

Western Banker Magazine: HR & Training Digest

Issue #32 – August 2016

Puppy Training New Employees

By Scott E. Byorum, Nationwide Real Estate Tax Service, Inc.

Your new employees, no matter how skilled, are a lot like puppies. They are new. They are looking for acceptance. They want to fit in and feel valuable. And they need support and guidance.

Sure, they are adults. They were raised by some form of parentage. They are supposed to be on their own, reliable and responsible. So yes, it's true, if they are going to make it at your bank they are going to need to pave a lot of their success on their own. You're not running a nursery.

But any successful bank knows that it owes a lot to the culture and environment it fosters. "Sink or swim" is not a wise business strategy. Because eventually it all filters down to customer and employee attrition rates... and your bottom line.

So think "puppies" for a minute.

Be a Pack Leader

Puppies want a strong, stable, and consistent leader. Strong is not to be read as loud and barking. They won't be top performers if they cower in your presence or run away from you with their tale between their legs. They want someone to look up to, someone they can be proud and eager to follow; someone who has noble principles and knows the path.

Puppies want stability and consistency. They want to know what to expect when they see you. They will become uncomfortable if you are erratic, nipping at them one day and nuzzling them the next. You'll lose their trust that way, so prove to them that you are a straight-shooter, that you walk your talk, and that your game is even-handed and fair for all.

Provide a Welcoming Environment

Puppies don't want to enter into a dog fight. They realize that everyone was there before them and they just want to be part of the pack. In a small pack, you'll want to introduce them to the others so they can become familiar with the faces and names. That might be impractical in a larger bank, so introduce them to a few top dogs, those they might encounter more frequently, before making the rounds with the pack they'll be running with. Above all, you want to treat them like they are part of the crew; that they belong.

Establish the Rules

Puppies need to know the rules or they will just scamper off and frolic impetuously. A puppy who is not familiar with their boundaries thinks it is playtime all the time. They go where they want,

when they want, doing what they want. Once the rules are flaunted, it is very difficult to re-establish control.

Provide Positive Reinforcement

The easiest way to get puppies to do what you want them to do is by training, encouraging, and rewarding the behaviors that you desire for them to exhibit and repeat. You don't want to over-reward them or they will come to expect the reward without putting in the work. Teach them the task or communicate the behavior you wish for them to do. Be enthusiastic. After all, isn't it absolutely fantastic when everything is running as it should?

When it comes to rewarding a good job and great behavior, one word fits the bill: "commensurate". Commensurate is equal or similar to something in size, amount, or degree. When a puppy learns to sit, you say something like "good puppy!" When they learn to retrieve, you give them a treat. When they successfully navigate the obstacle course, they get the big prize!

How does this translate for a bank employee? Provide verbal encouragement and gratitude. Hearing a genuine "thank you" means a lot to most people, because it makes them feel good inside... and feeling good feels good! Bring coffee or a bag of treats into the office. Throw down some gift cards once in a while. Take them to dinner when they land the big account. The ideas are limitless and most of them don't cost that much. What matters and means the most and is the most lasting is the gesture and good will it brings.

Engage Frequently

You've seen puppies that are neglected. They are wary and shy. They look sad. They sulk, cower, and hide. Think about the puppy that only gets talked to by its owner once a year and is told to do a "better job". Puppies crave attention, as do people, and they crave it on a regular basis.

Puppies are going to shy away from harsh or confusing behavior. They are going to thrive and delight in an engaging and supportive environment. It is not hard to see the parallels with people. We can often overlook, dismiss, or disregard the environmental and behavioral requirements of social beings. Behavior isn't inherent; it is learned... and it can be shaped, molded, and changed.

Scott Byorum is the director of business development at Nationwide Real Estate Tax Service, Inc., an author and a certified Instructional Designer. He can be reached at 800-528-7803 or scott@nationwidecompliance.com.