Dogs in the Workplace Help Reduce Stress, Says Study

Why are videos and GIFs of cute dogs so popular online? Because looking at them makes us smile and, even if we're not conscious of it, reduces our stress levels. And stress is a major contributor to employee absenteeism, morale and burnout, and results in significant loss of productivity and resources.

That's one reason why Take Your Dog to Work Day, which was June 20, was created. If letting workers bring their dogs to the workplace sounds nuts to you consider the results of this study by researchers from Virginia Commonwealth University.

The study, which was published in the March 2012 issue of the *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, found that dogs in the workplace may buffer the impact of stress for their owners—and make the job more satisfying for those with whom they come into contact.

The study took place at Replacements, Ltd., a retail business located in Greensboro, NC, which employs approximately 450 people. About 20-30 dogs are on the company premises each day.

Over one work week, participants completed surveys and collected saliva samples to measure stress hormone levels. In the areas of stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and support, the VCU researchers compared:

- Employees who bring their dogs to work
- Employees who don't bring their dogs to work
- Employees without pets.

The researchers didn't find a difference between the three employee groups on stress hormone levels, which was measured in the morning.

But over the course of the work day, self-reported stress declined for employees with their dogs present and increased for non-pet owners and dog owners who didn't bring their dogs to work. The team noted that stress significantly rose during the day when owners left their dogs at home compared to days they brought them to work.

Principal investigator Randolph T. Barker, Ph.D., professor of management in the VCU School of Business, said "Dogs in the workplace can make a positive difference. The differences in perceived stress between days the dog was present and absent were significant. The employees as a whole had higher job satisfaction than industry

norms.”

In addition, Barker noted that the team observed unique dog-related communication in the workplace that may contribute to employee performance and satisfaction.

For example, he said, although not part of the study, that employees without a dog were observed asking to take a co-worker’s dog out on a break. These were brief, positive exchanges as the dogs were taken and returned and also resulted in an employee break involving exercise.

Barker said that other findings revealed mostly positive comments from employees such as “pets in the workplace can be a great bonus for employee morale,” “having dogs here is great stress relief” and “dogs are positive; dogs increase coworker cooperation.”

“Pet presence may serve as a low-cost, wellness intervention readily available to many organizations and may enhance organizational satisfaction and perceptions of support. Of course, it is important to have policies in place to ensure only friendly, clean and well-behaved pets are present in the workplace,” he said.