THE FUTURE
Inspiring Stories of Veterinarians Who Followed Their Dreams, Left Clinical Practice, and Are Excelling Outside the Exam Room

by Sarah Rumple

Stacee Santi, DVM
Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Vet2Pet

When Santi was offered her first job as an associate veterinarian at a hospital in Portland, Oregon, the starting salary was $33,000.

“I suspended my student loan repayments, got a cheap apartment, ate ramen, picked up extra shifts, and worked my ass off to get by,” said Santi.

Fast-forward to 2010. It was a spring day in Durango, Colorado, where Santi was managing veterinarian at AAHA-accredited Riverview Animal Hospital. After spending the previous month reminding clients about parasite prevention and hearing many of them tell her that they had preventives left over from
last year that they had forgotten to give, Santi was getting frustrated. As she sat at the counter in the treatment area thinking about ways to more effectively remind clients, an alert on her phone captured her attention.

_Huh, maybe I do need a pepperoni pizza today_, she thought as she looked at the push notification from a pizza chain.

Then she had an epiphany. "I realized that if I could send a push notification to remind clients, they would see the note, they would remember, and they would give the medicine," said Santi.

So she reached out to a small-business app developer, and the Riverview Animal Hospital app was born. Clients loved it. Three years later, the app had evolved to include more features, and the majority of Riverview's clients were using it. But Santi was becoming increasingly unsettled at the corporately owned practice, and a life-changing conversation with consultant Randy Hall convinced her that it was time to make her app available to other veterinary practices.

"Randy told me to think about what I can contribute to the world as a human and to not let the corporation or the clinic limit what I can be in life. And that was really powerful to me because I had never thought of myself outside the confines of being a veterinarian," Santi remembered. "Randy said, 'You have this app thing going. If you really believe in that, you've got to think bigger for yourself. You have options. You can quit. You can do other things.' And once he said that, it felt like maybe I did have permission to push my boundaries and think bigger."

In 2013, Santi created her own logo and had a friend help build a website, and her company—Vet2Pet—was official. The next morning, an AAHA-accredited practice in Canada became her first customer. Today, Vet2Pet has nearly 1,000 customers, and Santi's days of making $33,000 a year and eating ramen are a distant memory.

Santi is among many veterinarians who have blazed a trail for others in the profession. Here are a few of their stories.

**Cindy Trice, DVM**

_Founder, Relief Rover_

"I remember this relief vet coming in—she rode in on her bike," recalled Cindy Trice, who was working as a receptionist at a veterinary hospital in San Francisco at the time. "She just came in, did her thing, and left. There was something about her, and I remember thinking, _That's awesome._"

Veterinary medicine was a second career for Trice, who graduated from veterinary school at 35 years old and worked as an associate for 4 years before deciding to try relief work when her husband had the opportunity to go to photography school in Missoula, Montana. As the only relief veterinarian in Missoula at the time, Trice had an abundance of work and realized she could make a career of this.

By 2016, Trice and her husband were living in Florida when she received a message on LinkedIn from a veterinarian near Lake Tahoe asking if she'd cover for her during her maternity leave.

"I asked my husband if he wanted to spend the summer in Tahoe, and he said, 'Sure. Why not?' So we handled the logistics, threw our dogs in the car, and drove across the country," remembered Trice. "It turned out brilliantly."

After that, Trice realized that she likely wasn't the only veterinarian willing to travel for relief work, and decided to start Relief Rover. Her goal with Relief Rover is to help connect people, but she also wants to elevate the relief veterinarian niche.

_"I really want for our profession to recognize the importance of relief vets in overall professional wellness."_
“I really want for our profession to recognize the importance of relief vets in overall professional wellness,” Trice said. “I want relief veterinarians to recognize their value and I want them to have the tools to run their businesses professionally.”

