

**AVMA President-Elect Remarks to HOD at Convention**  
**Dr. Rena Carlson-Lammers**  
**July 14, 2023**  
**Denver, CO**

It is a privilege and truly the highest honor of my career to share some thoughts with you today as I close out the year and begin my tenure as your AVMA President.

Two years ago, I shared an analogy of the windshield vs the rear-view mirror in our cars. The rear-view mirror is important yet small. It tells us where we have been and how we got here. The front windshield is also vitally important—it provides a view of what lies ahead, a glimpse of the future. I still use this analogy as a guiding principle to keep the focus on the future.

I challenge all of us to take the lessons learned from the windshield vs the rear-view mirror analogy. Let's integrate and build as we look towards the future. As leaders in this profession, what have we learned and what can we do today that will set our future colleagues and our profession up for even greater success? What can each of us do to support a system and create conditions that remove barriers to wellbeing, facilitate personal growth and professional development, and enhance financial success?

What are some key areas in which we all can have an impact both individually and collectively?

First, I encourage us all to think of the view of the profession we want the world to see and understand. What vision of ourselves do we want to manifest? Our collective identity is made up by the stories we construct to make meaning and create purpose in our lives. These stories play a significant role in our psychological wellbeing. In fact, the way we interpret our experiences and the stories we tell about them are so important that they not only provide a snapshot of our current state of wellbeing, they can also predict our wellbeing over time.

And there are countless ripple effects to the stories that we choose to tell. To give you an example of what I am talking about, information from a recent wellness conference suggests that second year veterinary students have mostly negative impressions and feelings when thinking about clients. Our future colleagues at this point have not even spent significant time in the exam room, yet already view clients in an unfavorable manner. At this stage in their learning—**WE** are the models for this belief system.

Our decisions to label an experience as a threat vs an opportunity teaches the next generation to assume the same. So think about the ripple of effects of producing graduates who enter the profession already viewing clients as a negative obstacles, vs a partner in providing the best care for our patients. And this is just one small example of how our stories and modeling may be inadvertently exacerbating, rather than reducing, some of the challenges of our work.

Addressing the stories we tell **IS NOT** about ignoring challenges or problems. It **IS** about identifying a narrative based on the lessons learned, our existing strengths, our capacity to evolve and adapt, and the unlimited potential within our profession. Embracing a more solution-focused narrative and emphasizing the creative, compassionate, intelligent, skilled veterinary professionals who are working with people who love and care for their animals, creates the conditions that allow us to manage the challenges of this profession more successfully.

Adopting a strengths-based approach in our stories and in our collective mindsets not only helps us achieve a higher level of wellbeing and better navigate the challenges we face as individuals, it also draws more respect, trust, and interest from those we have taken an oath to serve. And that creates positive ripple effects for generations to come.

Another key area for our success is creating a sense of belonging in our workplaces and associations. We know from the Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing and other studies that belonging, feeling accepted for our authentic selves, and believing we matter, has powerful long- and short-term implications for our individual wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of our teams and organizations. It results in more confident team members, more resilient teams, a much higher level of job performance, and teams that are significantly more profitable. In turn, this can have positive impacts on our relationships with clients and improve our overall patient care.

We can all play a role in proactively reducing the uncertainty of whether our colleagues and team members feel like they belong or not, creating welcoming environments and opportunities for authentic social bonds, and identifying our shared purpose, values, and goals.

What ties these concepts together—addressing our collective narrative and creating a sense of belonging—is mentorship. We know from our firsthand experiences as well as significant bodies of research that the guidance and direction given by a mentor can have a profound influence at any stage of career—but particularly for our new graduates and early career veterinary professionals. According to The AVMA survey of graduating veterinarians, the class of 2022, the number one reason those graduates who accepted a job offer, chose the one they did.

A mentor provides many levels of support from advisor, trainer, coach, cheerleader, and influencer. Effective mentors care about you enough to be candid and direct and invested in your success. They are trustworthy in order to provide a safe space to fall when things are difficult, process challenging experiences, and apply those lessons going forward. It's a relationship based on shared learning, shared teaching, and mutual benefit.

A positive mentor relationship provides emotional and career support that increases wellbeing, work satisfaction, and creates a sense of belonging. All qualities that contribute to a healthier narrative about ourselves and our profession, and increase our capacity to provide exceptional care to each other, our clients, and our patients.

The profession is still recovering from the impacts of COVID, and while the pandemic created many challenges, we've also encountered many opportunities. There is an incredibly exciting future ahead in terms of technologies and advancements, and the AVMA is working to bring these opportunities to the profession.

And while the profession is facing some workforce challenges, even current shortages in some areas, no one cares more about ensuring that we have appropriate numbers of well-prepared teams to meet workforce needs now and in the future. As Dr. Teller said, your AVMA is hard at work on all of these issues and is very focused on solving present and future needs.

As we work to solve these challenges, it's important to do it the right way, through long-term planning, and accurate data so that the public and the profession continue to be very well served. As we look ahead, let's work together to shape the future we want.

Let's step into our roles as mentors and encourage our newest colleagues with inspiring stories of our profession. Let's be role models to our youth, showing these aspiring future veterinarians that our profession is full of creative, compassionate, intelligent, skilled veterinary professionals who are working with people who love and care for their animals. Let's enhance our workforce by fully leveraging and valuing our team members, and strengthen our teams by creating

inclusive, welcoming environments where we all feel a sense of belonging.

Together, we can ensure all our colleagues share in the lifelong rewards made possible by this incredible profession that we are so fortunate to share.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity to serve the profession we all hold so dear, and I look forward to working with you in the year ahead.