

MEDIA RELEASE

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Office Petiquette

Unemployment rates may be forecast to increase in 2009 but it is still a highly competitive job market and companies that want to attract and keep the best employees are coming up with innovative strategies to attract and retain key people.

Recent surveys in both America and Australia reveal that pets in the workplace can deliver improved staff performance as well as relieving staff concerns about leaving pets at home alone.

Mars Petcare, Australia's leading petfood manufacturer, has always had office pets but has more recently introduced a "Pets in the Office" program that sees employees bringing their pets to work on a regular basis.

"Most of the people who work here are pet owners and there is real interest about each other's pets. We introduced this program partly to build the relationships between people who work here, but also for the well-being of both people and pets," says Amanda Fisher, National Market Activation Manager, Mars Petcare.

"Of course, with more than 650 people working at this site, it was important to establish a policy for the health and safety of both people and pets.

"We allow a maximum of ten dogs in the office area on any one day and pets must be registered before they come into the office.

"I bring my Hungarian Vizsla, Tui, into work on a regular basis and it is amazing how you talk to so many people that you may not necessarily interact with on a regular basis – even though we are in an open plan office," says Amanda.

"A Pets in the Office program may not be suitable for every large office but it really makes a difference here and has been easy to introduce and manage. One of the core principles that we work to is taking individual responsibility and having pets around is one way that this can be demonstrated," she added.

Mars Petcare recommends the following tips for any office considering introducing a pets at work program.

- Establish a pet booking system and ask anyone who wishes to bring a pet to work to register their pet prior to the day. This will allow you to control the number and type of pets that are in the office on any given day.
- Ensure that any pet that comes to the office is up to date on vaccinations and flea/worm control programs. This can easily be achieved by asking anyone who brings a pet in to sign a registration and indemnity form.
- Consider asking pet owners to display a pet ID tag with their owners' name so people and pets can be easily matched up if the pet becomes temporarily separated from its owner.
- Pet owners should be asked to bring leashes, toys and appropriate bedding to the office so their pet is comfortable and secure. Owners should also be asked to take their pets outside for a toilet break every one to two hours.
- Pet owners should be asked to supervise their pet throughout the day. If they do have to leave the office for a short time they should have a 'pet sitter' colleague who can take responsibility for the pet.
- Not all pets are suited to visiting the office and a nervous animal can sometimes display aggressive behaviour. Any aggressive behaviour from a pet that is directed towards other animals or people can not be tolerated and there should be a clear policy that owners will be asked to remove their pet from the office if this occurs.
- Finally, some dogs are not cat lovers and the feeling is often mutual. Offices may want to consider cat only days.

"You may also need to check with the owner of the building about bringing pets to work but we believe the best way to get a successful outcome is demonstrating that you have a thorough plan in place," says Amanda.

Guidelines for the management of pets at work have been published by the Petcare Information and Advisory Service and are available on www.petnet.com.au

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