

ASSISTANCE DOGS IN THE WORKPLACE

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Below is the text of a letter that Great Plains sends home with each of its graduates. Many have found it helpful in bringing their new dog into the workplace. It could be adapted to meet the needs of other programs and individual assistance dog teams.

To Whom It May Concern:

A new service dog team has recently graduated from an extensive week training program at the Great Plains Assistance Dogs Foundation, Training Center for EMRD in Jud, ND. The new graduate has asked that we provide you with the following information in order to brief fellow workers as to what is to be expected in the next few months.

The service dog has received a minimum of 160 training hours prior to being assigned to its new owner. The two then, as a travel team, completed a demanding three week course in which they were exposed to every commonly encountered travel situation.

The next few weeks will be important ones for the new service dog team. Those techniques and procedures learned at the Training Center must be applied to situations in the day-to-day travel routine. It is very likely that, in accomplishing these tasks, it will be necessary to physically correct the dog for misjudgment or distraction. This should in no way be looked on as a cruel treatment, rather as an often necessary part of working with a service dog. Please notice that the correction is always balanced with praise once the dog resumes behaving in an acceptable manner.

In the office or shop the graduate must be consistent in maintaining good control over the animal to assure that it will remain well mannered when not actually working. To this end the co-workers are asked to remember that the user is totally responsible for the dog's behavior. His or her permission should be given before you have any dealings with the dog. A good rule of thumb, however, is "the less fuss over the dog the better". It is of utmost importance that when the dog is working, it in no way be distracted and at no time should it be offered food.

In the best of situations, in the work setting the service dog is inconspicuous and well mannered but always ready to carry out his responsibility as a working service dog.

Thank you for your interest and cooperation.

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