

Pets find a place at the office

BY CASSANDRA KYLE DECEMBER 27, 2008

STORY PHOTOS (1)



Corrin Harper, president and CEO of Insightrix Research, holds company pet and chief morale officer Presley.

*Photograph by: Greg Pender, The StarPhoenix

Presley is a good little executive.

The chief morale officer (CMO) at Saskatoon's Insightrix Research Inc. always arrives on time, does his duties with ease and never asks for a raise -- only begging for a few extra treats after a job well-done. Presley, a terrier-mix who is about two years old, may be a dog, but in the office he relaxes staff and brings in customers, says Corrin Harper, Insightrix's president and CEO and the CMO's chief at-work caregiver.

"As far as a dog in the workplace, the one thing I've noticed is that from a business perspective, the clients are quite impressed with him," she said in a recent interview. "When they come here it's something different, 'Oh, there's a dog -- he's really cute and friendly.'"

"Our clients just love him. One of our clients made special trip here just to see him one day."

While he has cushy executive privileges now, including sleeping in a deluxe dog bed under Harper's desk and curling up with visitors on the couch in the reception area, Presley hasn't always had it so easy. The mild-tempered terrier was dodging death on the highway near Humboldt a couple of years ago when Harper, on her way back from a fun weekend at the lake, saw the stranded and scared pup and pulled him into her car.

After no one claimed the grey-haired canine, Harper decided to keep Presley. Unfortunately, the dog and her cat, Morris, could not peacefully co-exist, so Presley went to live with Harper's business partner Larry Goodfellow, who taxis him to Insightrix and back during the work-week.

Presley's addition to the office was welcomed by the tight-knit crew, who still jump at the chance to take the dog for a walk around Innovation Place or play tug-of-war with him and one of his toys, Harper said.

"There's been a couple of instances where we've been busy getting proposals out and we have tight timelines and it's fairly stressful ... and when you're done it's like, 'OK, I'll go play with Presley and throw his ball or one of his toys,' and it just kind of takes your mind off everything," she explained.

Insightrix isn't the only Saskatoon office that serves as a home away from home for a staff member's pet. Anne Dunn, a bookkeeper with Canadian Modular Manufacturing Corp., started bringing her schnoodle (poodle/schnauzer cross) to the office a year ago. Now, Emma is a fixture in the north industrial workspace.

"I bring her because she's a good companion; she gets me out of the office to take a walk in the middle of the day," Dunn said of Emma.

"She makes people smile in the building. You can't help but smile at her energy. ... Everybody who comes in, the mailman, the delivery guys, the men working here, they just smile at her, so I feel she's a big upliftment for the office."

At first the boss didn't like the idea of having Emma -- who was only a few months old at the time -- at the office, Dunn explained. Now, the big dog and the schnoodle get along just fine.

Emma makes the workday less monotonous, she said.

"She is definitely a stress reliever and she makes me smile and she makes me realize that there's something more than putting my head in the books for eight hours straight a day," Dunn explained.

Bringing a pet to the office is good for both the animal and staff, provided allergies aren't a concern and the dog or cat isn't too much of a distraction, said Michelle Wudrick, a dog trainer for more than 15 years. Her local company, Paws'n Train, has set up pairings of appropriate animals with places like nursing homes and other workplaces in the past.

"I've always been a proponent of dogs in the workplace," she said, adding pet owners have to make sure their animal is a good fit for the office -- and has the blessing of the boss -- before bringing it in.

"You don't want a dog that's going to constantly bark at people coming through the door and get disturbed and bite. Things like that you don't want in a dog. It's bad for business," Wudrick explained.

Still, under the right circumstances, having a pet in the office can be a worthwhile situation.

"They're comforting, they're there, if you need a break once in a while you'll go and pet the dog," she said. "I think it works both ways, it's a great thing to have."

Back at Insightrix, Harper says Presley's happy-go-lucky and calm attitude fits in with the work environment. Although not every office has its own CMO, the CEO thinks it's not a bad idea to appoint a pet to the position.

"It's kind of rare, but I guess I don't see a major downfall to it," Harper said. "I think it just adds to the workplace."

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