

# Coffee Break

## What advice would you give someone starting out in the animal welfare field?

That was the question we asked you for this issue's Coffee Break, and you passed on great advice for newbies: Stay positive, try to withhold judgment, and remember that people are the most challenging animals. More of your great advice is available online at [animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak](http://animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak).



MONIQUE RODRIGUEZ/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

There will be many challenges and rewarding days ahead of you once you have entered into this career; you must remember to keep personal feelings and opinions out of your daily investigations and casework (which is the hardest thing to do). The work is rewarding in the sense that you will rescue homeless and injured animals and defend them from those who cause harm to them; you are their voice and guardian, and they will love you for it. Always seek opportunities to improve yourself, get continued education, and be involved with your local city and/or county government to keep animal codes current and strong to help both the citizens of your community and the animals you are empowered to protect.

—Rance McIntyre, Chief  
Kitsap Humane Society  
Silverdale, Washington

The most challenging thing about working in the animal sheltering field does not have to do with the animals at all. It is the people. Learn to leave your ego at the door and pack an extra bit of sense of humor. Your co-workers, bosses, commu-

nity partners, and customers will test your patience to the limit and inspire your confidence in the human spirit ... often at the same time. You will find that by caring for the humans, you are much more able to help the animals. You may even find that, although you start working at a shelter for the animals, you are able to help them best by focusing almost exclusively on the humans who interact with them. That being said, do take time to hold a kitten or just watch some dogs play every once in a while, especially when you feel burnt-out (and you will feel burnt-out). Also, make sure your husband, wife, or significant other knows that random animals will just "show up" at your house. ("Of course I didn't adopt a puppy without telling you, honey! This is just a foster!" Learn to say this phrase with a straight face—you will use it more than you think!)

—Kimberly Cline, Administrative Specialist  
Oklahoma City Animal Welfare Division  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Every animal comes to us for a different reason. Just keep in mind that people are doing the best they can at the present mo-

ment. Help each animal and person that comes to you; try not to be overwhelmed by all the others. Focus on what's in front of you, and help there in the way that best matches with your abilities and desire. You will succeed, feel fulfilled, and it will be sustainable.

—Yolanda Morris, Board Member  
Pawsitive Alliance  
Seattle, Washington

Stay positive! You will enjoy life and job more. It is easier to think about solutions. We got into animal work because we like animals, [but] remember that, to be effective, we need to work with people. ... Remember that you will be much more effective if you are pleasant and articulate. Listen to others! If you do not listen to them, do not expect them to listen to you. If you do not talk to them, they will not realize they should change (spay, neuter, confine, train, vaccinate, etc.). If you are rude or lecture, you will turn them off. When you cause change in one person, it is likely they will cause change in others. When someone says, "I could not do your job," take it as a compliment. They are telling you that they are not willing to emotionally invest in an animal because there is a risk of being hurt. Take care of yourself. Recognize your limits. Stay physically and emotionally healthy. You will be more effective for a longer period. Remember that you are not alone.

—John Vail, Director  
Amador County Animal Control  
Jackson, California

We encounter many visitors who comment on how much they would love to work at a shelter. When we ask them why, we receive the reply, "Because I think it would be so fun to pet and play with the animals all day!"

I have been in the shelter field for five years. Upon entering this career, I knew there was so much more to the job than just playing and petting animals. You definitely need to have a passion for animals ... but you also need to have the dedica-

tion to give 100 percent daily for the thousands of pets that enter the shelter each year. In addition, staff must be able to communicate effectively with other staff, management, a board of directors, volunteers, and visitors—so people skills are very important. Emotional stability is also important. We all love the warm fuzzy story of how one of our hard-to-place animals has finally found a loving family to call his own—it is what keeps most of us going. Unfortunately, we also encounter situations of animal abuse/neglect, animal seizures, and the hundreds of pets that are thoughtlessly discarded because they grew too big, got too old, or the children no longer play with them. The emotional highs and lows can turn like the tide on any given day, but through it all, you need to remain positive. And at the end of your day, as you are leaving the building, it may be that tiny paw through the bars, or the inquisitive look from the dogs and the wag of a tail that brings a smile to your face and makes you happy to have made a difference for the many animals that come your way!

—Jenny Vandevelde, Shelter Manager  
Lakeshore Humane Society  
Manitowoc, Wisconsin

Something that I've been told and wish that I had taken more heed to is to start slowly, and stay within your limits. Starting out, you normally want to dive right in and do as much as you can. While this is noble, you risk spreading yourself too thin and getting burned-out. Try to find out what your skills are and where you can apply them. Then pick a few things, or one big thing, to focus on, so that you can contribute your best, stay healthy yourself, and help the animals the most.

—Lauren Ashley, Volunteer PR Coordinator  
Cat Guardians, Inc.  
Lombard, Illinois

**Animal Sheltering congratulates Yolanda Morris of Seattle, Wash., whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Pawsitive Alliance, where she works, will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appetit!**

**Next question:  
What is the public's biggest misconception about your work? What would you like to tell them about your organization, your co-workers, and your animals?**

Please submit your responses (150 words or less) at [animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak](http://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. Responses may be edited for length or clarity; no donation or purchase is necessary to win. See [animalsheltering.org](http://animalsheltering.org) for contest rules, or send an e-mail or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.