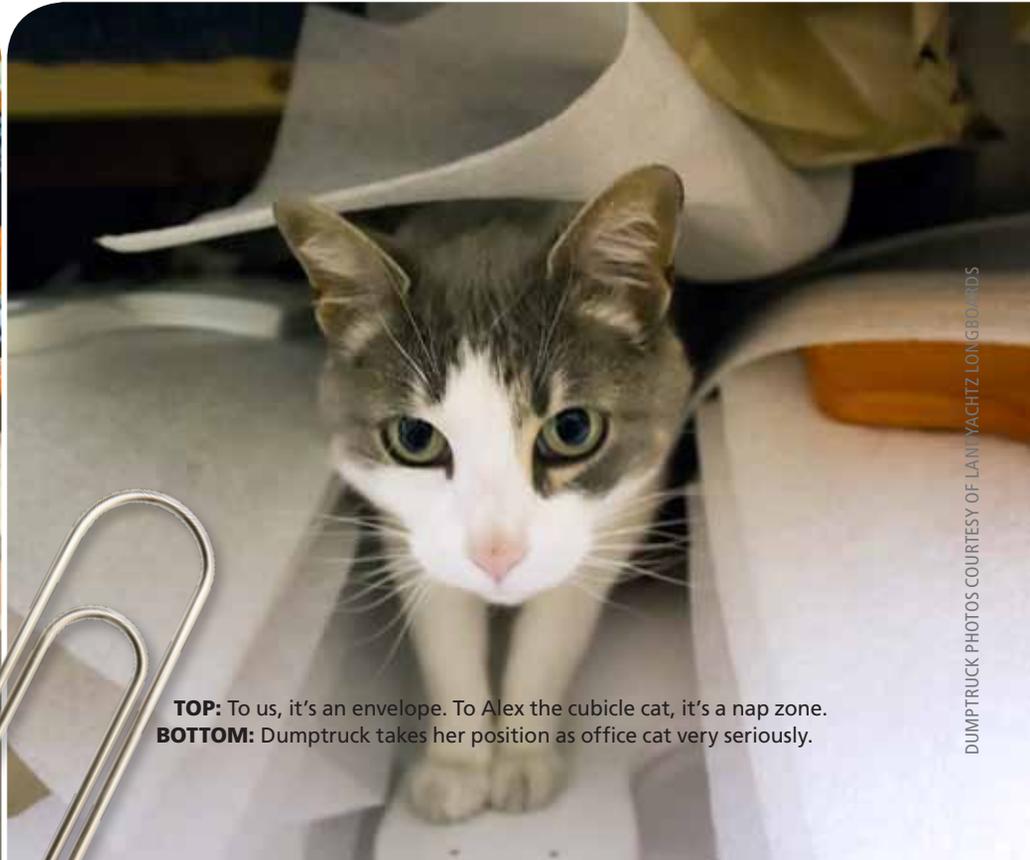


*cuddly coworkers
can be good for
employees. And
good for business.*

By Maryann Hammers

cubicle cats



TOP: To us, it's an envelope. To Alex the cubicle cat, it's a nap zone.
BOTTOM: Dumptruck takes her position as office cat very seriously.



skateboard factory may not seem a likely home for a cat. But a former starving stray thinks that Landyachtz Longboards in Vancouver, Canada, is the cat's meow.

Employees discovered Dumptruck — as the cat is named — foraging in a dumpster. “The choice [to keep her] was simple,” says employee Nick Breton. “She was rough-looking, hungry and alone.” Five years later, she’s “fat and happy,” Breton says. “She tends to make little beds out of merchandise, like soft T-shirts, but we love her anyway. She’s always down for a cuddle or to chase a shoelace around the shop.”

Everyone who shares a home with a feline friend knows how helpful a cat can be. Think of how cats excel at wrapping gifts, vacuuming and folding laundry. OK, on second thought, perhaps cats are not the best with chores, but a workplace cat really can be good for employees and good for business. “I would love to see an increase in workplace pets. Animals



PHOTO BY THERESA BRANDT

For Hoover, it's another tough day on the job at Art Works in Northern California.

make a setting warm and inviting,” says Abbi Collins, adoption manager for the Cat Care Society, a nonprofit cat shelter near Denver.

stress busters and business boosters

There are plenty of stories about homeless cats who become office cats and then “pay it forward” by helping to reduce stress in the workplace and enhance customers’ perception of the business.

At Texas publishing company Mike Byrnes & Associates, Jeffy, a tuxedo male adopted from the city pound, was so good at his job of calming frazzled nerves that he had his own business cards. His title: stress manager. And in Rockford, Illinois, Kathy Velasco’s small advertising agency is home to four abandoned cats. “We deal with lots of deadlines and client demands,” she says. “I always kid that when employees get stressed, I throw a cat on their laps to

calm them down. And clients love that we rescued the cats — we get extra points for that.”

The employees of HKA Inc., a Southern California public relations firm, took in Kitten, a 12-year-old female tabby. “She just showed up one day when she was a few months old,” says employee Robyn Williams. “When we feel stressed, we go looking for Kitten. Her antics make us laugh and remind us that life should be fun.”

Theresa Espinola says that Art Works, a Northern California art studio and sign shop, enjoyed a business boost after Hoover, a homeless flame-point Siamese, moved in. “Our customers think better of us,” she says. “He is obviously well cared for and friendly, so that shows we are kind and caring.”

