Headquarters and Training Center

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Client Experience Team

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**To Whom It May Concern:**

A guide dog will be entering your workplace in the upcoming months to provide one of our graduates who is blind or has low vision with greater independence. The guide dog completed an intensive 20-week training program and numerous tests in order to become proficient in their everyday tasks. The dog and handler were matched based on strict criteria such as pace, environment, and several other factors, after which the team completed a comprehensive two-week training course to learn to work together. You may see the team memorizing routes throughout the building, navigating around obstacles, and/or targeting certain doors and stairways that they visit frequently.

The graduate will ultimately be the expert on their responsibilities and needs for the guide dog. However, as a new team, they are by no means expected to be perfect at first in how they execute their guide work and communication. It is highly likely that, in applying their training to everyday tasks, they will endure occasional challenges. Please notice that any redirection or correction is always balanced with praise once the dog resumes appropriate behavior. Positive reinforcement for good behavior is an essential part of the human/guide dog bond. As handler and guide dog spend more time together and reinforce their skillset, the relationship between dog and handler will only grow stronger, and they will adapt to the strategies and routines that work best for them as a team.

Guiding Eyes for the Blind put together the following suggested accommodations and considerations for your reference to ensure a smooth transition for all involved.

Accommodations:

* As per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), an individual who is blind is legally allowed to bring their guide dog anywhere throughout the facility. They have the same access rights as their colleagues.
* At no point should the guide dog be separated from the handler. Depending on space limitations, the dog will either lay next to the handler at their desk, on a dog bed, in a crate, or in a secure and enclosed office.
* If space allows, a handler may choose to place a crate in their work area so that they do not always need to hold the leash and allow for some hands-free mobility.
* The guide dog will need to relieve itself every 4 hours or so, or at the handler’s discretion. A trash can should be placed outside in an accessible location so the handler can properly dispose of any waste. The handler has been specifically trained on how to adequately pick up after their dog.
* The handler will provide the dog water throughout the day and potentially store dog bowls in their workspace.

Considerations:

* It is of utmost importance that when the dog is guiding their handler, it in no way be distracted by food, eye contact, speech, or petting. Only the handler should offer the dog affection, praise, and attention.
* When a guide dog is not actively guiding their handler, they will remain under their handler’s control at all times. They should not be pet by others, as that interaction has the potential to interrupt appropriate behavior. Only with the handler’s permission should you ever interact with their guide dog.
* The handler’s work conditions must be safe for a guide dog. For example, the floors should be clean and absent of any safety hazards that could endanger the team.
* If assisting a guide dog handler, please ask about their individual preferences, as everyone’s needs differ. They may choose to hold your elbow, follow you by voice, or receive verbal directions as you walk behind them. Do not touch or grab the person, dog, or equipment without their expressed verbal consent.

We advise all colleagues to educate themselves and work with their fellow employee to understand the purpose of a guide dog, their role in supporting the team, and creating a safe, welcoming, and equitable space for all. If you have any questions about the above accommodations or would like more information on how to welcome a guide dog into your workplace, please call Guiding Eyes for the Blind or reach out to me directly.

Sincerely,

Melissa Carney

Community Outreach and Graduate Support Manager

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