Pets In the Workplace

CONSIDERATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH MAN’S BEST FRIEND

Presented by Beth Joffe
Seattleites Really Love Their Pets

Three cities in the U.S. where less than 20% of households have kids

![Percentage of households with pets and kids in San Francisco, Seattle, and D.C.]

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Scarborough Research

K. Shea / The Seattle Times
Employer’s Best Friend?
3 Benefits of Pets in the Workplace

- Helps reduce stress
- Encourages longer work hours
- Increased camaraderie
The Who’s Who of Pet Offices

- Tito's Handmade Vodka
- United States Congress
- Rover
- Google
- P&G (Procter & Gamble)
- Trupanion
- Ben & Jerry's
- Amazon.com

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Factors to consider before deciding to allow pets in the workplace

- Liability issues specific to employers and building management
- Cultural factors/clashes
- Policies
- ADA Compliance
Factors To Consider

- **Liability**
  - Landlord approval
  - Bites, other consequences
  - Insurance

- **Employee Issues**
  - Allergies
  - Fears
  - Cultural differences

- **Policies**
  - Auditions, probationary period
  - Progressive discipline
  - Which employee wins
RCW 16.08.040 – “The owner of any dog which shall bite any person while such person is in or on a public place or lawfully in or on a private place including the property of the owner of such dog, shall be liable for such damages as may be suffered by the person bitten, regardless of the former viciousness of such dog or the owner’s knowledge of such viciousness.”
WAC 296-126-094 – “duty of every employer to maintain conditions within the workplace environment that will not endanger the health, safety or welfare of employees. All facilities, equipment, practices, methods, operations and procedures shall be reasonably adequate to protect employees’ health, safety and welfare.”
The right of a person with a disability to use a trained service animal or guide dog in the workplace is protected by:

1. Washington Law Against Discrimination (WLAD), and
2. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (indirectly)
Pets in the Law - Employer’s Obligations

- Cannot refuse to hire, to discharge, or to discriminate against any person in compensation or other terms and conditions of employment because of:
  
  Age, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, race, creed, color, national origin...or the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability or the use of a trained guide dog or service animal by a person with a disability...
SERVICE ANIMALS ≠ PETS
“Service Animal” Defined In Employment

- “Service animal” means any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.

- “The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the individual’s disability.”

- In employment, **only dogs** qualify as service animals.
Tasks Must Be Directly Related to Person’s Disability

- Assisting individuals who are blind
- Alerting individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of people or sounds
- Pulling a wheelchair
- Assisting an individual during a seizure
- Alerting individuals to the presence of allergens
- Retrieving items such as medicine or the telephone
- Providing physical support and assistance with balance
- Helping persons with psychiatric and neurological disabilities by preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors
Service Animal Tasks **do not include**: 

- The provision of emotional support and comfort
- A dog’s mere presence as a crime deterrent
The employee with the service animal

VS.

The employee with the allergy or fear of dogs
Employer’s 2 Questions

- When not obvious what service animal provides, only two key questions:
  
1. “Is the animal a pet?” If yes, can exclude; if answer is no, can ask [Or: Do you need the animal because of a disability?]
2. “What is the animal trained to do for you?”
Employer Options

- **May** request documentation to support request for accommodation [*different than public accommodation]*
- **May** deny the request for service or emotional support if the animal poses an undue hardship or direct threat in the workplace
MY ADVICE IS TO INVEST IN TENNIS BALLS

THEY HAVE A HIGH RATE OF RETURN
Getting the Ball Rolling

- Invite input and suggestions from team about feelings on pets in the office
- Discuss vaccinations
- License requirements
- Create policy
- Pet-proofing
- Notifying employees and rolling out the new policy
Ground Rules

- Vaccinations
- Probationary period for pet applicants
- Leash requirements
- Size or breed restrictions?
- Three-strikes rule?
Policies

- Require employees to:
  - Be in complete control of animal at all times
  - Document vaccinations
  - Sign indemnification agreement
  - Way to transport animal in emergency

- Pet audition process:
  - Well behaved
  - Not aggressive
  - No barking
  - Probationary period

- No Tolerance Rule for bites and fights
- Three Strikes Rule for other accidents or issues
Notifying Employees

- Designate an employee to field pet-related complaints and questions
- Anonymous complaint system
- Emergency evacuation procedures
Pet-Proofing the Office

- Leash requirements
- Identify pet-friendly and pet-free areas
- Accommodating employees who are allergic or afraid of pets
- Signs announcing presence of animals in office’s lobby
- Icons outside of pet’s offices
Questions?

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