Jason Nicholas, BVetMed
President and Chief Medical Officer, Preventive Vet
“Pretty early on, I realized that we frequently see the same stuff in emergency practice,” explained Jason Nicholas, BVetMed. “Toxicities, urethral obstructions, pancreatitis, hit-by-cars… and I realized that a lot of these problems were happening because people just weren’t aware of how they could easily prevent them.”

During the two years following veterinary school, Nicholas worked at a 24-hour emergency hospital, where he began writing a book about preventing common pet emergencies. After relocating across the country and getting married, he decided to work as a relief veterinarian, hoping it would provide a healthier work-life balance and the flexibility to continue writing his book.

In 2011, Nicholas had the idea for Preventive Vet—a content publishing and consulting company that aims to help keep dogs and cats healthier through an online library of credible, vetted information for pet owners as well as books and other tools that help veterinary healthcare teams communicate more effectively with pet owners.

Nicholas hopes the books will become “the standard of care in practice.” You can find his 101 Essential Tips books for dogs and cats at press.aaha.org.

Beal also serves as coeditor and contributing author of McCurnin’s Clinical Textbook for Veterinary Technicians and writes pet owner- and industry-facing content.

“I thought the idea was crazy at first,” Beal recalled. “But I had a six-month-old baby at the time, and I remember being up in the middle of the night with him thinking, What if this would be a nine-to-five job? What if I didn’t have to work weekends anymore? What if I could get home before seven or eight o’clock at night? All those things encouraged me to ask him more about it, and I eventually took the job. I’m so happy I did.”

“A job in academia ‘literally fell in my lap,’” said Angela Beal, DVM. Beal’s husband works with the wife of the president of Bradford School in Columbus, Ohio. In 2005, the well-established school offered many different career programs, but one was missing: veterinary technology. Beal had been working as an associate for two years when the president of the school called her at home one evening and asked if she’d be interested in working at the school.

“This isn’t what I had planned for my future,” Beal said. “But it’s been wonderful. I love what I do.”

Kimberly Pope-Robinson, DVM, CCFP
Chief Executive Officer, 1 Life Connected
When a medical condition forced lifelong horse lover Kimberly Pope-Robinson, DVM, to transition from large-to companion-animal practice, she joined Banfield, working in various roles during her 12 years there. As a medical director during her final 3 years at Banfield, she found herself feeling suicidal.

Seeking change, Pope-Robinson left Banfield to join Zoetis as a regional strategic veterinarian. “I would go to specialty hospitals and ask what kind of support they needed, and they often asked for help with engagement, compassion fatigue, and other emotional issues,” she explained. “I became really good at life coaching veterinarians and their teams. I got to be known within my company as ‘emotions girl.’ Oh, you need something for your hospital? Call Kim. She does the emotions stuff. I started getting requests all throughout the country.”
Career- (and Life-) Changing Tips

Talk to as many people as you can. “It all goes back to those VBMA relationships,” said Amy Mohl, DVM, who doesn’t have formal training as an editor and credits where she is today to networking.

But don’t listen to the haters. “That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard,” a veterinarian told Stacee Santi, DVM, as she stood at her company’s booth in 2014, her first time exhibiting at a veterinary conference as Vet2Pet. “My friend was helping me work the booth for free, and she told him, ‘Move along, please. . . Move along,’” laughed Santi.

Keep an open mind. “When I take a step back and look at what I’m doing now, it seems crazy,” said Jess Trimble, DVM. “Coming from farm-town Illinois, I never imagined I’d be the chief veterinary officer of a San Francisco–based startup. But I never said no to opportunities that passed my way, and because I kept an open mind, here I am doing something I enjoy much more than clinical practice.”

Look deeper to discover what you really want. “Really do the work to figure out why it is that you want to leave your current position,” said Cari Wise, DVM, MAEd. She recommends asking yourself the following questions: Why am I not happy? Why do I want to leave this job? Write your answers down.

Expand your horizons. “Vet school education teaches us to think and approach things in a very analytical way that is translatable to so many things,” explained Jason Nicholas, BVetMed. “Don’t be afraid to look outside the profession for opportunities to use your skills.”

