

Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS)

WORKPLACE CULTURE AGREEMENT

We are drawn to work at PAWS because of its mission to advocate for animals. And while we spend our lives together doing this work, we can choose to create a humane and healthy workplace for ourselves.

Support a united PAWS

- Honor and respect differences between departments and locations
- Minimize inter-department competition
- Practice “we” thinking
- Seek to understand the different needs of the departments
- We are all responsible for the whole
- Include, rather than exclude

Practice collaboration, cooperation and coordination

- Provide access to information about decisions, decision-making processes and what’s going on
- Encourage inter- and intra-departmental collaboration
- If you must interrupt someone, give them a chance to say if it’s a good time or not, and schedule a later time if need be

Embrace diversity and practice open-mindedness

- Expect differences
- Different is not wrong
- Look for the contribution that each person is trying to make to help the animals
- See commonalities and seek to understand differences
- Disagreements are not necessarily a hindrance—they keep PAWS dynamic

Practice open, direct, prompt communications

- Take a stand to stop gossip
- Practice proactive listening and seek to understand
- Deliver and receive complaints, suggestions, and other communications responsibly
- Hear someone out before responding
- Take time to check for understanding before proceeding
- Practice honesty
- Use phone or face-to-face meetings when topics merit such communications; e-mails can be misinterpreted or impersonal

Deal with conflict responsibly

- Agree to resolve outstanding conflict NOW
- Be active in resolving conflicts
- Deal with conflict directly—with the persons involved
- Show respect—keep your voice calm and your language clean

Shelters and animal care and control agencies employ people from many walks of life— individuals with different views, personalities, and work ethics. Although the alternative would probably seem pretty dull, sometimes all that diversity can be a recipe for conflict. But the road to a healthy work environment can start with a simple document that describes the ideal interactions among staff.

- Promote healthy conflict—view it as an opportunity to explore differences and increase understanding
- Opinions are subjective—respect other people’s right to their own perspectives

Promote trust

- Everyone takes responsibility for themselves in continuing to build trust and is accountable for their actions
- Commit to working towards a healthier future
- Lend support to build trust individual to individual, intra- and inter-department, between locations and PAWS-wide
- Trust that everyone at PAWS is making decisions for the animals in good faith—or check it out if you have questions

Address problems proactively and constructively

- Treat complaints, suggestions, and ideas with respect
- Take responsibility to bring issues needing attention to someone who can take action
- Think constructively, look for solutions
- Encourage people to work things out between themselves
- Give up the grudges or let grudges be a signal to you that you need to go talk with the person in question

Demonstrate respect

- Respect people’s right to different opinions
- Respect decisions made
- Respect the right to disagree
- Extend compassion to your coworkers
- Practice courtesy and consideration of others
- Value each other regardless of job title, seniority, position, or opinion

Acknowledge feelings and the emotional aspects of our work

- Recognize the importance of having a sense of humor—lighten up
- Identify healthy ways to reduce or release stress—ask for help if you need it
- Find ways appropriate to the setting to express sadness, grief, and anger when those feelings arise
- Respect others’ response to emotions—help them find creative and appropriate outlets to express their feelings
- Keep things in perspective—help yourself and others maintain a positive outlook
- Have fun!

Create and maintain a safe workplace

- Find safe ways to accomplish your task
- Commit to following safety procedures even when you’re in a hurry
- Know your limitations and seek out others to help when needed
- Bring safety concerns to the attention of your supervisor or someone on the safety committee

Show appreciation

- Remember why we have chosen to work here
- Practice appreciation at all levels of the organization
- Acknowledge people across the organization when they’re really fantastic
- Model appreciation interdependently as well as inter- and intra-departmentally and individually

The Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) in Lynnwood, Washington, created this workplace culture agreement that lays the ground rules for working at the shelter, guidelines that range from a ban on gossip to a focus on finding healthy stress relievers. In 2003, PAWS reaffirmed these principles, which are posted in the building and appear in the shelter’s employee and volunteer manuals.