

Coffee Break



When your work becomes overwhelming and you start to burn out, how do you regain a positive attitude and find the strength to continue?

That's the question we asked, and you responded with all sorts of mood-improving methods—from getting together with friends to reading a good book to spending time with pets or shelter animals.

No matter what anyone may say, it is not sacrilege to forget about work for a day! I try to plan a day with extended family or friends. It helps to travel a little—to get away from my town, my house, the things that I look at every day when I come home from work. The other thing I do is immerse myself in a good book. When I go back to work, things are back in perspective and I'm able to look at problems with renewed energy and successes with renewed joy.

—Melissa Snitzer, *Animal Shelter Inc.*,
Sterling, Massachusetts

I make sure I take a long walk with a favorite dog in the sun and think hard about the “balance” in my life. Sometimes if all areas of my life are not well-balanced and I have not taken time to enjoy other hobbies and friends and family, it affects the quality of time I spend with the animals I help care for. So I try to make sure my diet is healthy and my personal relationships are healthy by spending time with my children and closest friends—the rest falls into place. And I remember I am a good person for helping the animals somebody else chose not to.

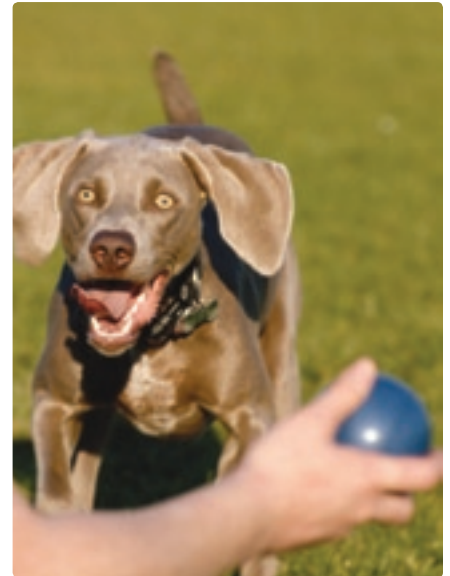
—June Hatlestad, *First Coast No More Homeless Pets*, Jacksonville, Florida

I look back at photos of the animals I was able to help. Seeing them in their new homes and getting the love that they deserve makes it all worth it. I will look back at notes or e-mails that I get from people who have adopted my cruelty-case animals. Somehow this makes everything okay.

—Cheryl Shaw, *Chester County SPCA*,
West Chester, Pennsylvania

I take my lunch break and take dogs out to our compound and let them play and run around. I can usually take three or four animals out in an hour's time. It makes me feel so refreshed to come back to work and deal with the public. The dogs enjoy it, and so do I.

—Gail Ross, *City of Edmonton Animal Control*, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada



The first thing I do is take a deep breath. It's amazing what getting some much needed oxygen to your brain can do for your thought processes, not to mention your ability to cope. I try to expand my inner vision to beyond the problems that are immediately in front of me. There are so many amazing people, places, and things in this world—mountains, lakes, flowers, teachers, coworkers, friends, and family. Then I look around me at everything I have, and especially at my animal friends—how can I help be anything but happy and grateful for the love and joy they bring me?

—Cynthia MacMillan, *Sequoia Humane Society*, Eureka, California

I remind myself I need to stay strong and firm to help the rest of the staff hold it together—and be positive and cheery even when I am exhausted. To do so, I'll take a break from the customer side of things and spend the day entrenched in animal care, dog-walking, extra training, and grooming. After a full day of all the little things that keep the shelter running, I am refreshed and recharged.

—Karen Caswell, *New Hampshire SPCA*,
Stratham, New Hampshire

We keep all the communications that people send us about the pets that we have adopted to them in our brag book. We take this book along to all of our functions for other people to read in the hopes that they realize shelter animals are not damaged animals. When I get one of these letters, it renews my strength to go on.

—Roxanne M. Smeltzer, *Susquehanna Stray Animal Shelter, Red Lion, Pennsylvania*

I simply remember one thing: how fortunate I am that I am in a position to help. Imagine how awful it must be to have to look on suffering and be powerless to do anything about it!

—Cary Birdwell, *volunteer, Humane Society of Dallas County, Dallas, Texas*



I put the “out of the office” sign on my door and take my three cocker spaniels to the dog park and spend an hour walking, throwing the ball for the dogs, and watching them run and play, happy as clams. The physical exercise, fresh air, and joy of seeing how happy my dogs are gives me the energy to go back to the office and plug away some more for the best interests of the critters in our care.

—MiChielle Cooper, *Buck Animal Welfare Fund, Inc., Emporia, Kansas*

I name five things that I am thankful for that day. They can be small things (“I’m thankful my hair looks nice today”) or important things (“I’m thankful that all my pets are healthy”). This really puts my day in perspective.

—Stephanie Steele, *volunteer, Humane Society of Genesee County, Burton, Michigan*

I sit with the dogs and cats in the shelter and think of the countless hours the volunteers have served the shelter, and this seems to help me continue. Because if there were not caring and passionate people that volunteer at the shelter, there would be more need for animal control and care. The volunteers and their caring keep me going.

—Dan Woodruff, *City of Arab Animal Control, Arab, Alabama*

We get together with our volunteers and have a potluck or a Saturday coffee break. We share stories about our horses, dogs, cats, and other animals in our lives. The laughter (and sometimes tears) and group energy always gives us a boost and renewed commitment.

—Jane Heath, *Montana Horse Sanctuary, Helena, Montana*

I try to take the last half-hour every day to visit our cat rooms and make sure every kitty gets talked to and that heads get rubbed, especially those who have been here a long time or don’t seem to attract as much notice from others. It’s therapeutic for me and essential for them to feel loved. Reminding myself why I’m here and who I’m working on behalf of gives me the strength to tackle difficult issues the following day.

—Heather Rigney, *Louisiana SPCA, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***Animal Sheltering* congratulates Cary Birdwell, a volunteer at the Humane Society of Dallas County in Dallas, Texas, whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. The organization will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. “Bone” appetit!**

Our next question: Does your job follow you everywhere—even when you’re on vacation or taking the day off? Tell us how.

Please submit your responses (250 words or less) at www.AnimalSheltering.org/coffeebreak or send them to Editor, *Animal Sheltering/HSUS*, 2100 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20037. **Your answer may be printed in a future issue of *Animal Sheltering*.** If your response is chosen for publication, you will be entered into a drawing to win a **free coffee break (valued at \$50)** for your organization. No donation or purchase is necessary to win; see www.AnimalSheltering.org for contest rules, or send an e-mail or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.