

If you can't stand heat get out of our kitchen

Dear Editor,

I write in reply to your article "Supervets are not superhuman" (October 30 issue) and the letter "Practice today is a job for Super-vet" (December 11 issue). The former author's starting point is: "I kind of know what a vocation is, I think." The author then defines this: "It's a single word to describe a peculiar type of career in which the individual accepts that his or her lifestyle will be compromised a bit by the demands of the profession. But he or she does so willingly...". Perhaps the author's starting point should have been an English dictionary.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines vocation as: "noun, divine call to, or sense of fitness for, career or occupation". This derives from the Latin vocare, to call. A vocation is a calling. Nowhere does the definition talk about work-life balance, superpowers or anything else for that matter. Having been called to a particular profession, one accepts that that profession is one in which you will dedicate yourself (otherwise your choice of profession is nothing more than a voluntary choice with no sense of duty).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines dedicate as: "transitive verb, devote or give up (to... purpose, etc); in past participle: devoted, having single-minded loyalty".

The RCVS oath sworn by every member on admission to the

profession affirms the duty of every veterinary surgeon " ... I promise above all that... my constant endeavour will be to ensure the welfare of the animals committed to my care."

There seems to be a bit of a theme here. This is what it means to have a vocation and, unfortunately, there is a downside: your private life comes second to your professional obligations. I knew this when I went to veterinary college and I have not been disappointed.

If members of the profession are not prepared to make sacrifices for their chosen career path, then perhaps, for them, it is not a vocation. The career of veterinary surgeon is a career of service.

If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. In fact, if you can feel the heat from the outside, don't go inside in the first place. Don't walk in, complain about the heat and ask the cook to turn all the ovens out; the food will be cold (no doubt you will complain about that), much like your sense of satisfaction with your job. Nothing is easy in this life and you do not get rewards without sacrifice.

Your role is to serve and, sometimes, that is a bitter pill to swallow. No one pretends that it is easy to do. How you cope is up to you. Your colleagues and employers can provide support and the profession has some support structures for those who suffer from stress. I would advise those in need to utilise them. If you do not ask for help, you cannot complain when it is not forthcoming.

I have had two breakdowns in my 13 years of practice. This fact has caused me very much to reconsider my work ethic. I have changed my career path to suit my more fragile mental constitution but I am still called to veterinary work and I am still very much devoted to my vocation. I still put my professional obligations first, much to the annoyance of my long-suffering partner when I phone at the last minute to say that I cannot make dinner with friends or a trip to the theatre. Nowadays, I make sure that obligations are manageable most of the time.

Yours faithfully,

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VT 37(3):47

5.2.07