Have a backup plan. “Relief work is always a great option,” explained Wise. “It really helps to take off the pressure of feeling trapped if you don’t like your current job or are trying to start a business and need a flexible way to make money.”

Get your finances in order. “Take a hard look at the things you’re paying for. Are you living beyond your means?” asked Santi. “Figure it out. It’s a math equation. You go live in a smaller house, you get a beater car, you pick up extra shifts or do relief, you pay off your student loan, and then you start living the good life. Or then you take the chance and start a company. Get a small business loan. You went through vet school—this isn’t harder than vet school.”

Hustle. “This will require grit and hustle,” explained Santi. “It’s not just going to happen. You’re not just going to put in a couple of weekends and realize your dreams. It takes persistent grit and hustle to get through the hard times. You’re going to have to give some stuff up.”

Don’t give up too quickly. “If it’s something that you really want to do, you just have to keep trying,” said Wise. “You’ll get rejected every time until you’re not.”
Recognizing that there was a need for emotional support in veterinary medicine, Pope-Robinson left Zoetis and started her company, 1 Life Connected, in 2015. She offers a framework for people to create their own unique path to wellbeing, and she has written a book, created a Facebook group, and created a coloring book with a poem. She speaks and consults internationally and feels privileged to be in the position to be able to give back.

“We're not broken, and we don't need to be fixed,” she said. “We're just learning how to be our imperfect selves in this imperfect world.”

JESS TRIMBLE, DVM
Chief Veterinary Officer, Fuzzy Pet Health

It was a Saturday evening when Jess Trimble, DVM, found herself in the back kennel room of the veterinary practice where she worked as an associate, sitting with a dachshund who was on IV fluids. The practice technically didn't take overnights or emergencies, and Trimble wasn't getting paid. “I was just there because this person had no other options, and the dog would've been euthanized otherwise. I remember thinking, I'm glad I'm able to help this person now, but I can't do this forever.”

So Trimble, who grew up on a small farm in Illinois, decided to go back to her roots, spending a few months on a dairy farm. While there, she learned that by improving the farm’s systems, she could improve the health of the animals, which would make the animals more productive, which would increase the farmer's revenue, which would mean the farmer could hire someone part time to do the evening milking, which would allow the farmer to go see his kid's baseball games.

“The little tweaks where we can improve the health of the patient, but also improve the life of the human, is really what I found myself to be passionate about,” Trimble said.

So when the chief executive officer of Fuzzy Pet Health approached Trimble and discussed how they could help pets and their people, Trimble was ready to get involved.

“I have found so much joy in establishing the protocols, procedures, and strategic needs of a company and being that veterinary voice for a company full of nonveterinarians,” Trimble said about Fuzzy, a veterinary house-call service and telemedicine platform. “I imagine I will always work in a position that likes to push the boundaries a bit.”

AMY MOHL, DVM
Chief of Content Strategy, Brief Media

After graduating from veterinary school in 2007 and working full time in a clinical practice setting for nearly six years, Amy Mohl, DVM, needed a change. “I needed flexibility, especially after my first child was born,” Mohl explained. “My husband has no flexibility in his schedule, and we were lucky that we were in a financial position where I didn't have to practice full time.”

While weighing her options, Mohl connected with someone she met as a student member of the Veterinary Business Management Association (VBMA) who worked for Brief Media. “I wrote a couple articles for them and got to know the editorial team. When they needed a veterinarian for some small projects, they asked me to step in, and it grew from there,” she said. “Much of what I've done here is help determine how we can help veterinarians. What do veterinarians need? Are we striking the right voice for [them]? I'm offering that perspective.”

Mohl now enjoys a full-time, remote position with Brief Media, managing the company’s content team. The flexible schedule is ideal for the mother of two, who said, “I couldn't do anything that was rigid or set because the rest of our life is so not set.”

