



# Have You Reached Your 'Breaking Point'?

Your day starts like a typical day. You step out of the shower, smell the coffee brewing, and hear the dogs starting to whine. Your mind starts organizing your morning. One obese lab spay, one cat castration, and three hospital cases to attend before seeing clients at 10:00. You can almost feel your cortisol level rising when the phone rings. Your blood pressure rises as you answer, knowing full well, chances are it won't be a "good morning" call. Your newest employee breathlessly informs you that Fritz is missing, and his cage door is open. She continues on, explaining that she has searched the entire hospital

and although the stock room appears vandalized there is no sign of Fritz. You suggest she continue taking care of the rest of the patients until further help arrives.

Sound familiar? It's just another day of small crises and fires to extinguish, typical of life as a veterinarian. Adding to the above stress, imagine that the phone only rings if the bank, bill collector, divorce attorney, or your sponsor is calling.

In general, we are a group of proud professionals. We find it difficult to ask for help. In many instances we don't even recognize we need help. Taking time for introspection, personal development, and fun is rarely scheduled because we are too busy caring for everything and everyone else.

I am a small-animal practitioner who graduated many years ago. Shortly after graduation, I partnered up with my fiancé and purchased a practice. Things went well initially. Several years passed, and while working to build the practice, we failed to work on our relationship. Communication became non-existent unless discussing a patient. Vacations became few and far between. The business became a 24/7 commitment. Our personal, psychological, emotional, and spiritual growth was neglected. I admitted myself to an inpatient facility due to severe, chronic depression on three occasions. After a multitude of medication trials and ECT, I felt normalized enough to continue practicing. However, the damage done to my personal and professional relationship with my partner was significant.

Looking back, I realize my business partner also became increasingly stressed. Communication focused on that fact that the division of our work responsibilities had become

unbalanced. At that time, I had been enduring constant back pain that was unrelieved by NSAIDs and PT. One day I made the decision to do something I had always told myself I wouldn't do. I took pain medicine from the hospital. It relieved my back pain immediately. So rather than using my brain and talking to my primary care physician, I used the medication as I needed it. After a few months, it became apparent to me that I was also using it for the way it made me feel. I then contacted the Health Professional Recovery Program (HPRP) for assistance.

I am two years into the program—and thank God for this second chance. The HPRP has made me a stronger, more confident, and more open-minded person. I've been embarrassed, ashamed, and very hard on myself for all the difficulties imparted on others. Most of all I am grateful, thankful, and indebted to those who have supported me.

Within our professional family of veterinarians, there are people in need of financial, professional, personal, and emotional help. As with any group, we have colleagues suffering from homelessness, hunger, alcoholism, depression, and emotional crises. When was the last time you asked a colleague for help, particularly emotional or personal help?

Whoever you are, you are not alone. As a profession, we need to take off our blinders and start recognizing, and pro-actively helping ourselves and our colleagues. Hopefully, soon we will have an initiative to develop an anonymous program supporting our colleagues in need. In the meantime, if you need help, please visit the HPRP website at [www.hprp.org](http://www.hprp.org) or call (800) 453-3784. You can also contact the MVMA at [mvma@michvma.org](mailto:mvma@michvma.org) or (517) 347-4710.

*Submitted by an anonymous MVMA member who cares deeply.*