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IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH WITH THE HELP OF PETS AT WORK

The article deals with the problem of the health and mood-boosting benefits of pets as well as exploring the broader benefits of a pet-friendly workplace. In particular, the authors examined and analyzed the problem of mental health and its connection to pets and pet-friendly offices. Accordingly, studies continue to confirm that allowing employees to bring their pets to work has an overarching net gain for business since it boosts employee morale, positively affecting the rate and productivity of the output. Moreover, many companies see the value in coworker bonding and create immersive team building drills and exercises. Thus, people who are able to bond and get along are able to collaborate more effectively and essentially are more productive. With resilience shown to be a major weapon in the fight against mental illness, one of the best ways to build resilience is to identify and support those things in our lives that revitalize us. Seeing how pets are able to provide significant emotional support and joy for many people, smart business leaders would do well to be mindful of this resource and create pet-friendly workplaces for their employees who require psychological support. Likewise, since many people are prone to experiencing an increased amount of feel stress at work, research shows that just a few petting strokes (even watching fish swimming in an aquarium helps to alleviate psychological tension) can ease stress and reduce your blood pressure. Among other proven benefits pet owners receive are a generally more relaxed state as well as a chance to practice mindfulness. Similarly, pet ownership was shown to improve cardiovascular health, reduce loneliness (a critical factor in mental health) as well as help ease many chronic health conditions whereby animal-assisted interventions can play an especially important role for those facing severely distraught mental and declining physical conditions. For this reason, innovative companies such as Google, Salesforce, Etsy, and Amazon enthusiastically embrace the

role of pets in the workplace. Hence, Dog-owning Googlers are called Dooglers, and the company's corporate code of conduct explicitly welcomes pets, encouraging employees to take advantage of the mental and physical benefits that our canine and other animal companions can bring to the workplace dynamics, enjoyment and productivity.

Keywords: *pet-friendly workplace, pet-friendly policies, stress, mental health, emotional support, the benefits, increased productivity, cardiovascular health*

Анотація. Лебідь Л.П., Сімонова І.В. Покращення ментального здоров'я завдяки домашнім тваринам на роботі

У статті розглядається проблема переваг домашніх тварин, що покращують стан здоров'я та настрої, а також переваги робочого місця, придатного для домашніх тварин. Автори статті розглянули та проаналізували проблему психічного здоров'я та його зв'язок із домашніми тваринами в офісах, де дозволено перебувати з домашніми тваринами. Дослідження продовжують показувати, що дозволити працівникам приводити своїх домашніх улюбленців на роботу – це хороший бізнес, тому що це добре для морального стану співробітників, і це добре для продуктивності праці. Багато компаній бачать цінність у зв'язках між колегами та створюють командні тренування та вправи. Люди, які вміють спілкуватися і ладнати, здатні ефективніше співпрацювати і, по суті, більш продуктивні. Стійкість – головна зброя у боротьбі з психічними захворюваннями. Одним із найкращих способів формування стійкості є виявлення та підтримка тих речей у нашому житті, які «відроджують» нас. Для багатьох людей домашні тварини забезпечують значну емоційну підтримку та радість. Розумним керівникам бізнесу було б добре пам'ятати про цей ресурс та створити робочі місця, придатні для домашніх тварин, для своїх співробітників, які цього потребують.

Ключові слова: *робоче місце, облаштоване для тварин, політика щодо тварин на робочому місці, стрес, психічне здоров'я, емоційна підтримка, переваги, збільшена продуктивність праці, здоров'я серцево-судинної системи*

Relevance of the research topic. Contemporary animal science presently places an increased emphasis on studying the development of the international programs such as “Take your pet to work” which outlines the peculiarities of the influence pets have on our organism during the working day. In particular, a recent study by Nationwide Pet Insurance in partnership with the Human-Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) reinforces findings which suggest that more than three times as many employees at pet-friendly workplaces report a positive working relationship with their boss and coworkers compared to significantly lesser numbers observed in work spaces that either explicitly prohibit or are not actively encouraging office pet interaction [2].

Setting the tasks. The goal of the article is to carry out thorough research of the problem of improving mental health by introducing pets to work environments. Specifically, the authors undertake a comprehensive analysis of the positive impact

and outcomes of pet-friendly workplaces coupled with the task of examining a number of creative pet-friendly policies and their potential application for companies and businesses in Ukraine.