GRACE KIM, DVM
Founder, Richer Life DVM

Grace Kim, DVM, worked as a veterinarian for five years before she and her husband, a physician, welcomed their first child in 2008. After having two more children within the
next three years and moving across the country multiple times for her husband’s job, Kim’s job became stay-at-home mom.

In the spring of 2018, when Kim’s youngest child was in full-day school and she found herself with more time, she began addressing things she had put on the back burner, including her family’s finances.

“I became really interested. It was fun to learn about,” Kim recalled. “That was about the time when the Merck veterinary wellbeing study came out, and it reminded me of all the stress I felt when I graduated with six-figure debt. I felt like the information I was learning to improve my own financial wellness would be good to share with other veterinarians.”

And so, Richer Life DVM, a financial wellness blog for veterinarians, became Kim’s next “baby.”

Since then, Kim has spoken at a national conference and created a Facebook group with more than 1,100 members, and she is now working to help veterinarians conquer their finances. “Vet school is much harder than learning basic financial concepts. … You can definitely figure this out.”

Laci Schaible, DVM, CVJ
Head of Veterinary Medicine, Rhapsody.vet
After graduating from veterinary school and working in private practice for four years, Laci Schaible, DVM, CVJ, and her veterinarian husband, Jed, diagnosed their own dog with osteosarcoma.

After seeking out a specific type of radiation therapy, they felt overwhelmed.

“I wondered how in the world pet owners can do this,” Schaible explained. “As veterinarians in practice, we understood that vets don’t have forever to spend with people and hold their hands and be their concierge through their pet’s health crisis. But there really was a need for that.”

In 2010, they launched VetLive, the first veterinary-specific telehealth platform, in an effort to help pet owners navigate the veterinary medicine system. Together, the Schaibles owned and operated VetLive until 2015, when Schaible woke up to find that her husband had taken his own life.

Knowing she didn’t want to go back to clinical practice, Schaible maintained VetLive, did freelance writing, and dipped into savings to get by in the years following her husband’s death. In the summer of 2019, Schaible got a call from the chief operating officer of Rhapsody.vet, who invited her to meet with the Rhapsody.vet team.

“I ended up getting offered a job,” Schaible said proudly. “It was the first time I’d ever been offered a job without applying for it.”

Today, Schaible serves as Rhapsody.vet’s head of veterinary medicine, and she’s proud of what the start-up is working toward. “We’ve built this amazing veterinary-specific hospital management software that’s unlike anything else that’s out there,” she said. “It’s free to veterinarians, and it uses standardized diagnostic codes. It makes it so easy for vets—they just quickly check boxes.”

Cari Wise, DVM, MAEd, Certified Life Coach
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Joyful DVM
“I had three jobs my first year after vet school,” said Cari Wise, DVM, MAEd. “I never got fired, but I left them all because I wasn’t happy.”

Name it, and Wise has probably done it. Since graduating from veterinary school in 1999, she has worked as an associate, built her own practice from the ground up, worked as a brand manager for Royal Canin, picked up relief work, built and directed a vet tech program, and served as a program manager for VetPrep.

But ultimately, because of her entrepreneurial heart and desire to make an impact, Wise started her business, Joyful DVM, in 2017. “Joyful DVM is all about teaching veterinary professionals how to crush anxiety and to become empowered to create the lives and careers they love.”
explained Wise. “In vet school, we learn how to be doctors, but we don’t learn anything about how to function as a human being in that setting. It’s a high-pressure, high-stakes situation, and it drives anxiety, depression, and suicide.”

Through Joyful DVM, Wise offers online courses, consulting, and coaching. Her goal is to get veterinary medicine off the top-10 list for suicide.

“When you find yourself restless and looking for another job, there is something internally that you want to pay attention to,” Wise said. “I firmly believe we all are called to a purpose, and there is something out there for us. I love the flexibility of what I’ve created out of my education.”

Sarah Rumple is an award-winning veterinary writer and editor living in Denver, Colorado. She took a leap of faith to start her business, Rumpus Writing and Editing, in 2016.

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