Canines in the Cubicles | Wander our hallways, and you’ll see some of us working like dogs
by JOHN BALZAR

At the moment. 18 percent of the staffers in the Communications section of The Humane Society of the United States are dogs.

First-time visitors to our operations building are surprised to hear the fact. That’s probably because of something they don’t hear: barks, cries, growls, or yelps. Our cubicles, offices, and hallways are as calm as any you’ll encounter. Dogs, you see, quickly settle into the rhythms of the office setting. If you looked carefully, you might notice that we have water bowls on the floor in addition to the standard water cooler in the corner. You’ll see that we’ve learned to keep our dignity, our balance, and our modesty as we step over those “baby gates” that delineate each dog’s cubicle. And I’m sure that if you turned many of us upside down, dog biscuits would fall out of our pockets. But that’s about it.

No remuneration is paid to dogs who show up each day, of course. Rather, in the way of these loyal creatures everywhere, they are content to serve for nothing more than an occasional treat, a pat on the head, and the chance to be at our sides.

Serve? Yes, that’s the word. By their presence, they serve to boost workplace morale. They provide lessons in teamwork—when a human is called to a meeting, or to long-distance travel, the need falls first to an office mate to dog-sit. In the ancient manner of the canine, these white-collar office dogs provide a measure of balance to our hectic days and by so doing, they contribute to productivity.

Most important, dogs serve as warm-blooded, tail-wagging, funny-faced, shaggy-eared, all-day reminders of why animals are so important in our lives, and also how they are so vulnerable.

So thank you, Ardy, Bella, Cookie, Freasky, Gigi, Hank, Hobbes, Jack, Jaeger, Murphy, Pepper, Pyper, Sandy, Tabby, Tango, Yoda—and, yes, Louie, who acts enough like a dog that we don’t object too strenuously to his actually being a cat. Let me also mention that calm, hairy fellow named Boss; and sweet little uncomplaining Tess, too. We lost them recently to old age, but they live in our thoughts.

These are tough times in the land, as we’re often told. Well, they are less tough thanks to the companionship of our animals. Bringing dogs to the office is a perk that costs employers little but pays dividends in staff loyalty and workplace joy.

In our office family, there are last-chance dogs who were adopted from shelters only because they were welcome at work and would not have to be left home alone. There are staffers here who wind up commuting farther than they’d like for the call of our work and the privilege of being with their dogs. And I think I speak for many of my coworkers at The HSUS in recalling the wisdom of an old adage that is...
particularly poignant in the office setting:
The reason a dog has so many friends is that
he wags his tail, not his tongue.

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president of communications.

Office Politics, Poochy-Style

Want to increase productivity in the
workplace? Boost employee retention?
Win friends and get your staff members
to actually talk to each other?

Forget everything you ever
learned in The Seven Habits of Highly
Effective People or the pages of Inc.
magazine. You’ve got something much
more influential at your feet: a dog.

The writers of all those manage-
ment tomes will probably never be
able to quantify the mysterious team-
building powers of drooling tongues
and wagging tails. But for those inter-
ested in adding a rung for canines to
the corporate ladder, the authors of
Dogs at Work: A Practical Guide to Cre-
ating Dog-Friendly Workplaces make a
compelling case.

A cross be-
tween an HR man-
ual for the poochy
set and a Ms. Man-
ners column for
their owners, this
new book from The HSUS emphasizes
the positive effects of bringing dogs to
work: greater creativity, lower blood
pressure, more personal interactions. Pet
writer Liz Palika and HSUS chief econo-
mist Jennifer Fearing also provide tips for
keeping it that way, offering step-by-
step advice on everything from house-
training issues to designated dog-free
zones. Sample policies from The HSUS
and other organizations address poten-
tial liabilities and list procedures for pre-
serving harmony among the species.

TO ORDER a copy of Dogs at Work for
$21.95, visit humanesociety.org/hspress.