



Business Going To The Dogs?

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It is estimated that 1.4 million owners bring 2.3 million dogs to work each day, and that doesn't even count one-person shops and people who work at home. Many company leaders may be considering whether to let their office go to the dogs.

First, note that I'm not addressing service animals, such as Seeing Eye dogs. A whole special set of regulations and responsibilities exists to accommodate workers and members of the public who require assistance because of disabilities; the following rules and tips do not apply to them.

Second, the focus for this column is on dog-friendly workplaces, so leave the ferrets and the cats at home. While some companies may allow any type of pet in their workplaces, most restrict their policies to dogs only (with perhaps fish also being allowed).

Companies that offer dog-friendly workplaces cite numerous advantages. Some cannot be easily quantified – improved quality of life, better office morale, increased camaraderie, decreased stress and greater happiness are cited as positives.

Recognize, however, that not all employees love dogs, and perhaps a pet-friendly workplace will be a disincentive to some current or prospective workers. For all of the benefits listed above, some workers – and customers – may view the atmosphere as too unprofessional. Further, there may be some industries where state or local regulations prevent dogs from being present, such as some restaurants, food stores, hair salons, medical offices, etc.

If a decision is made to create a dog-friendly workplace, there are steps that should be taken and issues to consider. First, check to make sure that the building allows dogs, and also make sure that have proper insurance is in place to cover any injuries or damage that may occur. Next, consider what kind of rules should be in place, and put them in writing.

If an employee has or develops an allergy to dogs, or perhaps even a psychological phobia to animals, disability law requires that an accommodation be made. Consider creating a "dog free" area in the workplace, or installing high-grade filtration systems to reduce dander and hair.

Make sure the policy addresses aggressive behavior against other employees and dogs, and enforce the policy by barring offending animals for good or until they are properly trained. And lay down

rules for waste cleanup that clearly states whose responsibility it is to wield the pooper-scooper.

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