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In this office, 4-legged stress relief is key

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STEVE RINGMAN / THE SEATTLE TIMES
Softchoice employee Krystina Schaber is one of several at the Seattle company who bring their dogs to work. Roxie usually sleeps under her desk. The information-technology service and supply company has been allowing dogs since its inception in 1989.



STEVE RINGMAN / THE SEATTLE TIMES
Jenniver Iverson's dog, Tully, peers out into the hallway to see what's going on. Dogs who come to work at Softchoice must be potty-trained, at least 4 months old and have obedience-school certificates.

Every day, Joey goes to work at Softchoice. He's been there a year. His officemates describe him as fairly calm, though he gets riled when there's a lot going on.

Joey didn't feel well Friday, so he curled up beneath his desk and slept it off, ignoring visitors to his cubicle.

Joey is a 4-year-old Jack Russell terrier and one of 16 dogs approved to come to work with their owners at the Seattle office of Softchoice, an information-technology service and supply company.

Friday was the 10th annual Take Your Dog to Work Day, but having dogs at desks is just another day at Softchoice. The national "holiday" was conceived by Pet Sitters International, an organization for professional pet sitters, to celebrate canine companionship and to encourage doggy adoption.

Several South Lake Union-area businesses accepted pet-food donations for the Seattle Humane Society in honor of Take Your Dog to Work Day. The Humane Society distributes the donated food to low-income, senior and disabled pet owners.

And the Humane Society's mobile adoption center was at the South Lake Union Discovery Center for on-the-spot adoptions.

Softchoice has been allowing dogs since its inception in 1989. Founder David Holgate didn't like leaving his dog at home, and Softchoice employees soon found that incorporating canines in the workplace fostered a friendlier, more relaxed work environment, said John Eddison, a sales manager and chairman of the office's dog-owners group at the office near Olympic Sculpture Park.

Eddison shares his office with his 2-year-old husky mix, Shorty. He says office dogs are a good way for people in different work groups to make connections.

"We have a joke around here: Everyone says 'hi' to the dogs first," Eddison said. "Recently, I had a couple deals fall through, and it's great to be able to sit with [Shorty] for a couple of minutes and decompress."

Studies have shown the presence of dogs reduces stress and anxiety, said JoAnn Turnbull, a spokeswoman for the Delta Society in Bellevue, a nonprofit organization that offers animal-assisted therapy programs.

"Obviously, there's stress in most work environments," Turnbull said, "and just being able to reach out and pet the dog can help."

Softchoice lets applicants know upfront it's a dog-friendly workplace. But accommodations are made so people with allergies can be in a cubicle pod without dogs. Dogs must be potty-trained, at least 4 months old and have obedience-school certificates in order to come to work.

And the company has a three-strikes policy for barkers and mess-makers. No aggression is tolerated.

"It's such a stress relief," Eddison said, "you look down at your dog, and you have to smile."

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