

What Leadership at an Animal Shelter Actually Is

It is much more than a compassionate director

11 COMPONENTS OF THE NO KILL EQUATION
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TRAP NEUTER RETURN
"Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) can make a real difference. It's the only proven method to humanely and effectively control the free-roaming cat population, and it often directly reduces a community's euthanasia rate by lowering the number of births and reducing intake into already crowded shelters."
BRY TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN, PETSMAINT CHARITIES

7 GREAT REASONS TO FOSTER CARE
1 Your own pets will learn more social skills.
2 You can learn if you're ready for an additional pet.
3 You help the shelter or rescue learn about the pet's personality.
4 The pet gets to live with you rather than at a shelter.
5 You can help without spending money.
6 It makes you feel good.
7 You are saving a life!

THE MANY HATS OF NO KILL VOLUNTEERS:
• Dog walking
• Socialization
• Feeding
• Transporting
• Fostering
• Special events
• Office work
• Fundraising
• You name it!

WINNING ADOPTION POLICIES
• Keep hours to allow working families opportunity to visit and adopt animals.
• Advertising and off-site adoption programs increase the visibility of available animals.
• Cageless facilities create a more inviting setting for the public, and animals may also be happier and more socialized in this type of setting.
• Work with specific breed rescue groups.

COMPREHENSIVE ADOPTION PROGRAM

MYTH BUSTER!
Not all shelter pets need a new home:
"If you are only thinking about how to get the animal adopted, you are just putting a bandaid on the problem. A lot of these animals don't need new homes. They had perfectly good homes to begin with. Animal shelters should be operating like good doctors — focusing on wellness and prevention rather than treatment."
KATHY POBLOGNE

RETENTION

PROACTIVE REDEMPTION
"Walk down that aisle and think about where that dog or cat came from. How could you have stopped it from coming in the door? Most animals don't belong in shelters. Most pets DO have somebody to advocate for them and you have to do a little homework ... and make it all work out."
KATHY POBLOGNE, WISCONSIN WATCHDOG

LOW COST, HIGH VOLUME SPAY/NEUTER
"Even though pet overpopulation is a myth, continued promotion and availability of high-volume, low-cost spay/neuter is a means to reach strays in shelters where adoptions equal intakes, without the market share challenges we have now. More than that, we want intakes low enough that even a lazy, bureaucratic, uncaring, inept director can run a No Kill shelter with ease."
NATHAN BRINGARD

CANINE SERVICES MANAGER, NORFOLK SPCA
"I look back at all of the dogs that could have benefited from these playgroups. The many dogs that weren't allowed to go home with other dogs because it was too much of a 'risk.' It brings tears to my eyes to think of all of the dogs that have been held back. But in the spirit of the dog, we are moving forward!"

Medical and Behavior Prevention & REHABILITATION

COMPASSIONATE DIRECTOR
"The first and only genuine apology I ever got ... from someone in authority, came from someone who had been on the other side of the container when my kittens were taken from their cage and injected with sodium pentobarbital, from someone who likely had never heard of Tompkins County, NY, at the time, and who would not have allowed something like that to happen."
VALERIE HAYES, FKA&O THOSE ONE VOLUNTEER'S VIEW OF A SHELTER'S TRANSITION TO NO KILL

RESCUE GROUPS:
• Shift the costs of care from public taxpayers to private individuals and groups.
• Free up cage and kennel space, reducing expenses for feeding, cleaning, and killing, thereby...
• Improving a community's rate of leaving.

RESCUE GROUPS

ENGAGE THE PUBLIC
New research shows where homes are acquiring pets (less than 25% from shelters and rescues), and reveals that 30% of people not adopting said that if they felt more confident about shelter pets, they would definitely consider adoption — the problem is perception.
MEETHEALME.ORG

The eleven components of the No Kill Equation

In [Part 1](#) of this series on leadership, we discussed how Drs. Mike Lombardo and Bob Eichinger conducted the foundational research to determine what personal and organizational leadership is, a set of 67 core competencies that can be monitored, measured, and, in many cases, developed. In this part of the series, we are going to examine those competencies relative to their importance to effectively running an animal shelter. Doing so can help us better select, hire, retain and develop effective leaders to run our nation's animal shelters, and, therefore, save more animals' lives.

