

# What Can't Be Taught

## Ce qui ne s'enseigne pas

### Stay positive and set boundaries

Alexandra Schlesiger

**D**r. Serge Chalhoub immediately expressed his eagerness to help students and to again become active in CVMA initiatives when he was appointed as the CVMA Student Liaison Advisory Group (SLAG) faculty representative for the University of Calgary — Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (UCVM). Dr. Chalhoub's enthusiasm for helping students was further displayed during the 2017 SCVMA Symposium, hosted by UCVM, when he volunteered as an actor, playing a "patient's" animated and uncooperative "owner," a role he takes on every year for UCVM's annual CPR competition.

Born and raised in Montreal, Dr. Chalhoub graduated from the DVM program at the Université de Montréal — Faculté de médecine vétérinaire (FMV) in 2004. He then completed a 1-year rotating small animal internship at the same institution. After working for 2 years as a general practitioner and emergency veterinarian at the DMV center in Montreal, Dr. Chalhoub pursued a residency in small animal internal medicine at the Animal Medical Center (AMC) in New York city. Once completed in 2009, he stayed on at the AMC as their first renal/hemodialysis fellow. During that time, he was also trained in interventional radiology/endoscopy.

When asked how he tries to cultivate a good work/life balance, Dr. Chalhoub responded, "Ah, the million dollar question we all have! I greatly enjoy my work and work extremely hard, but I think the key to a good work/life balance is setting clear boundaries between your work and personal life — which took me years to truly appreciate. I make a conscious effort to turn off my phone and not check e-mails at home and I make sure to reality-check the daily and weekly tasks I would like to complete. At work, I try to stay positive as much as possible and I believe it is important to remember that days do not always go as planned and to expect surprises, in other words, be comfortable with uncertainty."

With mental health being top of mind in the veterinary profession over the past few years, Dr. Chalhoub was asked to share



Dr. Serge Chalhoub with one of his dogs, Luna.

ways he helps support his own personal well-being. "Mental health is a very important topic; one we should all be aware of," insists Dr. Chalhoub. "The work/life balance strategies I mentioned are some of the same strategies I employ to help my own mental well-being and it is also important to stay healthy and active outside of work (with family and early morning gym workouts alone)."

"It is also important to stop regularly and ask ourselves how we are doing and if something does not feel right inside of us, it is important to reach out for help sooner rather than later. This can be talking to our partners and friends to begin with and also considering mental health professionals. Our profession is fantastic, but there is no doubt it can sometimes take its toll on our well-being."

One key piece of advice Dr. Chalhoub has for new veterinary graduates is to always stay actively curious, but not at the expense of health. "Our profession is rapidly evolving and it is important to keep our eyes open and our brains thinking but, no matter what, remember to stay healthy, physically and mentally, because you can't have a career without your health."

Dr. Chalhoub, a senior instructor at UCVM, says one thing he did not learn in veterinary college that he wishes he would have is how to communicate with owners and with team members. "The ability to communicate well is as important as our medical knowledge, and sometimes more important," advises

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Dr. Serge Chalhoub and Dr. Søren Boysen, co-recipients of the 2015 University of Calgary Team Teacher of the Year Award.



Dr. Serge Chalhoub volunteering as an actor for UCVM's annual CPR competition.

Dr. Chalhoub. “This includes communicating a medical plan, a patient’s status, and financial aspects of treatment. It is great that most veterinary curriculums now have some form of communications training and I’m proud to say UCVM has a strong communications program incorporated in each of the DVM program’s 4 years.”

Throughout his studies and career, Dr. Chalhoub had mentors who contributed to him finding his path and one mentor with whom he kept in touch since his time at FMV is now a colleague at UCVM. “I feel having mentors along my journey was instrumental to my career and, to give back, I am now mentoring several UCVM students,” says Dr. Chalhoub. “What I believe makes a good mentor is having many years of positive experience under the belt, as well as the ability to listen and be patient, and the confidence that ‘things will likely work out’ over time, even when seemingly difficult or confusing. Being a mentor is not about having all of the answers; it is about being a helpful guide through the confusion.”

Throughout his teaching and mentoring years, the biggest mistake Dr. Chalhoub has seen a veterinary student make, unrelated to medicine, is being unprofessional or lacking collegiality. “I have certainly seen students be unprofessional to other students and even to faculty and staff numerous times and it is so important to always be professional, not only with clients but also with classmates and faculty,” urges Dr. Chalhoub. “We can still be professional with one another even when we disagree or are frustrated about something.”

On top of Dr. Chalhoub’s CVMA volunteer roles, which include sitting on CVMA’s National Issues Committee and continuing his role as the CVMA SLAG faculty representative at UCVM, he is involved in humanitarian efforts as the coordinator of the UCVM-CUPS Pet Health Clinic for disadvantaged Calgarians. He has also authored and co-authored numerous scientific articles and book chapters on renal and urinary medicine, as well as the use of point-of-care ultrasound for triage of critically ill patients.

Dr. Chalhoub’s efforts do not go unnoticed. He was selected as the 2013 recipient of CVMA’s Teacher of the Year Award by UCVM students, and additional accolades include being the

co-recipient of the 2015 University of Calgary Team Teacher of the Year Award and the 2017 Carl J. Norden Distinguished Teacher Award. “Dr. Chalhoub is a great mentor and instructor who makes school fun,” says Kira Moser, UCVM student and past-president of the SCVMA Committee. “He is always keen to help students, whether it’s spending his evenings giving lectures at student club events or having lunch with students to talk about internships.”

When asked what he would change about his career path if he could, Dr. Chalhoub explained, “To be honest, I would not change much! Life is a process, and reflecting on my career, I feel all points led to where I am now and I am very satisfied with that. All the past bumps, disappointments, or decisions I felt were not right have led me to an amazing job and career. I sometimes wonder what my career would have looked like if I became a radiologist or cardiologist, but I also know that as humans, we all have a tendency to wonder about the ‘what ifs,’ and that things always seem brighter on the other side ... Okay, maybe I would go back and become an Air Force pilot!”

Dr. Chalhoub became involved in the CVMA early on while in college, first as a Jr. representative on the SCVMA Committee and then as the SCVMA Committee President who had a seat on CVMA Council and acted as the national voice for student veterinarians. Dr. Chalhoub also attended not only one SCVMA Symposium, but he took the opportunity to attend all 4 annual SCVMA Symposiums while he was a student at FMV. “I love to travel and I also wanted to experience the other Canadian veterinary colleges and see how they differ,” says Dr. Chalhoub. “I will never forget attending a WCVMA Symposium event and learning how to two-step! But by far the best experience was meeting student colleagues and making life-long friends from across the country, on top of the incredibly educational labs and lectures. I urge students to try and attend at least one SCVMA Symposium while pursuing their DVM.”

Dr. Chalhoub encourages students to get involved and volunteer in their national professional association, “I greatly enjoyed learning what the CVMA was all about as a student and, all these years later, I am still happy to contribute back to this amazing organization.”