

LifeMapSM



"LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success. Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more enjoyable and abundant life."

June 17, 2008

This Week's Message:

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A Path To More Fun and Better Health.

What if I told you there was a great way to bring a bit more fun into your life including your workplace? What if I also told you that at the same time you could improve your health as well as facilitate more effective communications with your family members, friends and colleagues at work? No - this isn't the next Oprah-endorsed self-help book. What I speak of this week is the power of giving and receiving love from our pets.

The bond between humans and animals goes back millennia, when certain wolves first started to gather tentatively near a caveman's fire. For much of human history animals were primarily used for plowing our fields, grinding our grains, feeding our families, catching rodents, transporting our goods and us, and guarding our homes. Over time man and beast began to trust each other and eventually take comfort in each other's presence.

As we humans developed beyond the subsistence level certain domesticated animals evolved from service animals to pets and companions and, starting with clan leaders and royalty, we began welcoming them into our homes, our families and our hearts. Egyptian tomb paintings, ancient Greek and Roman frescos, and paintings from the royal courts of Europe and Asia all document this evolving attachment between the species as civilization itself grew and spread.

So what is it about animals that so powerfully draw us to them? The answer is that for centuries people simply felt better around animals and now we have discovered that the strong, positive interaction that exists between humans and animals is beneficial to every member of the human family including individuals, children, couples and elders. The positive and healthful effects of this bond are supported and validated by case studies and hard data from scientific research. Let's take a look.

Paths Forward

- **Benefits for Individuals.** Our companion animals permit us to be alone but not lonely. Even in married couples 78% of the time it is a pet that greets a person at the end of the day - not the spouse. Pets forestall loneliness and isolation that can lead to anxiety and depression. It has been shown that pet owners enjoy better physical health because they exercise more with their pets. Pets foster social interaction. For example, one study documented how walking a dog makes it easier to initiate conversation with a stranger and another study showed that 34% of pet owners said they talk about their pets to other people (compared to 20% who talked about their spouse, hmm.) Studies have demonstrated that while petting a dog or cat various pleasurable and healthful hormones are released and also that people who stutter do not do so while petting a dog or cat. Another showed that pet owners had lower blood pressure and lower levels of triglyceride and cholesterol.

- **Benefits for Children.** Children who care for pets learn responsibility and commitment (though it does require coaching from parents). Kids who participate in educational programs concerning the humane treatment of animals showed higher levels of empathy for humans than kids who don't participate in such programs. Caring for a pet is a good way to learn nurturing skills something often missing in the way we raise our boys. Some parents avoid pets because of a concern about allergies though one study showed evidence that living with two or more cats and dogs as toddlers made kids less reactive to allergy-inducing substances by the time they turned seven. And, less scientifically, a kid with a pet always has friend to turn to.

- **Benefits for Couples.** Studies have shown that couples who have pets: have more frequent contact and closer relationships with each other, are more satisfied in their marriages, have more frequent contact with other people,

and handle stress better than pet-less couples.

• **Benefits for Elders.** Here is where the research really kicks in. Elder dog owners have fewer doctors' visits than those seniors with no pets. Nursing homes in Texas, Missouri and New York found that daily medication costs dropped almost 70% when pets (and plants) were introduced into the environment. We have already mentioned blood pressure and social isolation both of which are concerns for our elders. Even our aquatic friends can help as was shown by study of Alzheimer's patients who get easily distracted and lose interest in eating. While looking at fish in a tank they became less agitated, had a better appetite, ate more and didn't lose weight. Listen to the words of Dr. Edward Creagan, professor of oncology at the Mayo Clinic Medical School: "Pet's can help patients cope with cancer... animals can be a significant factor for successful aging. If pet ownership was a medication it would be patented tomorrow."

• **How About Work?** Did you know that "Take Your Dog To Work Day" has been around since the late '90's and is celebrated this year on Friday, June 20? During last year's TYDTW Day an estimated 10,000 companies in the U.S. and Canada welcomed their employees' pooches. Nearly one in five companies allow pets in the workplace and in a 2006 survey millions of respondents said that pet-friendly work policies improves morale, creativity, helps co-workers get along better, creates a more productive work environment and reduces stress. But TYDTW Day is about more than valuing pets in the workplace; it is also about encouraging pet adoptions from shelters, humane societies and rescue groups. If this idea intrigues you go to www.petsit.com and click on TYDTW Day for important (and fun) ways your company can participate, how to convince your boss to join in, as well as crucial rules to make it a success - not a distraction.

• **A Wonderful Alternative.** Sometimes one's living situation, work schedule, health or finances make pet ownership impossible. It is still possible to enjoy and benefit from our animal companions. In every community there is a shelter, a breed rescue group or a humane society that needs your help. You can meet new people, expand your network, enjoy furry friends, have fun, and benefit your community simultaneously. LifeMap community member Allison Lindquist is the Executive Director to the East Bay SPCA in Oakland, CA and says some of the many ways to help out in a shelter include working with the cats and dogs, helping collect needed supplies (like towels, blankets, etc), giving tours, helping with office work, educational projects, fundraising or special events.

LifeMap is about learning from what we experience so that we can enjoy a more abundant and more rewarding life. Asking little in return, our pets accept us uncritically, forgive us easily and love us unconditionally. Maybe from them we can learn how to do that for each other and ourselves.

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Resources

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