

You Want A Day Off Because Your Dog Died? Good Luck

Dear Stephen:

I hope you do not think this is a weird letter. It's about Biscuits. Not the biscuits you eat, but my miniature collie Biscuits, who I had for 17 years. She just passed away, and I feel as if a family member died. I am a single man with no partner, and Biscuits was like my child.

I work in outside sales in Chicago for a contract manufacturer. On Fridays, when the office was a bit more casual, I would often bring Biscuits to work with me. Everyone loved her. I know everyone thinks their pet is the cutest, most affectionate and smartest, but my miniature Lassie really was. Biscuits got cancer a year ago, and I spent the last year and thousands upon thousands of dollars trying to help her recover. I finally had to put her to sleep last week.

It was awful. The vet asked me if I wanted to be in the room, and I did. I held Biscuits until I felt the life leave her. Now, I wake up despondent. I cannot motivate myself to work. I do not even feel like going to NeoCon next week. Everyone at the office knows I was very attached to my dog. My boss keeps telling me to get over it and just go out and buy another dog. That is the last thing I want to do.

If Biscuits were my child or family member, my boss would take my feelings more seriously. I know it is not exactly the same thing, but these feelings are real. No one seems to understand this, though. Even friends at work who used to give Biscuits treats on Fridays have started rolling their eyes and snickering when I bring her up. None of this makes going to work any easier.

I do not want to be the crazy person at work, but I can't just pretend I'm not sad. I just want to stay out of the office, but I do not have the vacation days to spare. What is the deal with pet bereavement? Do any companies offer something like this?

Jo(a)nesing for My dead Doggy!

Dear Jo(a)nesing:

First, I am sorry to hear about your dog. Seventeen years is a long time to have a pet, and when any relationship that long comes to an end one needs time to grieve. You had Biscuits for longer than most marriages last today and certainly for longer than most people spend in their jobs today. Pets give us unconditional love, and that is very rare to find.

I think anyone who has had any sort of pet they loved, be it a dog, cat, hamster or goldfish, can relate to your story. It is always sad when a pet dies, and it can discomfit us



You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at: StephenSays@bellow.press

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter @WorkplaceGuru, Like Stephen on Facebook; and follow him on LinkedIn.

when we are forced to reckon with the power of our feelings for these animals.

Me? I am a cat person, and my cat is even older than Biscuits was, never mind what that is in dog and cat years. I can promise you now when my cat dies, I will be crying a river's worth of tears. Then, I will hide away for as long as I can because I will be too embarrassed to tell anyone I am so upset my frigging cat died. Even so, I think those of us who know how important pets can be can still recognize the loss of a pet cannot compare to the loss of a human family member, even for those of us who treat our pets like children. You seem to understand this though, so I don't want to get hung up on it, but it is worth emphasizing.

Now, there are some companies

— Mars, Inc. of candy bar fame, is probably the most famous — that offer special bereavement leave for pets, although none in our industry. Did you really even have to ask that question of the furniture industry? There has been some debate about the fairness of this policy because those employees who aren't pet people would not be eligible for this extra benefit. This claim of inequity is absurd on its face, and those companies that offer time off to mourn pets seem to agree.

I am hopeful this trend continues and companies in our industry consider making it part of their leave policy. Going into work the day after putting down a pet is usually not worth it — for the employee or the company. Why not offer one or two days paid? Manufacturers all love to show off their Fortune magazine ranking as proof they are great places to work; anyone want to take on the Biscuits dilemma?

With that said, I wouldn't hold my breath while waiting for this policy to spread. Leave policies have been going in the opposite direction of late, as companies are packaging sick-days and vacation-days into a single "paid time-off" pool. The unique nefariousness of this movement is a topic for another column, but suffice it to say you could get another Biscuits tomorrow, and when she dies you likely still wouldn't have paid leave to mourn her.

Speaking of getting another Biscuits, I know you don't want to hear it, but your boss is right. If you still want to have a dog, the best thing to do is get another dog. I don't mean to turn into a shrink here, but the best things about pets is that we feel like we have something that depends on us and loves us because we take care of them. Getting another pet fills that void. Just do me a favor and do not name the next dog after something you can buy at McDonald's.

In the meantime, if you need to talk with people at work, talk to the pet people. I don't just mean people who have pets, either. In every office there are at least two people who are absolutely crazy about pets. These people want to see all the stupid pictures you take of your pet; they want to hear all the stories about the mischief your pet made; they may even get your pet a birthday present. It sounds like you are one of these people, but I am sure there is someone else in your office who is similar. Talk to that person about this stuff, and avoid the topic around others. Some people will understand, others will think you're crazy. Those who think you're crazy have chunks of dirty ice where their hearts should be, but steering clear of the subject around these people makes it simpler for everyone — yourself included.

Stephen

Would you like to meet BoF's own Stephen Viscusi during NeoCon and "Ask Stephen" your career question in person? E-mail him at Stephen@visucsigroup.com to schedule your appointment.

HEARD ON THE STREET WITH STEPHEN VISCUSI

¶ We heard some noise about **Holly Hunt** hiring a new president. **Rick Kilmer** is the new guy at Holly Hunt and he was president of **Interface Flor** division and previously worked as vice president for strategy at **Janus et Cie**. Before that he was running **Kohler's Kallista**. **David Schutte**, who had run Holly Hunt since **Knoll** acquired it, was promoted to run all the Knoll subsidiaries. Big Loss for Knoll's NYC region: The very popular **Eric Stroud** leaves Knoll to become vice president of sales for the U.S. for **Teknion's** subsidiary called **Studio TK LTD**. This is a hot poach for Studio TK LTD. Stroud is a popular national executive with close ties to major A&D firms. In other news, **Herman Miller** released Grand Rapids-based **Linda Choong** from her roles as chief merchandising manager for **Herman Miller for the Home**. Miller is shedding people in that division and at **Design Within Reach**. **Richard Munsey** left Design Within Reach after Herman Miller transferred him to that division in Los Angeles. **Anne Issackedes** left **OFS** in NYC to join the independent rep group **Levine Contract Group**. **Annette Barrelet** left **Teknion** in New Jersey to join **Herman Miller** in that sale territory. **Carrie Scott Johnson** left as an executive for **Baker** (division of Koehler) in the Northeast to become the managing director for creation at **Bauman North America**. They make contract and residential textiles in Switzerland for the U.S. and have a partnership with **Carnegie** fabric and their own showrooms. It's fun to see where someone got a new job, but just as important for you is to remember: That means the position they left might be open! It could mean a new job for you. Go to the company's website where you can apply on line. For everyone who gets a new job, that means, someone usually left an opening somewhere else.