

Workin' Nine to Five Dogs in the workplace By Laura Tyler

I googled “pets in the workplace,” and found specific studies on the effects of dogs’ going to work with their owners. Interestingly, almost every article I read talks about stress reduction for employees as a great positive indicator. A few articles addressed the down side such as dogs requiring potty breaks, dog hair, allergies, people who don’t like animals, naughty dog muggings for attention etc. and irresponsible employees who think work is a doggy day care service. This can become a serious liability for the business owner if something goes wrong.

I could not find one study that addressed workplace stress on the dog? What if your shy dog doesn’t really like all that attention from strangers? Does he back away or lower his head when people reach out to say hello? More than once I’ve spoken with a dog owner whose dog is beginning to show signs of aggression or fear behavior toward delivery personnel or customers coming through the door. This does NOT get better by ignoring it!

Many of us are fortunate to be able to take our dogs to work. Properly channeled that additional social contact can do wonders to nurture a calm and friendly dog. A very well planned and consistent routine are the hallmark of successfully integrating a dog into the workplace environment. Your planning should take into consideration, the developing temperament of your dog as well as the general work environment.

Certain skills should be taught at home before taking your dog to work. Relaxing in a kennel crate is a must! Yes, some dogs just happen to fit in with little or no additional effort, but most dogs really do need to know what’s expected of them. If your 85 lb. Bernese Mountain Dog greets customers with paws on shoulders and a face full of slobber, that behavior needs to be addressed. If your herding dog follows people to the door with a quick nip on the rear end, that’s probably not conducive to customers returning to your business. And of course we can’t forget our wonderful guarding breeds who sometimes decide that delivery drivers need to stay outside.

It can be frightening for a customer to walk through the door to a downtown business and be greeted by a large (whatever breed) dog that happens to be listed on the wall at the post office as the murdering, crazed, chomping mixed breed dog of the day. A dog properly trained to return to their crate or to a special mat by your work station is a positive step in the right direction.

Not all dogs are social butterflies! For these dogs socializing with people they do not know or trust can be terrifying and can set up defensive behaviors. These fearful dogs need to have a safe space to go when they are not comfortable with social encounters. And it’s your job to “have their back” and stop people from putting social pressure on a dog they do not know. Train your dog to kennel up or go to his place. Take on the role of his protector in social situations. That will help to build that important trust bond between you and your canine work buddy.

Laura Tyler is a certified professional dog trainer with 25+ years of experience and has earned associate certification through the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants. She owns Total Teamwork Training LLC here in Northwest Colorado.

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