



Paw Prints

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The Agony, the Attitude and the No-Kill Movement

The numbers are staggering: 70% of all cats and 65% of all dogs in shelters are euthanized.

How did shelters become the biggest killers of companion animals in this country? How can such places be called “shelters” with so many dying there? Is this what Henry Bergh, father of the American humane movement, had envisioned?

No.

And while it might be easy to point to pet overpopulation, shelter policies, or resource issues as the culprit, the truth is that we as a society are to blame. The bottom line? If we are to become a No-Kill Nation, our attitude toward companion animals *must* change.

Buffalo Humane is a no-kill organization. But what does that mean? To us, it means dedicating ourselves fully to the animals in our care. That doesn't mean that we *never* euthanize. But it *does* mean that we give the animal the opportunity to have a life of reasonable quality, ideally in a home with a responsible human caregiver. We attend to medical needs, evaluate quality-of-life prospects for animals with chronic conditions, work to find suitable homes where special-needs animals can continue to be cared for and loved, and we devote significant effort to rehabilitating animals with behavioral problems so that they might find their own forever home. In some, very rare cases, we cannot successfully rehabilitate an animal or ensure a reasonable quality of life, and we must make the *heart-wrenching* decision to let the animal pass on over the Rainbow Bridge.

Still, the no-kill philosophy remains controversial. Organizations such as ours are often criticized for their no-kill policies. Consider the following arguments: Some people see no-kill as a

matter of relegating dogs and cats to a lifetime in small cages, slowly “going mad” because they receive little personal attention. Others see no-kill as a noble though unattainable goal that results in significant resources “squandered” on largely unadoptable animals while other animals are left wanting, with few rescue prospects. Still others see no-kill as impossible.

Most people probably see the no-kill question as purely a matter of resources. A given shelter can't possibly become no-kill because of a lack of space (a resource). A given dog pound can't become no-kill because there isn't enough money (a resource). And a given rescue can't become no-kill because they don't have the people (a resource). But while all these points may be valid, the simple fact is that we all need

a fundamental change in *attitude*.

To become a No-Kill Nation, our attitude toward companion animals must change. Furthermore, that attitude change must come from every one of us, from the individual who has one dog or one cat to the lawmakers at the local, state,

and federal levels. We must stop viewing companion animals as disposable commodities and as nuisances.

Dog doesn't behave properly? Maybe the next one will. NO — new attitude.

Feral cats pooping in the garden beds? Trap and take to a shelter (to be euthanized). NO — new attitude.

Dog is aggressive? Take it to a shelter; they'll find him a home. NO — new attitude.

Moving, new place doesn't take pets? It will get adopted. NO — new attitude.

Elderly parent left behind older dog? Someone will take it. NO — new attitude.

Recommended Reading:

“Redemption, The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No Kill Movement”

By Nathan Winograd

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Attitude... (continued from page 1)

A new attitude is also needed by those to whom we entrust the care of abused, neglected, abandoned, or lost companion animals. Throughout the United States, thousands of government-supported or subsidized dog pounds routinely euthanize 80-90% of all the animals that enter their facilities. Yet only 200 miles away from Buffalo, a young dog warden – with a different attitude – rarely euthanizes a dog, despite the poverty in her county, the paucity of resources, and large numbers of roaming animals. How does she do it? She works cooperatively with local volunteers, local vets, rescue groups, and her staff of one to find placements for the dogs. She vaccinates every dog at intake, so her disease rate is almost non-existent. She utilizes Petfinder.com to list dogs quickly on the website. She works with local vet clinics to get all the animals altered at a low cost before they go to new homes. She instituted a work-release program to allow inmates from the local jail to come in and help walk, socialize, and care for the dogs. She organizes fundraisers to make improvements at the pound. She does monthly low-cost vaccination clinics for area dogs and cats. And she office-fosters the dogs when needed. This county dog pound is in a steel and concrete building that has seen better years, yet when you walk into the building, the kennels are clean, the dogs are comfortable, and the building feels hopeful and bright. This is dog warden Dawn McVay and the dog pound for Columbiana County, located in Lisbon, OH.

Twenty miles away from the Columbiana facility is another county dog pound and a scene that is repeated county-after-county throughout Ohio and many other states. Multiple dogs are housed together in runs designed for single dogs, without regard to temperament, health, age, or gender. If it is a weekday, they might be fed – but on weekends they might not. Injured or ill dogs receive no veterinary attention, but are left to suffer through their stray hold. Even though disease is rampant, and young puppies are born and die right there from distemper and parvo, neither vaccinations nor sanitation protocols are part of standard operating procedure. You walk in and feel the fear and sadness that permeates the building. The dogs can smell the death and despair in the place, even if we humans cannot. The gas chamber sits out back waiting for that third day when (multiple) dogs are shoved into a small box and gassed. Once they have been killed, they are thrown into a dumpster and hauled away to the dump like garbage. There is no policy to work with rescue groups, and local animal advocates are treated like annoying gnats rather than being enlisted to help find homes for the animals or improve shelter conditions. This facility has an 87% kill rate.

