

EmPower HR Guide To Building A Dog-Friendly Workplace



We love those furry, fluffy, angelic animals. Most of us who have dogs can admit to how therapeutic it is to have one.

What's not to love? Their sweet soul, fiercely loyal nature and friendliness are everything. They're not called man's best friends for nothing!



It doesn't take intense research to know how beneficial allowing dogs at work can be. From lower stress levels to better employer branding and higher job satisfaction, the benefits of this practice are immense.



In fact, the benefits of a dog-friendly workplace are so tried and true, that corporate giants like Amazon and Google have jumped on the bandwagon, while other companies like BrewDog took things a step further by offering a paid week off for new pet owners (pawternity leave). It's pretty great that this practice is doing something right for the organization and its employees.

Some companies, particularly in the health sector, employ therapy dogs for visits to help with stress and morale. Also, since the COVID-19 pandemic, in the U.S. more people are acquiring pets. So, it's safe to say many new pet owners would more likely welcome a pet-friendly office.

Transform Company Culture

Apart from playing a role in creating the right perception to attract top talent in the hiring process, allowing dogs at work sends a message regarding your company's culture and creates an ambiance of being laid-back and friendly – definitely a great way to lighten the stress that comes with a busy work environment.

A dog-friendly culture can even set the pace for a healthier office by encouraging more activity like walking meetings and opportunities to take an outdoor break and enjoy the sun. And the positive interactions that come with bringing dogs to the office? This sure gets coworkers talking in a friendly way.

Lessen Stress For Employees

Another benefit of providing a dog-friendly workplace is that it removes obstacles for dog-owning employees. For instance, your employees won't need to worry about their pet being lonely at home or covering the costs of pet care expenses.



Of course, a dog-friendly workplace is not every employee's cup of tea. Safety issues such as bites and accidents — not to speak of phobias or allergies — are things to consider before opening up your workplace to dogs.



Below are some helpful steps to take for safely building a dog-friendly workplace:

Step 1: Poll Current Employees

Did you know that a severe phobia of any animal is regarded as a disability. To ensure that your workplace doesn't risk violating human rights, make sure to talk with your current employees about their thoughts and formalize your policies in writing.

Before converting your workplace, take a poll of current employees. Some questions to ask could include:

- Do you currently (or plan to in the near future) own a dog which you would like to bring to work?
- Do you have allergies to dogs?
- Do you have a phobia of dogs?
- How do you feel about the potential of having dogs in the workplace?

Collecting these basic questions will give you the needed gauge for how your overall team feels about a dog-friendly workplace, and gives you an accurate starting point with which to begin.

Step 2: Speak To Your Building Owner, Legal Counsel & Insurance

Some landlords just don't welcome the idea of pets in the workplace, so it's best to check with them first. Review your lease agreement and consult with the landlord before moving forward with any other plans. Work with your landlord or

leasing agent to set expectations and update any lease agreement with clearly outlined parameters for your new policy. You also need to know the building threshold and how many dogs you can have in that space simultaneously. You might need to rotate when dog owners can come in with their dogs, depending on what's allowed.

Lastly, speak with your insurance provider to collect information and requirements of building a dog-friendly workplace. One dog bite could lead to a costly lawsuit, so it's a best-practice to consult with a lawyer about potential problems down the line, waivers that you can implement, etc.

Step 3: Update Your Office Layout As Needed

Now that you've polled your employees and spoken with your building owners, legal counsel and insurance, you need to review your office set-up.

Create A Dog-Free Area

Consider a dog-free zone for those employees who have allergies or were not on-board with the idea. Providing a work area free of dogs will ensure these employees feel heard and understood.

Establish Outdoor Potty And Play Zones

Set aside an area where employees can take their dogs to go potty. Clearly mark these areas with signs, and provide dog waste bags and stations.

Let the dogs make new friends and play together. Whether it's a marked outdoor area or a room with toys, having an area for dogs to let off some energy throughout the day is a smart decision, and can help make dogs excited to come to work too!

Provide Barriers

Establish penned-in areas around desks and workspaces to allow dogs to move freely, stay off-leash in smaller designated areas, and interact with their other desk mates. This gives dogs and people plenty of room to play neatly while spending quality time together.

Communicate When Dogs Need To Be On A Leash

As dog-friendly as your office is, humans should still be in control of the space. A leash policy keeps dogs close to their owners and in-check when necessary. When dogs leave their gated area, they should be on a leash to avoid accidents, unpleasant surprises, and unexpected encounters.

Ensure Easy Access To Water, Cleaning Items, Treats, Etc.

Ensure access to water bowls so all office dogs can stay hydrated. Having dog treats available is a nice touch as this will help people meet and play with new dogs too (if they're interested). Be sure to share information about the treats' ingredients for dogs with food sensitivities.

Cleaning items are a necessity to ensure good sanitation as well. Accidents are inevitable in a pet-friendly workplace, so be prepared for them and have cleaning supplies readily available to dog owners. Take note of this peculiar period also as the COVID-19 pandemic has made deep cleaning a major requirement. This has to be regular to disinfect work areas and get them ready for next use.

