

Boosting Productivity: Positive Effects of Allowing Dogs in the Office

While dog owners are always looking for ways to spend more time with their canine friends, leaders in business are always looking for more ways to increase productivity in the office. With this in mind, could there be a way of combining both? By allowing employees to bring their dogs to the office, will this actually increase productivity? Well, researchers seem to think so and we want to dig a little deeper into why this might be the case!

Many years ago, when offices were based around cubicles and managers thought productivity could only be achieved when employees had no means of communicating with (distracting) one another, the suggestion of bringing a dog to the office would have been ludicrous. As we start to learn more about what makes us tick in the workplace, however, it doesn't seem so silly considering dogs make us so happy.

Let's explore a few reasons as to why dogs could allow for the positive effect for which you've been searching!

Experts Believe in Dogs

As we all know, the best way to assess whether a story such as this is true would be to look towards the experts. Have they been studying dogs in offices? As it happens, they have and the results have been very positive. After assessing both employees with dogs nearby and employees without a dog in the vicinity while working in a factory, lower cortisol levels were found in those who spent the day with a canine friend.

In case you were unaware, cortisol is considered the 'stress hormone' and the level of cortisone produced by the adrenal glands will decide your motivation, fear, and overall mood. When cortisol levels are high, this essentially keeps the alarm trigger activated and can lead to heart disease, anxiety, depression, difficulty sleeping, headaches, forgetfulness, increases in weight, and problems with focus/concentration.

Thanks to the Open University, and Marie-Jose Enders in particular, we know that being around dogs can actually have a double effect. As your cortisol levels fall, oxytocin (a positive hormone and one that leads to happiness and a relaxed mood) increases. Therefore, we can safely say this is one point for allowing dogs in the office.

Just in case you needed persuading a little more, we can also point you in the direction of research by the Virginia Commonwealth University. In this study, the outcome showed that stress is always less likely when dogs are around.

Big Companies Believe in Dogs

As well as the experts, more and more big companies seem to be believing in dogs in the workplace. For example, Google (always setting trends!) allow dogs in their offices and it has also become a big trend in the Netherlands. While researching the topic, we found over 50 vacancies in Dutch companies that had at least one mention of dogs.

People Believe in Dogs

Finally, we reach the main section of the guide because, although this may seem obvious, people believe in dogs. Ultimately, there are a number of ways that dogs can bring about a boost in productivity.

Increased Motivation - Firstly, the simple fact of the matter is that your employees will feel motivated if they have their dog sitting next to them at the desk. Rather than worrying about them at home or feeling alone, the office simply becomes a second home for them both. With the dog snuggled at their feet, they feel relaxed and are much less likely to feel stress when a problem arises and this can be a great atmosphere to have in any office.

Furthermore, there's another perspective which suggests employees will feel valued after being allowed to bring their canine friends to the office. By making this change, you're showing that you care and that you

want them to have the right environment to enjoy work. Suddenly, the team will be more willing to go the extra mile when something goes wrong. This builds a real team effort, and leads nicely onto the next benefit.

Potential Teamwork - Take a dog into the office and watch how many people rally around them. Of course, this won't happen so severely if there are dogs in the office every day because employees will grow accustomed to the idea (one reason why those who introduce dogs need to be patient). However, employees will still stop to pet dogs around the office and this can lead to more conversation between colleagues. Soon enough, dogs allow for more communication and collaboration. In the past, many have noted how having dogs in the office has brought colleagues together.

Lower Healthcare Costs - We've seen how dogs can be beneficial for stress and our mental health, but there's also something to be said for our physical health too. According to the Human Animal Bond Research Initiative in the US, \$11.4 billion is saved every single year in doctors' visits for pet owners. Compared to non-pet owners, this is a huge difference. What's more, obesity is also less common in dog owners.

By introducing dogs to the office, prospective dog owner employees will be attracted to your company; those who previously didn't want to buy a dog because they didn't want to leave them at home during work may also now get a fluffy friend. Either way, you'll have yourself a healthier workforce and the company's healthcare and insurance costs both decrease.

Fewer Sick Days - Productivity doesn't just increase for the time your employees are in work, but it also increases because your team are missing fewer days for sickness and stress. As all business owners and managers know, sickness is a huge expense for all industries and it guarantees a knock to productivity. Now, this knock is reduced somewhat even for those who just want personal days to spend with their dog.

To put this one into perspective, nearly 12 million working days are lost on a yearly basis because of depression, stress, and anxiety. Not only is it costly, it's also not nice to think that your employees are going through these problems. With something as simple as allowing dogs into the office, there are things you can do as a business owner or manager.

Ultimately, this has huge repercussions for a business because you save the two most important resources; time and money. You don't have to contact an agency to replace the sick worker, you don't have to go a full day without getting certain tasks done, and you can take on more orders from customers. Of course, away from worrying about money, you can also be happy that your colleagues are happier and healthier.

Encourages Movement and Activity - Finally, have you ever reached the end of the day and then realized how little you actually moved? For many, they sit staring at the computer screen and don't even get up to pull the lunch from their bags. Not only does this sedentary lifestyle harm the body, it can be detrimental for the mind too. Sometimes, we need to move and change our environment every so often to see work problems from a fresh perspective and this is something that dogs can introduce so well.

Dogs need activity whether it's just a walk around the office or a short walk on the lunch break; either way, the change in environment and not staring at the same problem on a computer screen can work wonders. Especially if you go for a walk outside, you can forget about work for a while and just get some fresh air. By allowing the brain some rest, you might find that employees come back with a fresh attitude and can resolve potential problems immediately.

Introducing Dogs into the Workplace

Now we've seen the support dogs have from people, big companies, and experts in the niche, the next question is 'how can we introduce dogs successfully?'. We know what you're thinking, the first day will be a nightmare because nobody will be able to concentrate and very little work's going to get done; this is a fair concern. For this reason, we recommend a slow and steady introduction.

Acclimatise Both Dogs and Owners

Not only will the dogs need time to acclimatise to the new environment, your employees will also need to get used to their pets being next to them as they work; even the most focused of employees will have trouble walking past a colleague's desk when two little beady eyes and a bundle of fur are looking up at them.

With lots of new people and lots of new pets, both will need time to settle but we urge you to remember the long-term benefits. With some businesses, dogs have been so successful in the office that they've adopted a company pet (almost like a mascot). With shared responsibility for looking after them between the whole team, the mascot appears on social media and even Christmas cards. You may not be surprised to hear that customers and clients love the whole idea and normally welcome the company dog with open arms.

Honesty and Communication

In our opinion, we also believe it's important for employees to be honest with their colleagues and the management team. If food is to be shared, owners of excitable dogs should ensure that other dogs get a good look at the food otherwise they could go hungry. Also, make sure employees are honest about how well trained their dog is because having poorly-trained dogs roaming the office could soon end badly.

Have Fun

Finally, always remember why you chose to allow dogs in the office and spot the opportunities when they come. Even if you aren't fully on board just yet, lean into it and suggest group walks as a morale boost, suggest weekend dog-related days out as a company reward, offer incentives for the owners of dogs and, something we've failed to address so far, those who don't have dogs.

Not everybody in the office will own a dog, so make sure those who aren't owners don't feel left out or uncomfortable at any stage. If everybody comes together and generates ideas to make the plan work, it can create a great atmosphere and the business benefits from motivated employees, improved productivity, and fewer sick days!