Research methods. Our examination necessitated the use of the following research methodology: study and analysis of different international sources, psychological, sociological, specialized medical literature; statistical analysis; study and analysis of this issue in Ukraine.

Analysis of recent researches and publications. A recent study conducted by the International Journal of Workplace Health Management looked at the stress levels of employees trying to determine whether or not the presence of a dog made a positive impact. This was accomplished by looking at cortisol levels in the morning and comparing them with those measured at the end of the day. Accordingly, people who worked with a dog present had significantly lower stress levels at the end of the day when compared to those who did not have the benefit of interacting with a canine companion throughout the day.

Presentation of the main material. Looking at the health and mood-boosting benefits of pets (especially dogs and cats) it is evident that they can drastically reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, ease loneliness, encourage exercise and playfulness, and even improve the owner's cardiovascular health. Moreover, caring for an animal can help children grow up more secure and active. Similarly, pets can provide valuable companionship for older adults. Having said that, one needs to consider some of the obvious downsides of adding a pet to your life. First and foremost, it is a big commitment, since by deciding to get a pet you agree to take care of another creature for the rest of their life. Accordingly, you have to consider the time and money you'll need to invest in pet care. On the flip side, having a pet has a lot of rewards, including mental health benefits. Thus, people of all ages find that having a pet improves their mood, lowers their stress levels, and eases loneliness. Many pet owners remark that pet care responsibilities aren't a chore, but are instead viewed as a soothing routine that helps people focus and organize their days. Most importantly, pets provide love and companionship to their owners in good times and bad. [1]

Every pet owner instinctively knows that pets make them feel good. Whether it's a dog greeting you at the door or a cat purring contentedly in your lap, your pet is there to offer unconditional love and acceptance. Not surprisingly, there developed a field of real science behind the benefits of owning pets which studies the benefits of animal companions which range from improved heart health to helping people cope with stress and anxiety.

Companionship. Living with a pet means you have someone with you whenever you're at home. Pet owners say that they feel less alone compared to people who don't own pets. Pets can also help you connect with other people around you. For example, dog owners tend to meet their neighbors, converse and interact with people in their community on a more frequent basis. On top of that, many pets (dogs in particular) are affectionate, accepting, loyal, honest and genuine companions. Hence, if you feel

isolated and lacking support, a pet can be an invaluable support in alleviating a sense of alienation and loneliness.

Mood booster. Just looking at your pet might make you happier. Studies show that eye contact with your dog can release a hormone that makes you feel happy. Oxytocin or as it is sometimes called the love hormone, is known to bring about an immediate mood booster. Additionally, pets fulfill the human tactile needs whereby most people feel better when they have physical contact with others. Thus, simply patting a pet can lower your heart rate and bring about a sense of calm and comfort.

Health routines. Having a pet means having to take care of their daily needs. Setting up a schedule for feeding, grooming, and exercising a pet is a good way to provide stability and structure in your life. Furthermore, pets provide purpose and motivation which can help your self-esteem, wellbeing and mental health.

For people struggling with anxiety or depression, routines offer an important feeling of control. For children, taking care of a pet builds a sense of responsibility, laying the foundation with all kinds of character-building relationships in life.

Stress reduction. Most pet owners know that petting your dog or cat is a quick way to de-stress, but few are aware that there is actually a scientific explanation for how pets help with anxiety. In particular, studies show that being around pets can lower the level of the stress hormone – cortisol, which eases tensions, helps reduce feelings of strain and anxiety [2]. Research shows that just patting a pet can ease stress and reduce your blood pressure. Even watching fish swimming in an aquarium is known to reduce stress, help you relax and attain a state of mindfulness.

Increased social interaction. Pets create opportunities for better social interaction, especially if you join an animal club or attend pet shows. Attending pet-friendly events and areas (beaches or parks) can also help expand and strengthen your social network as you can make new friends just by taking your dog for a walk or waiting at the vet. If you have fear of crowded social situations, or suffer from social phobia, a pet can help with introducing you to and engaging with other people who also have pets and can thereby enhance your mental health.

