

## **Haters Gonna Hate:** Are you just going to stand by and take it?

Surfing the web today I came across an online review directed at a veterinary hospital and a specific veterinarian in a small community. Reading it made me angry but then I realized that I don't have to remain silent. This review was not about me or about my practice but it quite easily could have been. In fact, it has been about me in the past and like many veterinarians, I too have been victim to negative reviews, online slander and even bullying in my small community. For twenty-seven years, as a vet, I chose to "take the high road" and remained silent. Refusing to respond to the negative and slanderous online trolls, I tried to grow a thick skin and focus on staying positive. Only those closest to me know how much it hurt and how I struggled to not let those comments eat away at my confidence.

In the early years of my career, I struggled with being a professional in a small and close knit community. As a vet, everyone had an opinion. They loved you, or hated you. You were either a hero or a money grubbing capitalist. Sometimes the same client that praised you last week was the one calling you a heartless villain this week. While it has gotten easier to accept the nasty comments and behind your back whispers that occur in a small community, I have to admit, sometimes it still feels personal. How can it not? For many of us, our career as veterinarians is a calling, not just a job.

I still recall the experience as a new practice owner, of a truly hateful and slanderous campaign aimed at harming our small business and turning our new community against us. I was invited by a friend to join an evening painting group. I love to draw and paint, but starting a family and buying a small business had left me little free time to pursue my hobbies. I decided it was time to do something for myself and agreed to join my friend. I introduced myself to the group as just "Elaine" and being new to the community, most of the members did not know I was "Dr. Elaine", a veterinarian. As people worked on their art, and chatted with each other, I felt my stomach tighten as the talk turned to pets and then a discussion of local veterinarians. Opinions about local veterinarians were bantered about and then my stomach knotted as things suddenly took a nasty turn. I listened in shock, as people discussed the smear campaign of posters that were being placed around the community "exposing" the terrible new veterinarians that had recently started a practice. This was the first I had heard about this slanderous campaign and I was afraid and hurt. With a tremor in my voice, I stood up and re-introduced myself as "Dr. Elaine Klemmensen". I heard a collective gasp go through the room and sat back down to a room of stunned silence. I continued to paint while trying to figure out how I could get the hell out of there! Thankfully I was saved by my pager buzzing. One of the few times in my career I was happy to get called in for an after hours emergency!

Trolls did exist, back in the days before social media. Spreading their message was a little more difficult and their reach more limited but the effect on an individual's psyche equally devastating. The happy ending to that story was that it helped to build my resiliency and it taught me a valuable lesson about focusing on inner happiness and my own definition of success rather than external validation and popularity.

Everyone is entitled to their opinion and what I am talking about here is not respectful dialogue and open communication aimed at resolving a conflict or misunderstanding. I am talking about mean and spiteful online slander aimed at harming an individual and or their business. There is a difference and for years I ignored those trolls and refused to respond for two reasons: First, it seemed unprofessional and petty to respond. Second, I did not want to get drawn into the negative drama and chose instead, to protect myself and stay positive. To focus my energies on the people and things that I cared about in life and let the haters hate. It is far too easy in veterinary medicine to dwell on the negative. The negative outcomes, the negative clients and the negative reviews. To let that one mean, unhappy client or coworker, ruin your day while forgetting about the 20 amazing people that put a smile on your face.

What I realized today, while reading this nasty online review, is that I can finally speak up. I no longer own a veterinary practice, I no longer have anything to lose and maybe it is time for all of us in this profession to end the silence, to stop turning the other cheek and to tell the bullies what we really think.

So to all of you out there who have posted unfair, biased and downright mean reviews about your vet. Rants aimed to hurt or damage their reputation with no desire to understand or resolve your issue. Wake up take responsibility for your choices. You adopted that pet, you took on the financial responsibility for that animal and it isn't your vet's responsibility to subsidize the cost of medical care for you. It isn't your veterinarian or their team's fault when it is injured or ill. As hard as we try, as skilled as we may be, we cannot save every patient, we cannot foresee every complication and while we are doing our best, at the end of the day we are only human. Stop making your vet feel guilty if they want to earn a fair salary for the 60+ hours a week they work and for heavens sake stop telling them they're "only in it for the money". Frankly this phrase is getting pretty old for all of us so show a little creativity and come up with something new already. Recognize if you choose a lower priced veterinarian who does not offer 24 hour emergency care, you made this choice. When your pet is ill on Christmas Day and your vet won't answer their phone, is it fair to expect the other veterinarian to miss Christmas morning with their kids? Oh, and one more thing, if you are going to slander us or our team online at least have the balls to sign your real name. To Professor Dante, DW, Mountain Mitch and all the others hiding behind your slick pseudonyms, your not fooling anyone. We know who you are and all you have succeeded in doing is losing our respect. If you have a problem with our service or care just talk to us. Face to face. Like a grownup.

Sorry if that sounds unprofessional folks but maybe it is time to stand up for ourselves and tell it like it is. When my son was in grade 5, he was the target of some school yard bullying. We talked about it and encouraged him to not react, to pretend it didn't bother him, essentially to turn the other cheek. True to his nature, he listened, digested this information and then decided to handle it his way. This involved tossing the said bully across the room and ending up in the principles office. We were called in to the school to discuss our son's anger management issues and true to our non-confrontational nature, we listened and did not say what was on our minds, something I have always regretted. Where are the other kids parents? Is it okay to constantly taunt someone with mental abuse until they snap? Thankfully his teacher gave our son the support we did not, when several weeks later, he asked him how things were going. Our lad replied that things were much better for him after he threw the kid across the room. The teacher just looked at him meaningfully and said "Sometimes you just gotta do, what you gotta do".

Maybe it is time to stand up and do what we gotta do. What do you think?