

# BREAKING AWAY

Author, business owner, clinician, trainer, TV presenter, social media influencer—  
Dr Claire Stevens' career is busy, multi-faceted and very satisfying. By **Kerryn Ramsey**

**While most clinicians** thrive in their role as veterinarians, for some it's not everything they dreamed it would be. They may find it too stressful, exhausting or simply not be prepared for the long hours. So, what do you do when after years of effort and struggle, you reach your goal—working as a vet and a successful practice owner—but you're strangely unsatisfied? For many, leaving the profession is inconceivable but something has to change.

A few years ago, Dr Claire Stevens was in exactly this position. However, by thinking outside the box, she was able to move her

career in a new direction while still working part-time in practice. After working for eight years as a vet and being a partner in three practices on the Queensland/New South Wales border, she felt her priorities change during the time she married and had two boys.

At this point, she realised that just being a clinician was not for her. "I was a little embarrassed that for many years I





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hadn't felt 100 per cent satisfied with my career," she says. "I'd worked so hard to get there so why didn't I love it? I didn't want to give up on veterinary practice but I also didn't want to become a specialist or an emergency vet. I just wanted more."

## Global Vet Solutions

Dr Stevens is not afraid of hard work and by age 32 she had been a practice owner three times over. It was the very act of selling her share of the third successful practice, (then called VetLove in Casuarina, northern NSW, now called Casuarina Seaside Vet) that inspired her to move her career in a completely different direction. She decided to bottle everything she learned and share it with other vets through a new business called Global Vet Solutions.

"GVS is a company that offers advice on how to build your veterinary practice," she explains. "We provide online training for vets on consultation and communication skills, onsite training for veterinary teams and a membership program for practice owners."

"The business shows how we massively improved practice profit by looking at the importance of the perfect veterinary consult process. It's in the consult room that vets have the opportunity to build strong relationships with their clients. It's that 15- or 20-minute time slot that leads to repeat business, loyalty and referrals. However, vet school doesn't prepare us for this, so when faced with the harsh reality of this demanding role, back to back consults and the business aspect of vet practice, most vets struggle."

Global Vet Solutions audits clinics based on their staffs KPIs and general performance. They look at the team culture and work with business owners to not only get more paws through the door, but to also ensure the veterinary team can handle more business.

As Dr Stevens notes, the emotional pressure placed on all staff in a veterinary clinic can easily cause burnout. "The soft side of things—emotional intelligence, leadership skills, building resilience, teamwork and even simple strategies like deep breathing—are extremely effective in managing the pressures of a booming clinic. Global Vet Solutions is about bringing that all together."

## Diversifying her career

While collating all the information for Global Vet Solutions, Dr Stevens took a two shift per week job at the Pet Wellness Centre in Burleigh Heads on the Gold Coast. It was just the right amount of employment to keep her connected and enjoying clinical work.

Even though she was beginning to diversify her career, her passion for veterinary work was still strong. Her journey started as a high school student undertaking work experience at Cairns Veterinary Clinic in Queensland. "I remember fainting during my work experience and the vet told me I needed to harden up," recalls Dr Stevens. "After graduating from the University of Queensland in 2009, my first job was at the very same clinic. It was quite satisfying to return as a qualified vet and show them

*Dr Claire's Love Your Dog covers nearly every situation faced by dog owners.*





## COVER STORY

that I had actually hardened up!"

Dr Stevens spent 12 months working at Cairns Veterinary Clinic before heading off to London for three years. She worked at Animal Ark Hospital Essex, a large clinic with seven vets rostered on at any one time. "Coming from a semi-rural practice in Australia, it was a great opportunity to learn," she says. "At this practice, clients overwhelmingly considered their pets as part of the family. Rather than just basic consultations and routine procedures, I was doing much more advanced surgeries and having in-depth conversations about various possible treatment plans. It was very challenging but I learned a lot."

Returning to Australia, she took a job in Tweed Heads and

owners including vaccinations, diet, surgery, diseases, medical procedures, training and euthanasia. There is expert advice on canine care, the life stages of a dog and practical advice on all aspects of caring for your canine companion. This user-friendly information is balanced by Dr Stevens' personal stories of the unique bond between dogs and their owners. *Dr Claire's Love Your Dog* will be published on 1 May.

According to Andrew Swaffer, publishing manager of Woodslane Press, the first thing he noticed about Dr Stevens' book was the size—about 330 pages. "It's very comprehensive," says Swaffer. "We intended to do a lot of editing but ended up hardly cutting anything. From a commercial perspective, we know

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within six months was offered a partnership. Five years later she had purchased and sold three practices, Global Vet Solutions was starting to take shape and she was quietly making plans for another project.

### Love your dog

Dr Stevens started working on fulfilling another long-time ambition—to write a book. "Dogs are my favourite patients so it seemed like a no-brainer to write a book on dogs," says Dr Stevens. "I was finding it very difficult to say everything to an owner in a short consult. What I needed was a veterinary guide written for dog owners—one where I could say, 'Just look up page 106 and you'll learn more about why we're doing this'. As a vet you're also privy to the profound connection between human and pet, and I thought it would be fantastic if a medical guidebook also shared those stories. As that book didn't exist, I sat down and wrote it."

*Dr Claire's Love Your Dog* was a massive undertaking that saw Dr Stevens write every day for a year. Another year of editing and fine-tuning transformed the book into its final form. She also brought in journalist, editor and author Libby Harkness to help shape the book.

"Libby was instrumental in this project," says Dr Stevens. "I had written a storyline tracing the journey from when you first get a puppy to euthanasia. Libby asked if I really wanted people to finish the book on the subject of death. She suggested one more chapter about when it's time to get a new puppy. She also encouraged me to add my story to the book, explaining that this would be the point of difference between *Love your Dog* and other dog books; my one is written by a vet with whom the reader can connect. And apart from all that, she's a professional writer. For me writing has always been a hobby, so her skill set was exactly what I needed."

The book covers just about every situation faced by dog

that dog ownership is massive in Australia and there's a huge market for this type of book. While there are loads of training and behaviour books, there's not too many written by qualified vets. We don't believe any book has the coverage of Claire's, both in extent and subject. She goes places where other books just don't go. We jumped at the chance to publish it."

### Social influence

At the same time as writing her book, Dr Stevens was also actively building an online presence. This included posting a monthly blog and being active on most social channels. She was motivated by the fact that by building an online audience, she was also building the number of people who would potentially buy her book. And maybe it could lead to some on-screen work.

"In the back of my mind I thought that it would be great to be a television vet or work with brands," she says. "I had held off for years because I felt it was a bit showy and my colleagues would judge me. However, the older you get, the less you care about what people think. After going for it, I've appeared on morning talk shows on Channel Ten. Recently I was on Sky News reporting on the parvo virus outbreak. I'm also a brand ambassador for Hypro Premium Dog Food."

Dr Stevens' work life is now divided between Global Vet Solutions ([globalvetsolutions.com.au](http://globalvetsolutions.com.au)), her personal brand Dr Claire Stevens ([drclairestevens.com](http://drclairestevens.com)), which is associated with her book, television work and brand ambassadorship, and working at the clinic.

There are plenty of other projects in her future. "I love a challenge, so public speaking is something I'm about to undertake," she says. "I'm talking at a veterinary conference soon and even though it's nerve-racking, I'm excited because it's a skill I want to develop. There's a long list of things I'd love to do and I plan to create opportunities to make them happen." ▼

Any practice wishing to sell *Dr Claire's Love Your Dog* should contact Woodslane Press ([www.woodslane.com.au](http://www.woodslane.com.au)). w