Effective Leadership is More than a Compassionate Director

Item 11 of the No Kill Equation is generally referred to as a "Compassionate Director". It is widely regarded as the most important of the components of the equation. Without it, none of the other components of the equation are going to function well and needless killing of animals in shelters generally results. I, however, believe that this topic is far bigger than the shelter director or manager. The shelter manager or director, after all, reports to some governing body. In the nonprofit, private sector, that is generally a Board of Directors. In the public sector, the shelter head reports to a department head, usually in public health or safety, with policies set by elected officials,

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Most Important Leadership Competencies for Animal Shelters:

- 1) Action Oriented
- 2) Business Acumen
- 3) Caring About Direct Reports
- 4) Comfort Around Senior Management
- 5) Compassion
- 6) Composure
- 7) Creativity
- 8) Timely Decision Making
- 9) Decision Quality

including the Mayor and City Council. For a shelter to run well, each of these entities needs to be functioning effectively.

Furthermore, running a shelter requires a lot more than compassion. While "Compassion" is **one** of the required leadership competencies, there are several other that are also mission critical.

While all of the 67 leadership competencies are great things to have, the fact of the matter is that no one is good at all of them. Similarly, no job can have every competency as a mission-critical component of it, or no one would ever be able to do the job. Highly effective leaders may be very skilled at up to about 22 of the leadership competencies, with a similar number being likely to be critically important to key leadership positions. Selecting great leaders for important roles is, therefore, a matter of understanding the "competency profile" for the position and matching it to candidates that have demonstrated that they are skilled at the competencies required.

Determining Mission-Critical Competencies

In an effort to determine which of the 67 leadership competencies were most critical to running an animal shelter, I began surveying people in the field several months ago. I selected a broad cross-section of people to survey, including people who ran shelters, people who reported to those people at a staff-level, and members of boards of directors who oversaw shelter directors. The results from these surveys have been remarkable. Most remarkable has been the amount of consistency in the responses. Among the competencies nearly universally selected by the evaluators were: Action Oriented, Compassion, Creativity, Decision Quality, Ethics and Values, Integrity and Trust, Intellectual Horsepower, Managerial Courage, Perseverance, Problem Solving, Results, and Managing Vision and Purpose. It can easily be said, therefore, that all of these, as well as others, are mission critical to running an animal shelter.

What is Not Important and Why Many Shelters Fail

One competency stands out from the rest as something none of the evaluators identified as important. That is "Functional/Technical Skills". An example of shelters that select directors based on "Functional/Technical Skills" are those that hire veterinarians to run their shelters. Veterinary, or any other functional/technical skills, do not appear to be correlated to running an animal shelter.

People fail at directing animal shelters NOT because they are "bad" people, but because they lack some of the core competencies required.

It is also worth pointing out that with one possible exception, the critical competencies for shelter leadership cannot be learned in school. In other words: many shelter directors are selected based on two factors (schooling and functional/technical skills) that do not correlate at all with success. This likely accounts for why so many shelters have relatively high kill rates. Shelters are, in effect, selecting the wrong leaders because they are using the wrong criteria to select them.

Now that we have a functioning model of leadership in animal shelters, identifying good candidates to run animal shelters is a relatively easy thing to do. That will be next in this leadership series.

- 10) Ethics and Values
- 11) Integrity and Trust
- 12) Intellectual Horsepower
- 13) Learning on the Fly
- 14) Managerial Courage
- 15) Managing and Measuring
- 16) Perseverance
- 17) Political Savvy
- 18) Problem Solving
- 19) Results
- 20) Strategic Agility
- 21) Understanding Others
- 22) Managing Vision and Purpose