

Your workplace's best friend?

Level: Intermediate +

Time: 90 minutes

Summary: This lesson is about taking pets into work. In this lesson, students:

1. discuss statistics from recent studies;
2. study a text on the advantages and disadvantages of taking a pet into work;
3. write a set of guidelines to ensure a pet-friendly workplace is a comfortable place for all concerned, including the pets;
4. exchange opinions on and experiences of taking pets into the workplace.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student

Group size: Any

Note: This lesson plan is for both pre-experience and in-work business students based on an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* issue 7/2019.

Warmer

Have students discuss the first set of questions briefly with a partner or in small groups. Then collate students' answers to question 2 on the board, and work out the percentage and most popular pet together. Students then read the text in question 3 and discuss their responses to it as a class or in small groups.

Key words

Students match the key words and expressions with the definitions and then find them in the article before reading carefully through the article and noticing how they are used in context. The words in the task are in the order that they appear in the article.

Key:

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1. companion | 7. groomed |
| 2. diversion | 8. poop scoops |
| 3. interact | 9. obedient |
| 4. pop over | 10. cruel |
| 5. morale | 11. resilience |
| 6. tend to | 12. revitalize |

Should you take a dog to work?

To make this more communicative, students can do this task in pairs. They should read the article again and find the reasons in favour of or against taking a dog to work and dictate these to their partner who should write them onto the worksheet.

Key (possible answers):

for	against
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs reduce people's stress levels. • They make offices more friendly. • They provide positive diversions. • They remind you to take a break, which in turn may reduce your stress and consequently increase your productivity. • They lower absenteeism. • They raise morale, employee engagement and retention. • They have a positive effect on both employee well-being and the business as a whole. • They provide emotional support and joy. • They help people recover from ill health or a difficult time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs might be an unwelcome distraction. • They can be unhygienic and smelly. • They may have 'accidents'. • Other people at work may be allergic to them. • It could be stressful or frightening for the animals to be in the workplace, with strange noises, smells and unfamiliar people.

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Workplace guidelines for responsible dog owners

Students complete the gaps with advice on what a dog owner should do if they decide to take their dog to work. Tell the students to use information from the article to complete their sentences. Their answers might vary, and the most important thing is for them to write complete, grammatically correct sentences. Encourage them to write further guidelines of their own.

Key (possible answers):

- *have a pet insurance policy*
- *make sure their dog is clean, well groomed, free of parasites and not smelly*
- *be 100 per cent responsible at all times for their dog*
- *train their dog to be obedient and not to bark*
- *make sure their dog doesn't feel stressed*

Discussion

In pairs or small groups, students discuss the questions. Hold a short, whole-class feedback session afterwards in which you compare the students' answers to the information in the information box from task 1 and the information given in the article. In general, do the opinions in the class reflect those in the information and the article? If not, briefly discuss why that might be.

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1 Warmer

1. **Do you have a pet?**
 - If so, give details.
 - What does your pet do while you're at work?
 - If not, have you ever shared a house or an office with a pet?
 - Would you like a pet?
2. **Work out what percentage of students in your class have or live with a pet. What is the most popular pet in your class?**
3. **Read the text below. How do the answers from your class compare to the information below?**

A NATION OF DOG LOVERS

- 49% of British households own a pet
- 26% of British households own a dog
- 88% of dog owners say they feel happier and have a better quality of life because of their animals
- 91% of people in a pet-friendly workplace say they feel fully engaged with their work
- 15 minutes of dog petting releases the feel-good hormones serotonin, prolactin and oxytocin, and lowers the stress hormone cortisol
- 83% of people in a pet-friendly workplace feel their work is rewarding and exciting
- 87% of dog owners meet the World Health Organization's exercise guidelines compared to 47% of those who do not own dogs
- 42% of those aged 18 to 34 across the UK would like to have or already enjoy a dog-friendly workplace
- 2.1 million dogs are left alone in the UK for five or more hours on a typical weekday



Sources: smallbusiness.co.uk (2017) (<https://bit.ly/2CF4wxn>)

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2 Key words

Match the key words to the definitions below. Find and underline them in the article. Then read the article and note how they are used in context.

tend to pop over morale interact diversion companion

1. someone that you spend a lot of time with _____
2. something that takes your attention away from other things _____
3. communicate with and react to someone _____
4. go somewhere for a short visit _____
5. the amount of enthusiasm that a person or group of people feel about their situation at a particular time _____
6. usually do a particular thing _____

revitalize resilience poop scoops obedient groomed cruel

7. brushed, tidy and clean _____
8. small tools for cleaning up your dog's waste from a public place _____
9. doing what someone says you must _____
10. likely to make someone suffer _____
11. someone's ability to become healthy, happy or strong again after an illness, disappointment or other problem _____
12. make someone feel healthy again _____

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By Julian Earwaker



Studies prove that pets can make a workplace more relaxed, more interesting and more productive. Would you take your dog to work or be happy for your colleague to bring their dog to work? And what would the animals think about that? JULIAN EARWAKER reports.

engagement, retention, attraction and presenteeism" in pet-friendly work environments. *Forbes.com* describes pet-friendly workplaces as being "win-win for employee well-being and for business".

