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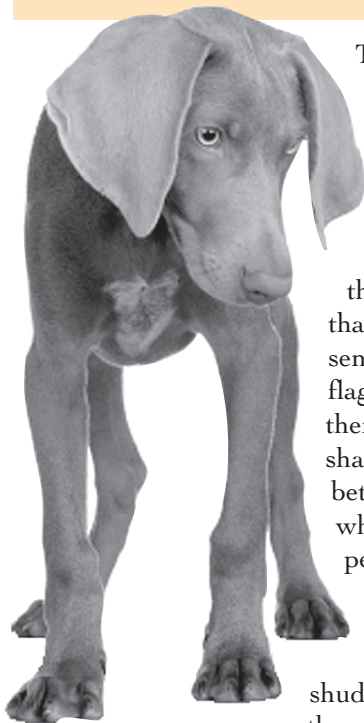
Supporting a Healthy Organization

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PETS AND PEOPLE



The world is divided into two kinds of people... This is one of those clichés that instantly sends up red flags. But there really is a sharp divide between those who consider pets part of the family and those who shudder at the thought of dog or cat hair on the sofa.

or cat hair on the sofa.

Even if you're not in the pet-crazy category, other people you work and play with are. And in a high-tech world, working animals are taking on surprising new roles. So it's still important for everyone--the animal-obsessed and the animal-averse--to understand the close relationship between four-legged and two-legged members of American society.

Animal ownership has deep roots in U.S. history. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the agricultural way of life meant close working relationships between man and beast. Farmers lived and labored beside their draft horses and dairy cows. Dogs helped herd sheep; cats curtailed rodent populations in barns and homes. At the same time, Americans were also enthusiastic meat-eaters, raising and

slaughtering their own livestock.

But people began keeping animals exclusively for enjoyment as well. Songbirds were the first animal to gain popularity as a pet, and the 19th century saw a boom of bird-related products for purchase: fancy cages, special foods and toys. During that era, parents also began to see that having children take care of pets taught them valuable lessons about kindness and responsibility.

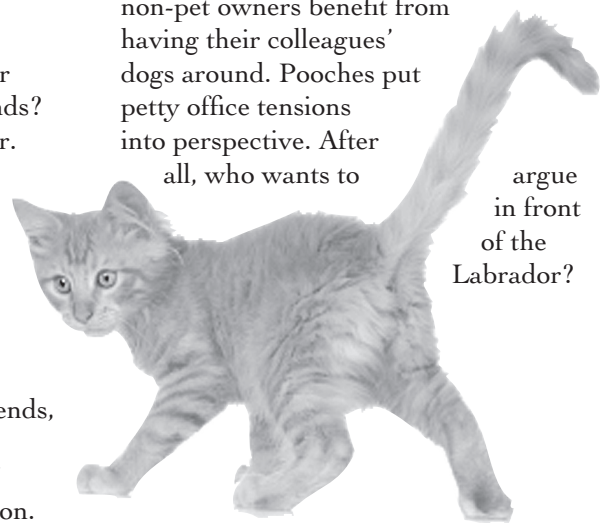
Today, pet owners are a growing majority: 63% of U.S. households in 2007, up from 56% in 1988. The statistics are staggering. We spend about \$41 billion on our pets annually. This total includes not just food and veterinary expenses, but extras such as bird nail polish and monogrammed dog sweaters. There are more Fluffies than Fidos in American homes--88 million cats versus 75 million dogs--but fish swim away with the numbers title at 150 million. The pet population also encompasses 16 million birds, 14 million horses, 13 million reptiles and 24 million other small animals.

Why have we gone a little loopy for our furry, feathered and scaly friends? Companionship may be one answer. Society is growing more fast-paced and fragmented than ever. Family sizes have become smaller; cross-country moves more frequent. Technology depersonalizes communication. While a flat computer screen connects you digitally to far-off friends, the warm ball of fur at your feet provides immediate reassurance of unquestioning affection and devotion.

Moreover, scientists have demonstrated that having a four-legged friend in residence delivers tangible health benefits to the two-legged owner. Several studies have shown cardiac benefits: lower blood pressure and possible protection from other heart disease risk factors. Pets may help owners cope more effectively with stress, and protect against depression, especially in the elderly. One study even showed decreased health care costs because pet owners averaged fewer doctors' visits--offsetting, perhaps, the high price of chew toys and kibble!

Recognizing the tight bond people share with their pets, a small but growing number of enlightened employers now allow workers to bring four-legged family members to the office. It is especially tough for dog owners to leave pooches at home unattended for long stretches. (Cats generally prefer staying put.) So a dog-friendly workplace means relaxed employees, able to put in longer hours. And coffee breaks are more fun when they involve a quick game of fetch. Even non-pet owners benefit from having their colleagues' dogs around. Pooches put petty office tensions into perspective. After all, who wants to

argue in front of the Labrador?