The evidence isn’t just anecdotal. Studies confirm that a cat in the office means a less stressed workforce and a happier workplace, says Meredith Wells-

Somebody call 911. It should be a crime to be as good looking as Miami Beach Police Department’s Garfield.

**CRIME SCENE
PROCESSING**

CRIME SCENE



GARFIELD PHOTOS BY MARIANA JOMARRON AND KRISTEN RICKERT



Lepley, Ph.D., a researcher at the University of Kentucky's Institute for Workplace Innovation. One of her studies, "Labradors to Persians, Perceptions of Pets in the Workplace," found that pets improve customer and employee moods and reduce stress. Another one of her studies, "Critters in the Cube Farm," published in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, shows that cats foster social interaction, create a positive impression and make the work environment seem more friendly.

"When we feel stressed, we go looking for Kitten. Her antics make us laugh and remind us that life should be fun."



cat-friendly companies

Molly, a former lonely stray, loves her job as "greeter" at the U.S. Forest Service in Tennessee. "Every time the doorbell bongs, she's off from wherever she's napping to the front desk to say hello. She's very vocal and enjoys conversing," says an employee of the federal agency. "If someone is upset about something, Molly hops onto the counter to talk to the person. The visitor immediately softens, and the conversation goes much more smoothly."

Not every workplace is suited for every cat, however. "It is important to match the animal's personality with the setting," says veterinarian Martha Smith, interim president of the Animal Rescue League of Boston. "Social cats [like Molly] are happy with lots of people coming and going. Cats that are 'door dashers' don't belong in a store where they can escape every time a customer comes in or goes out." And timid kitties will probably prefer a calm, quiet environment (think law office, antique store or bookstore).

But if the animal's personality and safety are considered, a cat can live comfortably in just about any work setting — even a fire or police station. "A Boston firehouse has had a house cat for years," Smith says. "The cat lives upstairs in the bunkhouse. He eats and sleeps with the guys." Garfield, a creamy orange tabby, is the mascot for the Miami Beach Police Department. "He just showed up 10 years ago," says officer Mary Jomarron. Since then, he's been neutered, microchipped and registered to the station.

"His presence is comforting; having him around reduces the stress related to police work," Jomarron says.

who cleans the litter box?

"It takes only a few minutes to maintain the food, water and litter," says Nick Breton. But still — somebody's got to do it. Though they can be low-maintenance, cats need daily care, including on weekends and holidays. "An animal should never go two or three days without human contact," Smith says.

Another consideration: Who pays for food and vet visits? At HKA Inc., several employees pitch in to care for Kitten. "Our agency's chart of accounts has a category for pet care, used for vet bills and cat food, and the CEO, who lives nearby, makes sure to feed her twice a day, seven days a week," says Williams.

In many situations, cat care falls to the business owner by default. "Employees love having cats around, but they don't jump in to clean litter boxes, clean up hair balls or feed them," Velasco notes. "I also pay for food, litter and veterinary expenses out of pocket. Since it's my business, the decision to have cats in the office is mine, so they are my responsibility."

But Velasco wouldn't have it any other way. "When I think about our cats running around in 10 degrees and snow, I feel good that we've given them a home," she says. "I like coming into the office and finding a cat stretched across my desk. They make me smile." 🐾



TOP: Jake chills after a long day at the office.
BOTTOM: Alex and Balou hug it out.



Archer takes a break from cleaning the computer monitor. He's a cubicle cat at Trupanion, a Seattle-based pet insurance company.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TRUPANION



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRUPANION

It's no accident that Trupanion's Toby sits at the head of the boardroom table.

bringing pets to work

If a resident store or office cat isn't an option, how about allowing employees to bring their own pets to work? At TBWA\Chiat\Day in Los Angeles, dogs are not only allowed, they are encouraged. More than 50 dogs hang out in the office each day, and there's even a dedicated outdoor dog park for breaks. Having wagging tails around not only benefits the pets' people, but also the rest of the staff, who get to interact with them. TBWA\Chiat\Day believes companionship is good for the soul — whether you're a person or a pup.

Lee Clow, global director of media arts for the company, says, "Having animals around, mostly dogs, is therapeutic. We have 600-plus people here, working day and night, weekends. Lots of pressure. They're stressed, tired; some are 'emotionally fragile' before they get here (mostly the writers). But a dog smile, a tail wag or a lick on the cheek says it's going to be OK."

Before implementing a pet-friendly workplace, here are some things to consider:

Check with employees first. Most will agree that having pets around is a welcome perk, but some people may not like working around animals, says consultant Sandy Steinman, author of *The Small Business Turnaround Guide*.

Inform prospective employees. "We state up-front that two cats live in the office," says Debra Hansen, CEO of Teacher's Professional Resource in Lakewood, Colorado. The company's cats,

Slippers and Zelda, were adopted from a local rescue agency. "So, if someone was allergic, this job would not be a good fit," Hansen says.

Create some rules. At Petplan, a pet insurance company in Philadelphia, employees and pets abide by the company's Pets at Work Pledge. Among the guidelines: All pets must be current on vaccinations; no aggressive behavior is tolerated; dogs must be house-trained and cats must be trained to use a litter box; pet parents are responsible for cleaning up "accidents"; no feeding is allowed in the offices. The entire pledge is posted on the company's blog at gopetplan.com (search for "pets at work pledge").

Designate a pet-free zone. Kathy Velasco has made a conference room off-limits to her four office cats, so that at least one room in her advertising agency is guaranteed to be always fur-free and cat-free.



PHOTO BY BILL HORNSTEIN

Lee Clow and Winnie