Improved fitness (dog owners). Dog owners are able to seamlessly get the exercise by walking and playing with their canine friends. Physical activity, like walking, has many benefits for your mental health and wellbeing. You can likewise use the time when walking your dog not just to improve your fitness making the most of the outdoors, but receive added benefits of further developing your mindfulness and relaxation skills and routines. Studies have shown that dog ownership is linked to higher percentages of longevity, with potentially lower risk of a cardiovascular disease [3].

Lastly, although, pets make excellent companions, appearing especially beneficial for your physical and mental health, there are, nonetheless, important considerations to take into account when deciding to become a pet owner. Thus, if you are struggling to look after yourself, talk to your doctor before you decide to start caring for a pet.

Studies demonstrate that allowing employees to bring their pets to work is good

for business since it aids in boosting employee morale, and that's good for the bottom line. Serving as a sure confirmation of the positive outcomes listed above is the 21st annual Take Your Dog to Work Day (TYDTWD). TYDTWD was created by Pet Sitters International in 1999 to celebrate the unrivaled emotional and physical support that our four-legged barking friends can provide. Celebrated on the Friday following Father's Day TYDTWD promotes the caring attitude towards and inclusivity of our trusty canine companions.

Although the idea of a special day for taking pets to work originated in 1999, corporate America didn't really start to catch on until the publication of a groundbreaking 2012 study conducted by researchers at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). In particular, it presented evidence that dogs in the workplace helped reduce stress in their owners and made work more satisfying for other employees with whom they came in contact.

A recent study by Nationwide Pet Insurance in partnership with the Human-Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) reinforces VCU's findings stating that more than three times as many employees at pet-friendly workplaces report a positive working relationship with their boss and coworkers, which is significantly more than those in pet-neutral and adverse environments. The Nationwide study likewise shows that pet-friendly companies are more successful at attracting and retaining employees, with this trend being especially relevant among millennials.

Compared to their baby boomer and Generation X counterparts, millennials are far more likely to value a pet-friendly work environment which influences an increased likelihood long-term company and brand loyalty. Accordingly, a nationwide study found that 90% of employees in pet-friendly workplaces feel highly connected to their company's mission, are fully engaged with their work, and are willing to recommend their employer to others. In contrast, less than 65% of employees in non-pet-friendly workplaces made the same claims. The study defined a pet-friendly workplace as one that allows pets in the workplace – regularly or occasionally – and/or offers a pet-friendly employee benefit, such as pet health insurance.

Hence, businesses interested in reaping the benefits of a pet-friendly workplace can find helpful tips and tools in *The Woofice* a pet-centric parody of a hit sitcom the Office released by Zoetis Petcare and HABRI as part of their Pet Effect Campaign. The Woofice details research supporting the benefits of a pet-friendly workplace and offers practical tools for employers interested in creating one. "With millennial pet owners driving demand for more pet-friendly offices, The Woofice is incredibly timely," says Steven Feldman, HABRI executive director. "It is HABRI's genuine hope [that] The Woofice videos and campaign content catch on and inspire people to take steps to create pet-friendly workplaces so the benefits of strong and healthy human-animal bonds can not only be experienced at home but also every weekday from 9 to 5" [5].

But if you're at an animal hospital, you already know all about the benefits of a pet-friendly workplace, evidenced by the fact that pet-friendly workplaces are a win-win for employee wellbeing which directly translates into increased business performance.

Since resilience is a major weapon in the fight against mental illness, one of the best ways to build up a reservoir of vitality is to identify and employ those things in our lives that revitalize us. Seeing how for many people pets provide significant emotional support and joy, smart business leaders would do well to be mindful of this resource creating pet-friendly workplaces. Even though hard research into the benefits of pets in the workplace is limited, the studies undertaken show promising results. In particular, a study by Virginia Commonwealth University found the presence of pets at the office to be a significant stress buffer for their owners. The researchers found that concomitant benefits may extend to non-pet-owning co-workers, who reported enjoying brief interactions with their pet-owner peers.

In a similar vein, studies by the Human Animal Bond Research Institute reveal the effect of dog presence on group problem-solving which indicate improved cohesion, trust, and cooperation. A nationwide survey demonstrated similar results showing greater employee engagement and retention in pet-friendly workplaces. Finally, studies undertaken by the Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction is (a collaboration project between the nursing and veterinary schools at the University of Missouri) prove the benefits of pet companionship for weight loss, treating veterans with PTSD, as well as alleviating anxiety in people with autism. Overall, workplaces that adopt a pet-friendly policy enjoy the benefits of attracting and retaining happier and healthier employees.

