

Being Happier & Healthier in 2018

DogsAtWork.Pro: A Labor of Love

After more than 20 years as a Human Resources Professional, a very special dog inspired Claudia Melzig to create a business that enables people to spend more time with their canine companions while at work.

In today's competitive workplace companies are expanding their employee benefit program to attract and retain talent, as well as help employees manage their lives more effectively. Many of us spend a majority of our time at work and with that comes deadlines, responsibilities and stress.

While 7% of U.S. businesses currently allow their employees to bring their dog to work, which is a 5% increase since 2012, there's an even greater opportunity for companies to become dog-friendly.

Three years ago, Claudia began volunteering at Seattle Humane. "I was excited to come in, help and learn," she said, "I love dogs and those with special needs inspire me to be their strongest advocate."

That's where Claudia met Miley, an eight-month-old pit bull mix puppy who would change everything for her.

"Miley had been surrendered to Seattle Humane and she was so sick that she couldn't get up," Claudia recalled. "We didn't know if she was alive or dead... we weren't sure if she had neck problems because she could have been abused, or what was going on."



Miley at the hospital in 2016

Miley was also very fearful, but Claudia fell in love with this young puppy early on.

"A friend of mine offered to foster her for a week and I went to visit her every day. That's how we started our strong bond," she recalled.

After one week, Miley needed a new foster home. "I had to take her," she remembered, "but I did so without telling my partner. I told him, 'It's just a week,' but I just couldn't bring her back. I kept pushing for keeping her longer and making sure she could get a break from the shelter. From a medical perspective, we had to figure out what she had and after several relapses we were able to schedule an MRI and Spinal test and found out that she had meningitis."

While Claudia was working, she was able to get permission to bring Miley with her to the office at certain days. That is when Claudia started researching all the great benefits allowing dogs in the workplace can bring you.

At the same time, Claudia undertook an advanced behavior training certificate with Christine Dahl at the Northwest School of Canine Studies.

"I was thinking of a career change," she said. "Family, friends and even my manager were helpful providing me coaching and seeing how I lit up whenever I talked about dogs. This is how one year ago, almost at the same time we adopted Miley, I created Dogs At Work, a company that helps businesses become dog-friendly."

There are numerous benefits to having a dog-friendly workplace and several studies have proven it.

"Employees collaborate and interact more, it increases productivity and job satisfaction, helps lower stress and anxiety, attract and retain talent, improve work-life balance and physical health...while also enhance company culture. Bringing their dog to work means employees aren't worrying about their pets sitting at home alone all day. Also means employees may be willing to stay later to finish working on a project because they don't have to rush home to let the dog out. Dogs improve relationship among human coworkers; stopping by someone's desk to give their dog a belly rub inevitable leads to start a conversation. Dogs in the office force owners to take a break, it gives people a valid excuse to get out of the office and go for a walk. Not only does regular exercise improve physical health but going on a walk can boost creative thinking.

Business-wise, my mission is to increase productivity and employee satisfaction in the workplace, embracing the bond between humans and dogs. It's my personal goal for more

dogs to get adopted and make sure that more people are able to adopt them."

"One of the biggest hurdles I've faced is helping companies understand that becoming a dog-friendly workplace isn't complex. With the right program, policies, guidance's, training and communication you can offer a great perk to your employees. People might have allergies, or be afraid of dogs, and we have ways to accommodate that by for example just making part of the office floor dog friendly. Also, each dog will have to be up to date with vaccinations, be potty trained and pass a "good citizenship test".



Miley at the Dogs at Work desk.

Claudia has been fascinated by the response to Dogs At Work. "For a lot of people, seeing that their business can be dog-friendly is an 'A-ha' moment, and are interested to explore this trending perk" she said.

"Eric O'Grey, who wrote Walking With Peety, has helped people learn how to eat healthier

and exercise more, and has improved others' health so much," she said. "If more businesses become dog-friendly the benefits can be huge for your employees, their furry best friend and your company.

"Allowing employees to bring loveable, well-behaved dogs to work creates a family environment in the workplace with improved morale and reduced employee turnover," said Eric O'Grey. "Think about it - given a choice between two employers and all other things equal - dog owners will choose the job that allows them to take their dog to work, every time."

Miley, the little dog who was the catalyst behind Dogs At Work, continues to thrive.

"She still has meningitis, but it's not the contagious type," Claudia explained. "I'm not sure if she'll have it for her entire life or if it will go away as we reduce her medication, but she's doing well." Her medical treatment helped her in so many ways. She couldn't walk more than a few blocks when I first met her, but now she can even do a 10-mile hike, loves playing tug and run around."

Miley has helped Claudia meet a wide circle of animal lovers "Through Miley we have an extended family and their pets. Even our veterinarian is our friend, now too," she said. "Seattle Humane has been wonderful and supportive while in foster care with her medical condition and her socialization."

Claudia's family includes Miley, her partner Paul, who has two college-age sons, and her sweet Vizsla, Dante, who accepted Miley as her big brother. "Paul has been my strongest supporter," she said. "He told me to follow my passion and follow my dream. I'm doing that, by leveraging my professional experience and love for dogs to have more companies allow their employees to bring their dogs to work, helping more people and their pets lead happier, healthier lives, too."

You could be the next employer to offer this amazing benefit. Contact Dogs At Work to implement your company's bring-your-dog to work program. You can visit their website at www.dogsatwork.pro.



Miley, Claudia, and Dante

Want your company to be a dog-friendly workplace?

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