



Veterinary Woman Role Model Profile

Ellie West

"I don't think you can be everything to everyone. My vision of a perfect career is about balance now, not about achievement. "



PLEASE SUMMARISE YOUR JOURNEY SO FAR:

From a young girl, I always wanted to be a vet and read every James Herriot whilst spending weekends on a city farm.

I studied at Cambridge, including a year of Land Economy, and whilst I liked anaesthesia at time, I wanted to try general practice. I had limited success with job applications and eventually became an intern at a private referral practice. It was a good place to learn some clinical and non-clinical realities and it was there I met my first inspiring anaesthetist, Kate White.

I then went into general practice at Wylie's Veterinary Centre, in Essex, and enjoyed two happy and memorable years but ultimately grew tired of managing a long-distance relationship and still had an itch to really get to grips with anaesthesia.

So, I decided to take an anaesthesia internship at UCD, following my boyfriend and taking two cats to Ireland, while working with Lynne Hughes.

Following Dublin, I moved to Liverpool, where I eventually did a residency (under the wing of Isi Iff and Ini Mosing), and then moved to Davies Veterinary Specialists (via a short locum at Cambridge) after returning from my first maternity leave.

I am still a part-time anaesthetist at Davies, working with another inspiring anaesthetist in Louise Clark, but now I am also the Environmental Sustainability Lead at Linnaeus, of which Davies is part of. This came about after we started a Green Group at Davies in 2017 and I recognised an absence of practical experience of sustainability. My vision aligned with that of the Linnaeus Executive and we are working hard to bring that to reality and have impactful change on our environmental impacts.

DESCRIBE YOUR TYPICAL DAY FROM WAKING TO SLEEPING:

On anaesthesia days, I wake with either an alarm call and a rapid turnaround for an early start at work or a later start which includes getting the girls to school first.

Both include a stumble downstairs to eat and drink tea, a melee of children's clothes/hair/breakfasts, and frantic racking of brains to work out what I have forgotten to pack.

Once at Davies, I work closely with highly-skilled teams of interns, nurses, supervisors and clinicians to deliver a timely diagnostic and theatre anaesthesia caseload. The planning is my favourite part. We move around between cases a lot; providing advice, performing procedures, or anaesthetising critical patients. Unless I am on call, the day ends with a peaceful drive home, joining in with the bedtime reading and routines, before eventually slumping into bed.

On sustainability days, I wake early with a drive to crack on and make today matter. Working from home means that the only pre-requisite to starting the day is a cup of tea. I spend a lot of the day on calls, working on communications, planning strategies and responding to queries. My favourite part is digging into the data; there are always interesting gems in sustainability and finding them feels like revealing hope. I never finish what I want to but I stop when my back can't take being at a desk any longer and join in with the family evening routines again.



HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN A SENTENCE?

Cautious, friendly and passionate about sustainability.

HOW WOULD OTHERS DESCRIBE YOU IN A SENTENCE?

A 41-year-old mother of two daughters, who works as a veterinary anaesthetist and sustainability lead.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR TOP SUCCESS AND WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM THIS?

Putting my head above the parapet and asking about sustainability. I didn't think I knew enough and I didn't know what could be done.

However, it started the conversation which led into my current split role. Having had that curiosity and persistence, and also insisting our vision was possible, we have started to move the goalposts.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE, SETBACK OR FAILURE AND HOW HAVE YOU OVERCOME IT? HOW DID YOU GROW OR CHANGE AS A RESULT?

I didn't sit my Diploma exams straight after the residency. I was fed up of learning and I had lost my curiosity about my subject.

I was also five months pregnant, about to have a child who didn't (and still doesn't!) sleep a lot. I waited until I was ready and then I enjoyed the chance to consolidate and learn more, while the exams weren't so scary as I had other priorities to manage.

WHAT COMPROMISES HAVE YOU HAD TO MAKE AND WHAT, IF ANYTHING, COULD HAVE HELPED?

I don't think you can be everything to everyone. My vision of a perfect career is about balance now, not about achievement. A better understanding of my own strengths and weaknesses has helped.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU HAVE GIVEN TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF, THAT YOU WOULD NOW GIVE TO OTHERS WANTING TO FOLLOW YOUR PATH?

Ask and you shall receive - spend the time understanding and being clear about what you want, and then ask for it. I am continually surprised and then annoyed with myself.

Learn how to reframe - a 'no' when you are looking for a 'yes' means your argument is not substantial enough or is missing the angle of approach.

Dare to be average - your soul will thank you for the gift.

Sit firm on your boundaries - no-one else will.

Work out where your strengths lie and seek to optimise working within a flow state. On this, I have to credit Libby Kemkaren-Thompson with the inspiration, and admit that this is still a work in progress for me!

I COULDN'T HAVE GOT WHERE I AM TODAY WITHOUT...

My boyfriend, who supports me, is a wonderful father, and has very little interest in veterinary medicine!

WHAT ARE YOUR THREE TOP LIKES?

1. Identifying native British wild flowers.
2. Seeing my family happy.
3. Singing - better still, if it is with others!

WHAT ARE YOUR THREE TOP DISLIKES?

1. Drivers who stop and park in moving traffic lanes.
2. Head-in-the-sand hoping that there is miracle technology on the horizon to avoid ecologic catastrophes.
3. Failing to treat younger or junior people with the respect that they deserve as a future colleague.



WHAT IS THE MOST HELPFUL BOOK YOU'VE READ AND WHY?

Rewilding by Isabella Tree.

This is the book which shows you that regeneration of our natural environment can be done, can be all the things that people say are not possible, and it is a glorious (and fortuitously well-written) proof.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER RESOURCES YOU'D RECOMMEND?

Talking to friends who know more than you!



Many thanks to Ellie for sharing her story to **inspire** veterinary women to **aspire** and **grow** into their full career potential.

If you would like to share your story please get in touch at info@veterinarywoman.co.uk

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