In the first dog pound, the dog warden is committed to saving the dogs in her care, while in the second, the dog warden sees the dogs as garbage. How is that for attitude?

Where, then, do we start?

We need to stop allowing our municipal or governmental dog pounds to be killing machines. We must demand that they stop the slaughter of animals without regard to what they can do to save them. Program success should be evaluated on the number

of animals *saved* not the number off the streets. And moving an animal out to another rescue group is as good as adoption, even if fees are waived.

We need to stop thinking that dogs and cats need to be perfect in every situation in order to be allowed to live. Behavioral evaluations are a great tool for shelters and rescues, but should not be used to make life and death decisions by untrained employees on stressed animals in unfamiliar or stressful surroundings. Animals are plucked off the streets and shoved into shelters where the smell of fear, aggression, and sickness permeate throughout. We then expect them to act like perfect angels as we poke, prod, and test them. Let me ask you this – if you were thrown into jail for no other reason than just being alive – how stressed would you be? Behavioral evaluations assess the behavior at only a given moment and do not always indicate the animal's true personality. Top animal behaviorists in this country recommend that behavioral tests be done at least three times before making euthanasia decisions. If a cat hisses because it is frightened from being thrown into a cage with a catch pole or a dog barks because it is stressed and alone, does that give one the right to kill it? And a behavior that is manifest in one environment (the shelter) may never arise in another environment (the home).

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We need to stop thinking of feral cats as vermin and start working toward a humane and cost-effective solution to the cat population explosion. Controlled cat colonies are beneficial to the community and can be instrumental in keeping rodent populations under control. Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-and-Return (TNVR) programs have proved *more effective than extermination* in reducing feral cat populations and animal control costs. We need to stop being angry at the woman at the end of her block that feeds stray wild cats and start working with her to control the population and build a safe habitat for them to survive the winter.

We need to work cooperatively with other rescues, shelters, and individuals who want to help animals. Shelters need to work with area rescue groups to move animals to foster homes when they start showing signs of kennel stress, and not wait until they are so damaged that euthanasia is the only answer. Independent behavioral assessments should also be allowed by outside groups, to see if the environment (not the dog) is responsible for a poor test performance. Three-day holds should not turn into three-month holds while a complacent shelter staff ignores the animal. Shelter administrators need to find *solutions* to euthanasia, and stop focusing on *justifications* for euthanasia. Rescue groups need to stop the superior attitudes they exhibit with other rescue groups, shelters, adopters, and the general public and start working cooperatively. Individuals need to stop purchasing puppies from pet stores, puppy mills, and backyard breeders, and think carefully before acquiring a pet. Individuals must also start living up to their *lifelong* commitment to their companion animal, and not viewing it as an item to *trade in* for another.

Our companion animals — all of them — are OUR responsibility. We all have to do our part. And that starts with ATTITUDE!

Dog Tip of the Month – Make it Work

Phone calls and emails arrive daily from people asking us to take in their dog or cat for various reasons. Most of these reasons are easy to fix, some need specialized help, but all are a result of people not taking responsibility for the life they originally committed to care for. The following are the top reasons for dog relinquishment that we have encountered and some simple tips to help people keep their own beloved pets.

We are moving and can't take our dog with us. Pet friendly housing may not be easy to find, but it is nowhere near impossible either. Most not-for-profit shelters and rescues in an area have listings of apartments and homes that allow pets. Contact the area shelters and rescue groups for regional listings. Get an apartment guide for the new area and call everything within your price range. You might have to sacrifice some creature comforts, but isn't your dog worth it? Would you leave your child behind because the first couple of apartment complexes you called wouldn't take children?

Our dog chews everything, he is destroying our house. Make sure your dog is set up for success. If the dog is still untrustworthy alone in the house, set up a crate or a dog-proof room that the dog can stay in when you aren't home. Make sure your dog has plenty of appropriate chew toys. Interactive toys such as Kongs® or treat dispensing balls are especially good at keeping your dog occupied. If using a crate, make sure it is the most wonderful place for your dog to be. Feed your dog in his crate, give special treats in the crate, and save the most wonderful bones for the crate (supervised, of course).

