Dogs in the Workplace: Benefits and Potential Challenges

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Why would a dog be in the workplace?

- Assistance animal
  - Service dog
  - Visitation dog
  - Therapy dog
  - Support dog
- Pet-friendly workplace
- Public service or military animal
Types of Assistance Animals

• Service animals
• Visitation animals
• Therapy animals
• Support animals
Service animal

- Dog, typically, trained to provide work or perform tasks related to an individual’s disability
  - Physical disabilities
    - Hearing, guiding, mobility
  - Psychiatric disabilities
    - Post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, autism spectrum disorder

- Public access
- Workplace – reasonable accommodation
Visitation animal

• Trained in basic skills to provide comfort and support through companionship and social interaction

• Many certifying organizations: Pet Partners, Therapy Dogs International, Alliance of Therapy Dogs

• Limited public access

• Visits libraries, hospitals, nursing homes, schools, homeless shelters, disaster sites
Therapy animal

• Trained in basic or advanced skills to assist healthcare or allied healthcare professionals within the scope of therapeutic treatment plan
• Physical therapy, occupational therapy, psychotherapy
• Limited public access
Support animal

- Provide physical, psychiatric, or emotional support primarily in the home
- Very limited public access (US: ACA act)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Category</th>
<th>Assistance Related to Disability</th>
<th>Typical Level of Dog Skills</th>
<th>Assists Public Service, Military, or Health Professional</th>
<th>Certification or Standards Available</th>
<th>Scope of Current Access Protections</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Animal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Broad†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Service or Military Animal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Public service or military</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Limited†</td>
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<tr>
<td>Therapy Animal</td>
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<td>Varies</td>
<td>Health or allied health</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitation Animal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sporting, Recreational, or Agricultural Animal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Animal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Limited†</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dogs in the Workplace

• Service dog or support dog
  • As a reasonable accommodation for a disability
• Therapy dog
  • Helping an employee with interventions
• Visitation animal
  • For employees or for clients
• Pets
  • 36.5% US, 32% CA households
• Mascot
Hypotheses for Therapeutic Effect

• Social catalysts
  • Levinson, dog as “co-therapist”
• Attachment and social support
  • Role of oxytocin
• Distraction
Evidence for Therapeutic Effect

• Dog ownership and cardiovascular disease
• Acute decreases in stress (e.g., HR, BP) in presence of dog
• Social facilitation – more friendly social interactions in presence of dog
• Employees who brought their dogs to work had lower perceived stress
However...

- Methodological weaknesses in literature
  - Absence of control groups
  - Non-blinded observers
  - Small sample sizes
  - Transient effects
Hazards

- Fleas and ticks
- Allergens
- Zoonotic diseases
- Slips, trips, and falls
- Bites
- Slobber & shedding dog hair
Allergies

• 1.6% of US population allergic to dogs; 15-30% of people with allergies have reactions to dogs and cats

• *Can f1* allergen in hair, dander, and saliva
  • In study of allergens in public settings, 40% of upholstered furniture had significant levels of *can f1*
  • Found in amounts to trigger asthma symptoms in homes *without* dogs

• No such thing as hypoallergenic dog
  • Study comparing homes with hypo vs. regular dogs
Allergies

• High efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters
  • 75% reduction in airborne $can\ f1$

• HEPA vacuums
  • More effective for cat allergen
  • Double bags

• Dog bathing
  • Washing twice a week sig. reduces amount of $can\ f1$ in hair and dander samples
Zoonotic diseases

• In general, dogs pose minimal risk to humans

• They do pose somewhat greater risk to:
  • People receiving chemotherapy or radiation therapy
  • Adults over 65 and children under 5
  • People who have received organ or bone marrow transplants
  • Pregnant women
Zoonotic diseases

• Campylobacteriosis
  • Leading cause of gastroenteritis in industrialized countries
  • 8% of cases may be due to contact with dogs and cats
  • Prevention: proper handling of pet feces

• Tapeworm, hookworm, round worm
  • Intestinal parasites
  • Prevention: proper handling of pet feces

• Ringworm

• Rabies

• Lyme disease
Slips, trips, and falls

• Dogs introduce lots of items to work environment
  • Leashes
  • Dog bowls
  • Dog toys

• Prevention
  • Limit leash lengths – no flexi-leashes
  • Dog-free zones
  • Designated areas for water and toys
Bites

- 4.5 million dog bites occur each year in U.S.
  - Only 17-18% receive medical attention
- Most often from familiar dogs
- 1 in 5 dog bites become infected
- Diseases transmitted from dog bites:
  - Rabies
  - MRSA
  - Tetanus
- Prevention: requiring passing obedience test
Slobber & shedding fur

• Slobber
  • More common among some breeds (Newfies, Labs, etc.)
  • Wipe dog’s face and neck after drinking, eating, or chewing

• Shedding fur
  • More common among double coats (Newfie) compared to single coats (Poodle)
  • Frequent brushing
Workplace Policy Considerations

• Caveat: service/support dogs to accommodate disabilities
• “pet-friendly” workplaces
• Workplaces instituting:
  • Therapy dog programs
  • Visitation dog programs for employees or clients/patients
  • Pet-friendly environment
Minimum Training Standards

- Pet friendly workp
  - American Kennel
- Visitation dog progr
  - Credentialing thr
Health Considerations

• Record of immunizations
• Flea and tick medication
• Frequent baths and grooming
• Frequent nail trims
• Leaving dog at home if dog shows signs of illness
  • Diarrhea
  • Vomiting
  • Uncharacteristic lethargy
  • Hot spots or rashes
Health Considerations

• Designated elimination areas
• Double bagging
• Pets
  • Zero tolerance policy
• Dogs as accommodations for disabilities
  • Time to take dog outside
Health Considerations

• Develop policy and procedures that clearly explicate the responsibilities of both the dog owner and the employer
Employee Considerations

- Fears and phobias
  - In 2001 survey, 11% of Americans reported fear of dogs

- Cultural differences
  - Dog ownership uncommon in some countries

- Allergies
  - Work environment
  - Work schedules
Employee Considerations

• Develop formal or informal procedures for evaluating impact of dogs
• Establish a continuous improvement process to address concerns
Soliciting Feedback from Employees

• Depends on type of dog (e.g., accommodation for disability, visitation, pet)

• Approaches
  • Comment box
  • Dog committee
  • Survey
Safety and Security Considerations

• Develop policies or procedures to reduce incidence of slips, trips, and falls

• Develop training materials to ensure dog owners are educated on their responsibilities in work environment
Legal Considerations

• Understand federal, state/province, and local laws regarding:
  • Service dogs and accommodations
  • Identification, vaccination, and leashing for pet dogs

• Establish clear eligibility criteria for both dogs and their owners

• Seek legal counsel to review policies and procedures
Thank you!

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