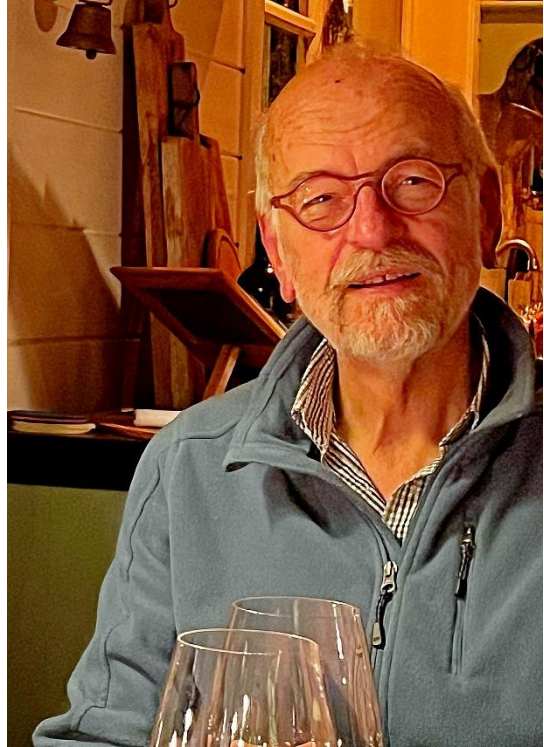


**Covetrus Dutch VET Magazine – Section:
'May I ask you something?'**

An Interview with Bart de Leeuw



- 1. What was your main motivation to work outside the veterinary practice?** After 23 years in practice, it was time for new challenges. There was nothing wrong with the work atmosphere; I had a great team in my Amsterdam practice, and as a born and raised Amsterdammer, I got along well with our clients. Additionally, establishing and managing the central Emergency Clinic in Amsterdam was a stimulating process. However, I felt the joy in my increasingly routine and easy work slowly slipping away. When I saw an advertisement for the position of Technical Manager at a pharmaceutical company and read what the role entailed, the proverbial penny dropped for me: I saw new challenges and opportunities for further development while still being able to use my practical experience. And it was true: the 16 years working in the industry in various roles and the resulting board positions at KNMvD (DIMEO) and FVE (EVERI) have given me a lot of job satisfaction and energy. And the European board work still does!
- 2. What inspires you?** When a problem lands on my desk, that needs to be viewed from all angles, the best solution must be found. And not as a "soloist" but as part of an enthusiastic team.
- 3. What does the "perfect day" at work look like for you?** I no longer have a daily work environment, but I gladly choose a day at a European meeting to answer this question. Aspects that make such a day "perfect" include – in no particular order – important agenda items, an effective chairperson, substantive discussion, listening to each other, SMART solutions and plans, and ample opportunity to network.

4. **What are you proud of?** I recognized and acknowledged that I was about to get stuck in my profession, and changed course in time.

5. **If you woke up tomorrow with one new quality or ability, what would it be?** A quality I would love to wake up with tomorrow is far outside veterinary medicine: being able to play the saxophone. Regarding an ability, I could then mention performing with a blues rock band, but I would like to switch back to veterinary medicine: I would like to see more opportunities (not only for me personally but from a much broader perspective) for older veterinarians with extensive and varied experience to share that experience as a coach or mentor, thereby helping young colleagues with the problems/questions/decision moments they encounter in their careers.

6. **If you were 18 now, would you study veterinary medicine again?** The answer can be very short: absolutely! Being a veterinarian is a wonderful profession with many opportunities to contribute significantly to the welfare of animals and humans.

7. **What is the most important lesson you have ever learned?** Make sure you don't get stuck in what I conveniently call the daily grind. If you are satisfied with the work you do: great, keep doing it. But if you are not satisfied, list for yourself why that is. If it involves relatively minor issues, address them and don't let them fester. However, if you no longer feel sufficiently satisfied with the actual content of your work, don't be afraid to switch to a different role within your profession. And thereby acquire new skills and competencies.

8. **What should veterinary students learn more or differently to be as broadly employable as possible?** A study is about acquiring the necessary competencies and skills. These skills include 'hard skills' (technical knowledge) and 'soft skills' (often also called 'social skills'). The development of 'hard skills' is well ensured in veterinary education, but the same cannot be said for 'soft skills'. Think of things like leadership, communication skills, time management, and conflict resolution. When young veterinarians get stuck in practice and become disillusioned with their profession, the lack of sufficient 'soft skills' often plays a (too) significant

role. It would be good to pay more attention to this; moreover, having these skills is also crucial when choosing a career outside of practice, for example, in business.

9. **If you could change one thing about the veterinary sector, what would it be?** This may not entirely answer this very broad question, but I would like to see even clearer communication about the wide range of roles veterinarians play. Not only in the field of animal welfare but also in research, medicine development and production, food safety, zoonosis control and signalling, policy-making, and education.

10. **Where do you think opportunities lie for the profession, considering developments in the field?** In line with my answer to the previous question, the answer to this question is obvious: everywhere! However, it is essential to approach several issues more sharply: ensure sufficient training capacity, ensure that education better aligns with all the tasks, responsibilities, and problems veterinarians face after graduation, ensure an effective coaching and mentoring program, and provide broad public information about what veterinarians do in their work.