My dog is so high-energy, he is not getting what he needs from me. The first thing to remember is that energy levels decrease with age – just as with human children. This, too, shall pass. (Did you relinquish your child during the terrible twos?) All dogs benefit from both physical and mental activity, but that doesn't mean you have to be a jogger or take your dog on daily 5-mile walks. Fifteen-minute training sessions a couple times per day can work wonders. Going through a routine of sits, downs, shakes, stays, etc., will not only help mentally stimulate your dog – but it gives you the added benefit of a trained dog. Take your dog to training classes. There are a great many wonderful dog-training

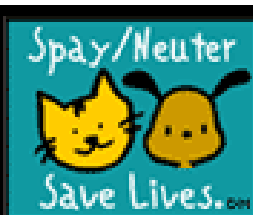
facilities throughout the area that offer group classes, ranging from puppy socialization to advanced agility. Doggie daycare can be a terrific way to help younger dogs release some pent-up energy and stay socialized as well. If you are more of a couch potato, as I am, tossing a tennis ball up a flight of stairs or off a wall can give your dog a great deal of exercise without you having to leave your chair. Play hide-and-seek by hiding treats throughout the house, and let your dog spend time seeking them all out. All of these activities can help your dog release some pent-up energy, as well as help you connect with your loyal companion.

My dog barks all the time and the neighbors are complaining. When dogs bark, they are trying to communicate. Many times dogs bark out of boredom or stress. Yelling at your dog to stop barking has the opposite effect that you want. Two things can happen. Either the dog thinks you are “talking” back and will continue to try to communicate to you by barking, or the dog will see it as getting attention and bark more for even more attention. So when he barks, don't give him that attention – walk away and ignore it. When your dog is quiet and not barking, give him loads of positive reinforcement and affection. It won't happen overnight, but with perseverance and consistency, the barking will decrease.

My dog needs medical care and I can't afford it. Every rescue and shelter spends a great deal of time and energy raising money for animals. Our organization alone spends about 95% of our money on animal vet costs, food, and supplies. You can raise money as well, as long as you are committed to it. Garage sales, fundraising parties, raffles, etc. can all help raise money for needed medical care. Talk to your animal-loving friends and family to help brainstorm on ways to raise money.

We are blessed in the area to have so many resources to help with our dogs. Training facilities, dog daycare centers, and rescue organizations can all be helpful in making life with your dog rewarding and harmonious. Upon acquiring an animal, you have made a commitment. Now it's up to you to “make it work.”

Clara Miller is Vice President of Communications and also trains dogs in her spare time.



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Cat Tip of the Month - The Reasons and Reality

Seldom a month goes by that I don't get an email asking if I can help rehome one or more cats. The reasons are many:

"I just lost my job and home, so can no longer take care of my cat..."

"We love our cat, but don't have the time..."

"My kids/husband/wife is allergic, so we can't keep our cat..."

"Our cat is spraying and biting..."

"We just had a baby, and I'm afraid the cat will scratch..."

"We're getting a divorce and need to find a new home for our cats..."

"We adopted a second cat, but he doesn't get along with the first, so we have to get rid of him..."

The reasons are many, but the reality is sobering. The market for cats is limited, especially for those older than 4-5 years and particularly if the cat is behaving inappropriately. If you don't want to deal with the problem, no one else will either. Such a cat taken to the SPCA is likely to be euthanized, especially in these tough economic times when adoptions decline.

My first approach to these calls is to talk through the problem and offer some solutions. What can be done in these cases? What can YOU do if you find yourself in this position?

For economic hardships, you may be interested to know that the SPCA does offer an emergency boarding service. This is a temporary arrangement of course, but it might be just what some families need to tide them over while they find housing. The SPCA also lists pet-friendly apartment buildings on their web site. Occasionally Buffalo Humane or another local rescue can work out a short-

term foster arrangement.

For allergies, there are several treatments. One is for the humans to receive a series of injections to desensitize them to the cat so it no longer causes a problem. Another is for the humans to take antihistamines like Claritin or Benadryl to reduce the symptoms (much like hay fever treatment). Yet another is to use Allerpet, a product that is wiped onto the cat's fur every week – it reduces the amount of allergens released into the air.

For fears about cats and newborns, education is the key. Old wives' tales, such as cats "stealing a baby's breath" need to be dispelled. Most cats are unlikely to injure babies, and they can make wonderful companions as the children grow.

For separations, divorces, and other family splits, it is advisable for one or the other partner to take the cats so they can be kept together. Cats find change very stressful, and stress is more likely to lead to inappropriate behavior.

For cats that do not get along and for litter-box or aggression problems, Buffalo Humane offers cat counseling either by phone, email, or face-to-face. It is often best to have our cat behavior counselor visit the home and observe the behavior in order to suggest the best solution. Cat behavior can often be modified, and despite what many believe, cats are very easily trained.

As you can see, there are many ways in which we can work together to help keep cats in their homes. Please, please, please, DO NOT hesitate to call and ask us to help before you jump to the conclusion that you have to give up your cat!

Pamela Rose is on Buffalo Humane's Board of Directors, and she also volunteers for the SPCA on cat behavior issues.