According to the Society of Human Resource Management, only seven percent of employers now allow pets in the workplace. While this is up from five percent a few years ago, it, nonetheless, indicates that we have a long way to making the workplace a pet-friendly environment. Yet, we should not approach this task only as matter of time since achieving this requires careful planning and consideration. It is thus important, first of all, to get consent and approval from the whole team, since not everyone loves pets, while some co-workers may have allergies. Hence, setting up designated pet-free zones may be one way to accommodate both groups. At the same time, appointed pet-friendly days can clarify expectations regarding when pets are and are not allowed on the job. Furthermore, setting up a select pet committee which can settle any disputes that may arise, further ensures that our furry friends are safe at work.

Finally, even if it is not feasible to welcome pets into your workplace, you can always demonstrate support for pet-owning employees and build community and engagement with alternative policies like hosting a picnic or happy hour at a dog park. Accordingly, sponsoring a pet photo contest with pet-related prizes, organizing a volunteer program at an animal-focused charity, providing a discount for pet insurance or offering “pawternity” time for those with new pets, and bereavement time for those saying goodbye to old pets are all great ways to establish and enhances pet-friendly environments.

At the same time, innovative industry leaders such as Google, Sales force, Etsy, and Amazon keenly embrace the role of pets in the workplace. Dog-owning Googlers are called Dooglers whereby the company’s corporate code of conduct explicitly welcomes

pets which is exemplified by Google's corporate culture explicitly embracing any and all forms of affection for our canine friends as an integral facet of the company's policy on pets.

As a result of increased competition for employee retention and productivity, smart business leaders are already viewing pet-friendly environments as yet another opportunity to create a workplace and a culture that aims at boosting comfort and employee satisfaction. Consequently, we are already witnessing how holistically-minded and pet-oriented companies are not only able to boast better mental health statistics but are quickly becoming innovative magnets for the most satisfied, loyal and creative talent.

Top 4 Benefits of Pets in the Workplace

Are you trying to convince your place of work to go pet friendly? A 2015 Society for Human Resource Management survey found 8 percent of American workplaces allow employees to bring their furry loved ones to work, up from 5 percent in 2013.

It may seem like having your pet around is just going to be fun and games, but with the right considerations, more and more companies may want to consider the benefits.

1. Stress Reducers

Do you ever come home after a long, stressful day and pet your dog or cat? Just feeling their fur, having their presence close to you, you feel a sense of calm and relief. Who knows if anyone can explain exactly how this phenomenon works, but scientific studies back up the feeling that we experience.

The International Journal of Workplace Health Management conducted a study where they looked at the stress levels of employees, and whether or not the presence of a dog made an impact. They did this by looking at the cortisol levels in the morning versus at the end of the day. The people who spent the day with a dog present had significantly lower stress levels at the end of the day versus those who did not.

2. Employee Retention

Keeping your staff happy, and the overall moral high, is not always the easiest task to accomplish. When it comes to the overall success of an organization, retaining good employees is an important part of the formula. According to Fortune.com, 53% of people working in a non-pet friendly workplace would consider staying with the company if they allowed them to bring their pet to work.

3. Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

Many companies see the value in coworker bonding and create team building outings and exercises. People who are able to bond and get along are able to collaborate more effectively and essentially are more productive.

An experiment conducted at the Central Michigan University looked at if the simple presence of a canine in the workplace would make people collaborate more effectively. They found that "those who had had a dog to slobber and pounce on them ranked their team-mates more highly on measures of trust, team cohesion and intimacy than those who had not."

4. Increased Productivity

Imagine what a difference a walk after lunch would do. Instead of having the post lunch time crash, a quick walk with a dog outside in the fresh air, could give employees a boost of energy needed to get through the work day.

One study found that people who had their dog with them at work did not have anxiety about rushing home after work to take care of them. Therefore, they were able to put in longer work days. They also found that pet friendly companies also had less people call out for the day versus those who could not bring their pet to work.

Things to Consider Before You Become a Pet-Friendly Business

- Allergies: You want to be respectful of employees who do not care to be around pets, or may have allergies. If possible, these employees should have a pet free space to work in.
- Space: Will the work space allotted to employees be conducive to bringing a pet? Some businesses have set up cubicles with special offerings such as doggie gates.