Clearly, not every workplace is suitable for pets. And not every colleague, client or customer wants to be greeted by a dog or cat, however friendly. Men, in particular, tend to see pets as an unwelcome distraction. *CEO Today* reports that 12 per cent of British men admit to complaining about pets at work, compared to just one per cent of women. While few workplaces have specific policies regarding pets, all must observe health and safety laws.

Would you want to share your workplace with animals? A dog? Cat? Snake? Bird? Fish? As all pet owners know, animals can be unhygienic, smelly and well, unpredictable. What happens if one of them has an "accident" on the carpet or floor covering? What about colleagues who suffer from animal allergies? Pet experts *Purina.com* have a few tips, including keeping pets groomed, creating special pet spaces at work, providing poop scoops, treats, toys and, importantly, water bowls.

In Seattle, performance management company Trakstar runs a dog-friendly workplace – but sets out clear rules. Their number one rule: "Dog owners are 100 per cent responsible, 100 per cent of the time, for their pet's well-being, behaviour and biological needs, including: scooping, bagging, cleaning and sanitizing as needed." The firm also insists that anyone bringing their dog to work must have a pet insurance policy. Other requirements concern health and hygiene (being parasite free and not smelling too strongly) and behaviour (being obedient, not aggressive – and not barking too much).

While recognizing the advantages of animals for the workplace, not everyone thinks about the effect on the animals themselves. Some pets get stressed by strangers and strange environments. It can be cruel to take a pet to work in an artificially-lit, air-conditioned office with strange smells and loud noises. "We're thinking about our needs and how our pets help us," writes Krystal D'Costa in *Scientific American*, "but we are not considering what they may need from their environment in these cases."

1 As I sit in my garden office writing this article, Lilly is giving me the look. This usually means it's time for a walk or food. Or both. Lilly is a seven-year-old Jack Russell Terrier and family pet. She's a useful alarm if someone comes knocking at the front door. She's ideal for getting me away from my desk for a regular walk. She's also a fascinating character and great companion.

2 I'm not alone in enjoying the company of a pet at work. Almost half of Brits own a pet, while in the US, it's around 60 per cent. According to *CEO Today*, one-fifth of UK workplaces allow their employees to bring a pet to work – with "muttropolitan" London leading the way for workplace dogs. Around eight per cent of American companies currently permit pets. Amazon, Google and many other firms offer dog-friendly offices. *Scientific American* reports that pets at work help reduce stress, make the office more friendly and "provide a positive diversion".

3 Although dogs are the number one workplace pet, both dogs and cats have a similar effect on people, according to behavioural psychologist Lotte Spijkerman. "They reduce stress and increase productivity, mainly because they interact with you of their own accord," she told *BusinessInsider.com*, "and when they pop over to your work station, it's a good reminder that you might need to take a break."

4 There are other benefits to having pets at work, too: one recent study from West Virginia University showed that dog-friendly workplaces have "lower rates of absenteeism and higher worker morale and productivity". Research by US pet insurers Nationwide found "a significantly higher level of employee

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Animals have long had a role in therapeutic, mental health and medical environments. "One of the best ways to build resilience is to identify and support those things in our lives that revitalize us," writes wellness consultant Naz Beheshti at *Forbes.com*. "For many people, pets provide significant emotional support and joy. Smart business leaders would do well to be mindful of this resource and create pet-friendly workplaces for their employees who need it."

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Every year, there is a "Take Your Dog to Work Day". In 2020, it will be on 26 June. It's not something I get involved in because a dog is part of my everyday working life. And from the look on Lilly's face, it's time to finish this article as that walk should have happened half an hour ago.

JULIAN EARWAKER is a freelance journalist, prison writer-in-residence and book author.

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3 Should you take a dog to work?

What arguments does the article give for and against taking your dog to work? Complete the table.

for	against

4 Workplace guidelines for responsible dog owners

If a company does decide to allow dogs in the workplace, what should the dog owner's responsibilities be? Complete the guidelines with information from the article. Add any further guidelines you think would be useful.

People who take their dog to work should:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

5 Discussion

Discuss the questions. Give reasons for your answers.

- Does your company allow people to bring dogs to work?
- If not, have you ever worked anywhere that had a pet-friendly policy?
- Would you want to apply for a job at a company that has a pet-friendly policy?