Mark Areas That May Be Dangerous To Pets

This especially applies to areas where there are chemicals, equipment, kitchen items that are sharp and breakable, medication or food as they can be harmful to dogs.



Step 4: Set Pawstive Parameters

Dogs need attention, and you can't really blame them for barking, whining and snoring in the middle of the office, though this can be distracting to other workers. Only allow dogs at work who are well-trained and behaved to ensure the least amount of accidents and issues.

Begin with a probationary period for each office dog. Set the parameters expected for both the behavior of the dog and the dog's owner. Have an initial review with the employee to cover the rules and expectations, and then a final review at the end of the period.

Create An Application Process To Ensure Dogs Are Office-Ready

After the probationary period, employees should be provided with an application that ensures their dogs are healthy, flea-free, friendly (to both humans and fellow dogs), and ready to hang around work. You need to emphasize having records of their vaccination, a recently passed fecal test, and their flea medication.

Use Colorful Tags That Communicate Dog Temperament

Just like people, dogs have unique personalities. Some dogs are energetic and outgoing, while others are shy, reserved and aloof. Let people know their temperaments by creating colored tags that attach to a dog's leash and signal whether the dog is outgoing or if people should ask their owners first before playing with the dog.

Require Good Pet Behavior

As awesome as a pet-friendly workplace sounds, it's only great when the new four-legged office mates are well behaved. Dog owners will also need to be sensitive to the environment and remember they're not at home, so they must respect certain boundaries and ensure their pup is on its best behavior. For the protection of everyone involved and the sake of a good retention rate, have a formal policy in place highlighting requirements. Office dogs need to be up to date on vaccinations and

free of any communicable infections or parasites such as ticks. They'll need to be house-trained and well socialized, so they don't get aggressive or uncomfortable due to being claustrophobic, with no history of biting, excessive barking, chasing or aggressive behavior. In addition, it helps to have dogs covered under their owner's homeowners' or renters' insurance policy, which must cover dog bites.

Step 5: Create A Dog-Friendly Workplace Policy

You've decided to allow your employees' amazing, fun and loveable dogs into the office - that is awesome! Before you go out and buy all the dog treats, ensure you have a dog-friendly workplace policy in order and signed by the staff.

Below are some key elements you will want in your policy to ensure the best environment for your team and your new furry friends:

1. Purpose Of The Policy

Having a paragraph outlining the purpose of this policy, its key areas, and why this policy is now being introduced will help set the stage of the intent plus the expectations of what this policy is to do for your staff should they have a question. Giving historical context and how this change came about will help communicate your organizational culture's narrative and progression.

2. Outline Of Key Areas

With a key policy like this, what we don't want is the impression of "Too Long Didn't Read (TLDR). Outlining what the policy covers makes for easy navigation and ease of reading. In this outline, you will want to include:

- HR Point Of Contact
- Required Documentation
 - Vaccination records
 - Health concerns or medication
 - Key points of contact for the owner
 - Waivers
- Escalation Process And Procedure
- List Of Dog-Owner Responsibilities



3. Clearly Define What Types Of Dogs Are Permitted At Work

As much as you would love the office to be an all-dogs-welcome environment, you should set parameters for dogs which are not approved for your workplace.

Depending on your office space and the size of your employee base, understand and decide what types and sizes of dogs can best be in the office and which will unfortunately not be allowed. Outline the permitted breeds, height and weight, as well as temperaments allowed and not allowed. In addition to this, they are outlining dog training and behaviors are key.

4. Clearly Outline Owner Responsibilities

Outlining what the dog owner is responsible for is critical to ensure there are no incidents in the future. This can range from:

- Fights with staff or other dogs
- Incidents or messes
- Damage to property



Step 6: Develop A Plan For Addressing Problems

Some dogs can quickly adapt and take to an office environment effortlessly. Others may be noisy, bark or whine constantly and have difficulty adjusting. Have a solid plan in place for how to address dogs that become distracting or disruptive.

Dog owners will need to be cooperative to help them through those situations. Make this process as seamless as possible and empower your team with a straightforward procedure to report any ongoing issues so you can handle them promptly.

Escalation Clause

As much as we would love for everyone to get along, that can't always be the case. Clearly outline what actions will be taken and/or what responsibilities lie with the following parties:

- The employee who made the complaint
- The company
- The dog owner

It is always best if the employee and the dog owner can work this out amongst themselves through a conversation, however depending on the issue, HR may need to be involved and help mediate to ensure a fair resolution is brought forward and adheres to the policy.

You're On Your Way To A Dog-Friendly Workplace

Following these best practices can help your company safely and effectively build a dog-friendly workplace. Remember, this one benefit actually grows into a host of other benefits which can ultimately help your team and your company thrive!

How EmPower HR Can Help

EmPower HR offers a variety of human resource services tailored to your business needs. Let us handle the HR administrative tasks so you can focus on your business and employees.

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