Vaccinations and Flea Medication: The last thing you want on your hands are pets getting sick or flea infested from coming to the office! It's important to have a system in place to check the medical records of pets that are coming into the shared work space.

Locally, Ukrainians first came to work with dogs in 2013 in Lviv, while in 2019, as many as 550 companies from 90 cities in our country joined the initiative. For a number of years now, on June 26 -World "Take a dog to work" Day Ukraine traditionally joins the ranks of pet-friendly countries. In particular, the founders of this initiative in Ukraine, Kormotech and the premium food brand CLUB 4 LAPY, launched a social campaign calling on Ukrainian employers to provide for a pet-friendly space in their offices, encouraging businesses to create an accommodating atmosphere for our canine friends and other pets. Working towards this goal, "The Paws in the Office" project helps Ukrainian companies make their dog-friendly offices an ever increasing part of a corporate culture on an ongoing basis [11].

With the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the organizers did not pre-register participants, whereby under quarantine, the event took place in the format of an online flash mob. Ukrainians in different cities went to work with their pets, posting photos with their four-legged friends at workplaces on Facebook and Instagram with the hashtags "#lapivofisi" and "# united by love". "Our company participates every year. This is one of the favorite events of employees. If it weren't for the quarantine, there would be about ten dogs in our office today. Due to the epidemic, most of the employees went to work from home, and even under such conditions, on this day we have two dogs in the office with us – Fluffy and Beagle Budyak. Everyone has a great time. There is a friendly and productive atmosphere. If the office is dog-friendly, it will definitely be great for people here as well," shared her appreciation for the initiative Yana from the Lviv IT company Symphony Solutions [11].

The founder of the "Take a Dog to Work" campaign in Ukraine Kateryna Kovalyuk

from Kormotech is convinced that: “Thanks to pets, we are all united by love. These are our companions. In today’s world, a dog in the office is not only natural but also useful. Researchers have shown that this has a positive effect on the working atmosphere and the general health and psychological wellbeing of workers”.

Developing this trend, global companies are making dog-friendly offices part of their corporate culture. The practice of hiring pets and thus making dog-friendly offices brings us closer to the best animal husbandry practices in the civilized world. We are happy to assist all willing business owners and managers to turn their offices into truly pet-friendly spaces”. [11]

Conclusions. Pets, especially dogs and cats, can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, ease loneliness, encourage exercise and playfulness, and even improve ones cardiovascular health. The issue of the health and mood-boosting benefits of pets and the benefits of a pet-friendly workplace was analyzed and observed in this article. The authors of the article examined and analyzed the problem of mental health and its connection with pets and pet-friendly offices. Studies showed that allowing employees to bring their pets to work is good business because it’s good for employee morale, and that’s good for the bottom line. The Nationwide study also shows that pet-friendly companies are more successful at attracting and retaining employees, especially millennials.

Compared to their baby boomer and Generation X counterparts, millennials are far more excepting and enthusiastic about working at a pet-friendly work environment. More significantly, studies show that pet caring employees are more likely to stay with a company for a long term if it facilitates a pet-friendly environment.

Moreover, a nationwide study found that 90% of employees in pet-friendly workplaces feel highly connected to their company’s mission, being fully engaged with their work, and are willing to recommend their employer to others. In contrast, less than 65% of employees in non-pet-friendly or pet-neutral workplaces made the same claims. The study defines a pet-friendly workplace as one that allows pets in the workplace—regularly or occasionally—and/or offers a pet-friendly employee benefit, such as pet health insurance. Presently, many companies see the value in coworker bonding and create immersive team building drills and exercises, whereby employees who are able to bond and get along are able to collaborate more effectively and are source of added effectiveness within their departments. Based on multiple converging research data resilience is shown to be a major weapon in the fight against mental illness. Not surprisingly, pets are identified as a powerful source of supporting and building up our mental and emotional wellbeing reservoir by revitalizing our energy and reinforcing physical resilience to stress and illness. Being able to provide significant psychological and physical health boosts pets are one of the most potent sources of joy for many people. Accordingly, smart business leaders would do well to be mindful of this resource by setting up pet-friendly, vibrant and efficient workplaces.

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