PET BEREAVEMENT

The death of a pet can be as traumatic as losing a human loved one. The stages of grief are the same, and the health effects can be as devastating. Recent studies have shown that more than 90% of owners experienced symptoms of depression, such as disruption of sleep and appetite, after losing a pet. Almost half withdrew temporarily from social activities, and the same percentage missed 1-3 days of work because of low energy or trouble concentrating. In a British study, ten percent of bereaved pet owners developed physical symptoms serious enough to warrant a doctor's visit. When friends or coworkers minimize or trivialize the loss, this adds to the hurt, potentially fueling additional anger or depression. A bereaved owner may feel the need to conceal his emotions instead of coping with them--an unhealthy strategy that prolongs psychological suffering.

Insensitive comments wound deeply. After a grandparent passes away, no one asks, "So, when are you getting a new grandma?" The same principle applies to a pet's death. "When are you getting a new cat?" is an equally inappropriate question. Beloved companions are never replaced. The decision to get another pet is deeply personal. For some, it helps to adopt another animal right away. Most people need an interval of a few weeks or months to adjust. For others, the loss makes it too painful to consider getting another pet for a very long time.

Many people gain comfort from familiar grieving rituals. Animal burial and cremation are now common. Multiple outlets exist for working through grief: books, local support groups, bereavement hotlines staffed by veterinary students and online chat rooms.

As with any difficult life experience, however, suffering is always eased by the support and understanding of family and friends. Sincere expressions of condolence are always appreciated. Write a card. Offer to run an errand or take care of an overdue task. Make a memorial donation to a local humane society in the deceased pet's honor. Acknowledging someone's grief will help them on the path to healing.



Employee Assistance Program

CHECKLIST: ANIMALS AT WORK

Most farm work that animals used to perform has now been mechanized. Tractors plow fields, not horses. Like many of their human counterparts, animals in today's workforce undertake jobs that require specialized skills and training. Two booming areas are law enforcement and health care.

Badge-wearing animals have come a long way since the sleepy days of cartoon character Deputy Dawg. Among their vital 21st century roles:

- 🐾 Police canines search quickly and effectively for drugs and weapons.
- 🐾 Dogs sniff out explosives residue that other scanning methods miss.
- 🐾 Landmine detection dogs are helping to clear formerly war-torn countries of the deadly devices.
- 🐾 After earthquakes and other natural disasters, search and rescue dogs locate survivors in the rubble.
- 🐾 Police horses make crowd control friendlier and more efficient.

Animal use has multiplied rapidly in the medical field as well, promoting physical independence for the disabled and psychological well-being for hospital and nursing home patients.

- 🐾 The successful use of guide dogs for the blind has mushroomed into employing assistance animals for a wide

range of disabilities.

🐾 Trained service animals assist wheelchair-bound owners live independently by performing simple household tasks.

🐾 Specialized animals also offer amazing help with difficult conditions, alerting epileptic owners to an oncoming seizure, or tracking autistic companions prone to wandering.

🐾 Therapeutic uses abound for animals in hospitals and nursing homes: informal activities, such as visiting the elderly and playing with sick children; and structured disciplines, such as physical and occupational therapy.

How can the average animal lover help? Local police departments often can't afford bulletproof vests for their canine members, so organizing a community event can raise funds--and awareness. Future guide dogs and assistance animals need to be socialized in individual homes before they enter formal training. Friendly family pets often make good candidates to become animal-assisted therapy volunteers--local organizations, such as humane societies, coordinate certification programs. Putting animals to work helping others requires a steady stream of funding, so another important way to help is to support the nonprofit organizations that train the animals.



ANIMALS IN OUR LIVES

6 Second Summary:

- 📌 Animals have evolved from important agricultural labor partners to treasured four-legged family members--now part of nearly two-thirds of American households.
- 📌 Pet ownership may confer physical and psychological health benefits, such as decreasing risk factors for heart disease and depression.
- 📌 Bereaved pet owners should take time to grieve, and friends and colleagues need to treat the loss with respect and compassion.

RESOURCE BOX

- 📖 Katherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History*. [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.] Engaging study of the long relationship between pets and people in America. Companion website (www.petsinamerica.org) has a fascinating virtual tour of artifacts from America's pet-owning past.
- 📖 Gary Kowalski, *Goodbye, Friend: Healing Wisdom for Anyone Who Has Ever Lost a Pet*. [Novato, California: New World Library, 1997.] Sensitive, comforting guide to grieving the loss of a beloved animal.
- 📖 Cornell veterinary students staff a hotline offering free counseling and support to bereaved pet owners: (607) 253-3932. For hours, and info on other hotlines, see www.vet.cornell.edu/org/petloss/OtherHotlines.htm.

EAP SERVICES

EAP is here to help. For more information about articles in this newsletter, or any other EAP-related topic, please call one of our trained counselors at our toll-free number:

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