

How Our Pets Allow Us to See Into Their Souls

Pets can be amazing teachers, and if you pay attention, they can teach you how to live in the present, be a more decent human being and get in touch with your emotions at a deep level. Don't wait until your pet's dying days to realize this - here's how to be intentional throughout your pet's life.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dr. Zach Scheurich, an integrative veterinarian, provides holistic veterinary care for Northwest Arkansas and Southwest Missouri
- He was nominated for a Game Changer award due to his unique ability to help pet guardians expand their relationships with their animals — and view them in different lights
- Dr. Z embraces the use of plants, including Chinese medicine and herbs, in his practice
- With experience treating wildlife, exotic animals, horses, livestock and cats and dogs, Dr. Z treats virtually the entire animal kingdom
- Dr. Z believes that, if we're willing to pay attention, dogs and other animals can teach us many lessons, including how to be more decent human beings, to live in the present and get in touch with our emotions at a deep level

Dr. Zach Scheurich, an integrative veterinarian, provides holistic veterinary care for Northwest Arkansas and Southwest Missouri. But it's due to his unique ability to help pet guardians expand their relationships with their animals — and view them in different lights — that Briana nominated him for a Game Changer award.

As someone who loves being outdoors and spending time in nature, it's only natural that Dr. Z — as he often goes by — embraces the use of plants, including Chinese medicine and herbs, in his practice. With experience treating wildlife, exotic animals, horses, livestock and cats and dogs, Dr. Z treats virtually the entire animal kingdom.

Digging Deeper to Find the Underlying Causes of Illness

After first studying wildlife biology and exotic animals, Dr. Z quickly realized that many problems animals face — whether they're a reptile or a family dog — come from improper husbandry. He says:

"When someone comes in with a problem — there's something wrong with, say, a bird or especially reptiles or amphibians — there's some sort of husbandry issue and you just have to figure out what's going wrong, what is happening ... most people often get those exotic animals without really knowing what to do. So they often don't know how to keep them or feed them appropriately. So it's this investigation or mystery, like what's going on with the husbandry?"

In terms of dogs and cats, dietary and lifestyle factors are often involved in the health problems they're manifesting.

"There's often something we can find out that'll help us ultimately solve the problem ... with the animal," he says. "Not just treatment, whatever treatment they might need, but also that lifestyle or a husbandry change. So that was kind of a wake-up point for me I think, as a dog and cat vet. Sort of realizing that things like diet and lifestyle can actually be major components of trying to get them through their issues."

With an interest in homesteading survival, Dr. Z began to learn more about plants and mushrooms in his environment, including their medicinal uses:

"So that sort of got me wanting to try things out with my patients from that herbal perspective ... That turned into me having no idea how much I would use Chinese medicine and acupuncture in my practice with my patients. I primarily use Chinese medical diagnosis and then usually formulate herbs specifically for each patient."

Guiding People Toward Deeper Relationships With Their Animals

Not only does Dr. Z do nonprofit work, including going out to the Hopi Reservation in Arizona to offer more holistic options, but he also embraces the ability to create and continuously evolve in the way he practices and treats his patients. Along these lines, one key area of focus for him is teaching clients how to deepen their relationships with their animals:

"It truly feels like not only am I continuously gaining knowledge in all these areas that I can help with, what people are kind of coming to me for in the treatment of their animals, but also that I'm truly gaining this wisdom over time of how I can guide people to have better relationships and interactions with their animals, [and] also rethink or reimagine the lifestyle that they see for their animals."

People often come looking for holistic treatments but still have a fairly like conventional mindset around what they're looking for. And so I feel like a huge part of what I do has been just to try to mitigate their expectations."

Like a lot of times, whether it's a first visit or whether it's over the period of a year, sometimes just trying to keep coming back to what the goals or what a successful treatment or outcome would actually look like for their pet or their family, all that sort of thing."

Pets Teach Important Lessons — If You're Willing to Listen

The other revelation that Dr. Z has come to over his years of work with animals is their ability to ground us in humanity. Pets, particularly dogs, offer us unconditional love in ways that, often, humans do not. And if we're willing to pay attention, dogs and other animals can teach us how to be more decent human beings, to live in the present and get in touch with our emotions at a deep level. He says:

"It's so much different than other relationships, like with our children — they're going to be off on their own someday. Spouses, there's obviously lots of different dynamics within that. Friends, kind of come and go, but our animals, we know from the beginning that they're going to be there for this chapter of our life, like a beginning and an end.

And especially in having gone through so many experiences with people at the end of their animals' lives and seeing, it's almost like through that whole process, they let you see into their soul ... And it is such a way for us to interact with our emotions and develop relationships with love and loss and all of these different things that they are amazing teachers at, really."

Dr. Z also offers insights into being present for your pet's entire life, including how to reframe the difficult end-of-life phase:

"I think that it's an opportunity for us to be really intentional and for us to see that relationship through. I often wish people could have the perspective on their pets that they have at the end of their life through the entirety of their life ... and to be able to maintain all those perspectives, which people often get in those moments of vulnerability. And they are ... the perfect teachers.

And often that's one of the things that I do try to remind people at the end of their animals' lives — we don't just want to focus on getting them better and trying to get more time with them ...

You've nurtured this relationship for 13, 15, 20 years sometimes. These are the moments you're going to remember. It isn't about time so much ... Every little thing you do is not so important, but what is important is make sure you're spending that time and creating something that you're going to look back on and feel good about."

If you'd like to learn more about Dr. Z and his holistic practice for pets, you can find him at [PlantsforAnimals.com](https://plantsforanimals.com).
