



# Notes from the Consultant's Corner

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## Are You Clueless? Give it a Try!

I'd like to tell you about a woman I know. She's clueless and I wish I could be more like her. You'll probably think I'm crazy, but I would like to share. We'll call this woman "Rhonda." Rhonda has been working in the veterinary profession for 20 years now and she's quite a trip. I started working with Rhonda when we purchased our pet hospital five years ago and she is the type of person you look at and wonder... "how *does* she do it?"

You see Rhonda never seems to get upset about anything at work. At first I thought that maybe there was something "off" about her, you know—someone who doesn't have all their pencils in their box. But after awhile, I realized that Rhonda is not only an impressive person, but a terrific veterinary assistant as well. I would watch her and wait for the time when something would ruffle her. I'd see her at times when the hospital was insanely busy; with fractious animals; with difficult clients; with bickering staff; and even with the obligatory rude client who has nothing better to do than yell. But, it never happened...she just never seemed to get stressed out. Here was one of the most unflappable people I had ever met.

So finally one day I couldn't resist any more. I walked up to her and said, "Okay...how do you *DO IT*?" "Do what?" she said. "How do you stay so calm all the time and never let the stress of the job bother you?" "What stress?" She replied. Thinking of course that she was being sarcastic, I simply laughed and stood with baited breath for her to impart some golden nugget of wisdom. But Rhonda repeated, "What stress?" This time I realized that she was totally serious. At this point I started getting a little freaked out and was thinking, "Okay... *just how clueless is this woman?*" So I dutifully went down the whole list of stuff...the sick animals, the rude clients, the ever-ringing telephone, the grumpy co-workers- you know the drill.

Rhonda simply looked at me and said with total earnest; "That's not stress... that's just the job." "Oh, I see....," I lied. "Um....what?" "What I mean," she said, "is that stuff is *always* going to be with the job, why get upset about it?" Still not getting it, I tried again, "Yea, but *how* do you keep it from bothering you?"

"That's what my job is all about" she replied, "I expect it. Why should I be surprised by it and get upset about it?" "It would be like a truck driver getting upset about driving in traffic...it goes with the territory. I just make a conscious choice to not let it get under my skin. None of it is about me anyway."

I started having flashbacks to childhood when my Mom would tell me to simply "ignore" my big brother's teasing because if I ignored him, it could no longer bother me. "So... does that really work?" I asked. "It does for me." She said. "When I go to work in the morning, I don't hope for the day to go a certain way. I just take it as it comes. If I expected my days to be without challenges, I'd be kidding myself."

I've thought a lot about what Rhonda said that day. I still catch myself watching her and wondering exactly how she does it. I've yet to see her burning incense, chanting, or doing yoga in her car at lunch break. She appears to be just a regular person, like you and me. With all my ruminations, the best that I can come up with is that Rhonda has perfected the technique of controlling *how* she perceives stress. Maybe for all of us, that's the key. It's a matter of *choosing* to interpret stress the way that *we want to*. To tell you the truth, I never really mastered the whole ignoring-the-big-brother-thing. However, I do remember a few times when I was so engrossed in my favorite TV show that his teasing just didn't bother me because I was so focused on what I was watching.

So maybe it's like that favorite TV show. Maybe if we really focus on something else—something *totally different*—when the stress hits us, we can somehow prevent it from getting to us. We can ignore it by focusing our energy on something else. I'm willing to bet it's a lot harder than it sounds, takes a lot of practice, and doesn't always work. But hey, I'm willing to give it a shot. Maybe for practice I should start thinking about *really good* TV shows (wish me luck in finding those).

Whatever happens, I'm starting to believe in the notion that I have more control over my stress than I thought I did. Maybe being clueless is not such a bad thing after all.

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