medical associations. You might start wondering if Colonel Mustard is going to pop in, and who would be murdered in the conservatory with the candlestick!

How many people did you picture at the gathering? A dozen? More? In reality, that room contained just 3 people. A few old vet school friends who, upon reading the above list, will simultaneously confirm its accuracy and deny its existence. If you asked us, the first thing we would tell you is we are “just veterinarians.” The truth, as usual, is so much more complicated.

It is easy to define ourselves by our careers. When our career requires a high level of devotion, energy, and effort to sustain, the most reliable aspect of our identities is the one we have a license and a diploma to validate. Plus, it is the easiest way to introduce yourself to someone new—even if every veterinarian I know has a fake backup career for social situations that minimizes small talk and rogue medical questions. No one wants to walk up to someone and introduce themselves with descriptors like “past president” or “artist” because those require way too much additional explanation for your average social interaction.

But when we dismiss our accomplishments, it is far too easy to forget all the diverse, complicated lives we live. We forget that our friends, colleagues, and even acquaintances have a huge variety of experiences, resources, and networks that stretch far beyond what we may know. It is also far too easy to forget that the people around us are also parents, spouses, children, caregivers, and patients, defined by a multitude of successes and challenges that have contributed to their identity.

One of my favorite parts of this profession is hearing everyone's remarkable backstories. If I run into you at an event, please don't leave out the good stuff, and feel free to ask me about mine. I'll probably hedge around it and act embarrassed, and it is OK if you do, too. The fascinating thing about my friends' stories isn't that all 3 were veterinarians; it is all the other things they are as well. **TVP**

Ben Kirchner