

Tell us about a time when you were about to lose your cool with a member of the public. How did you manage to calm down and handle the situation politely?

That was the question we asked you for this issue's Coffee Break, and you sent us plenty of creative examples of how you maintained your professionalism in the face of trying circumstances. For more of your responses, go to animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak.



A mother and grandfather came in with three rambunctious, out-of-control kids to adopt a dog because the mother was told it would help calm the children. No one in this family seemed to have the skills or patience needed to handle any pet. After 10 minutes of out-of-control behavior, we were furious at the adults for allowing the kids to run rampant through the adoption lobby and less than happy with the kids. We were to the point of asking them to leave when I decided to instead take each child individually by the hand and one by one take them on a five-minute private tour. We sat on the floor of the kitten room and with our "quiet voice" invited kittens to crawl into our laps to be petted. Turns out these children had never touched a cat or dog and were just overwhelmed at the mere presence of them. I gave each the homework assignment of practicing the quiet voice and gentle touch on a stuffed toy at home and invited Mom to come back when she thought they were ready to accept the notion of gentleness and respect for their future adopted pet. The family did come back three months later, eager to show off the positive results of their newly practiced skills, and left with a 6-month-old kitten.

—Kathy Gumph, Adoption Counselor
Humane Society Naples
Naples, Florida

I find that the best way to keep my cool during times when I'm dealing with someone that is really aggravating me is to use "reframing." This involves mentally viewing the situation from a different perspective so that it can be seen in a healthier, more positive light (and thus be easier to deal with). A good example is animal turn-ins. It's pretty aggravating to have someone surrendering a perfectly good animal just because they don't want to deal with it anymore. But I don't get angry with them. (By the way, no matter how much you try to hide anger, it always comes through ... this just makes them defensive and angry back at you.) Instead, I try to reframe the situation by seeing this as an opportunity to rescue this animal from these regrettably ignorant owners and find it a home with someone who can truly meet its needs.

—Steve Kinne, Dog Adoption Counselor
Wanderers' Rest
Canastota, New York

Dogs and cats come in all the time in terrible shape. My first reaction was to get angry. I took a step back and realized my bottom line is I'm here for the animals, not the people. When I was handed a small dog that had what looked like months of dried feces stuck to his back and legs and [he was] crying in pain, I safely and slowly cleaned him up and told the owner very calmly that if he did not want the dog anymore or did not have the time for him that I would love to have him. Two days later the owner brought the dog to me. He now lives with owners that absolutely love him. All's well that ends well.

—Nancy Lancaster, Groomer/Owner
The Rainbow Co.
Smithville, Texas

I work in customer service at a pet adoption facility. Potential adopters are required to complete an application form, followed by a consultation. One day I was confronted by a family who was interested in adopting kittens that were not available. I explained that the animals become available only when they have seen a veterinarian to get spayed/neutered, [undergo a] general health checkup, and [have] their temperament evaluated by the kennel staff. I also explained to the potential adopter that we require a consultation, and the application would need to be approved. I also informed her of the adoption fee. The potential adopter became very obnoxious about the process involved in adopting an animal from our facility. She expected to walk in the facility and come out with the animals of her choice in a short period of time without completing an application, [having a] consultation, or paying the adoption fee. I calmly reiterated our policy and adoption process and what is included in the adoption fee. She was too preoccupied spilling words of contention without giving me an opportunity to speak. I felt myself losing my temper, and before I reached the point of getting enraged by her contentious attitude, I excused myself and walked back to the kennel to speak to a front office staff and have her take over for me. I knew that if I continued to be in the potential adopter's presence, I would reach my "boiling point," and the outcome will definitely be ugly.

—Helen Karganilla,
Customer Service Manager
Sequoia Humane Society
Eureka, California

Honestly, we had a man bring in his dog because "it loved him too much." After the relinquishment paperwork was completed, the animal behaviorist and I were shocked when he asked if we had any dogs he could look at for adoption. Instead of getting angry and scolding him, we very nicely told him yes, but they would all love him just as much (if not more), as they had been abandoned and probably needed more love.

—Tanya Morris, Front Desk Supervisor
Roanoke Valley SPCA
Roanoke, Virginia

Animal control presented us with a gentle, pregnant pit bull one afternoon. Placing her in a kennel with food and blankets, we left, returning the next morning to find a tired new mother of eight. Days passed; no one claimed her. A rescue group spoke up for "Madonna" and her family, just as a cocky guy swaggered in with his girlfriend, long past the stray-hold date, demanding his dog. Our receptionist politely handled his machismo, smiling, nodding, and directing him to the sheriff's department next door. Waiting, the girlfriend admitted she was jealous of the dog, gave it away while the boyfriend was gone, and asked if they could keep one puppy. Our director never flinched, but smiled and said they were all on their way to rescue. Returning from the sheriff's department, the once-owner signed Madonna over to the shelter and left with the girlfriend. We all agreed—luckily, he chose the wrong girl.

—Maggie Tatum, Vice President
Elk Country Animal Shelter
Atlanta, Michigan

I get many calls from people planning on breeding one of their pets, but also wanting to adopt one of my rescues. So how do I manage to stay calm and polite when dealing with that? I stop, take a deep breath, and focus on the fact that they are still uneducated about the situation in its entirety. I wrap my hands around my coffee cup (because that keeps my hands busy and always makes me feel a bit better) and I try to remember that this person will tell others about their experience, so I want it to be a good one. I need people to love this rescue and what we do, so everything I say and do must be done politely and kindly, never rudely. Even if I do not adopt a dog to them, I still need them to have a good experience with our organization.

—Melissa Dory, Founder
Wyoming Rat Terriers Rescue
Lusk, Wyoming

Animal Sheltering congratulates Helen Karganilla of Sequoia Humane Society, whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Sequoia Humane Society will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appetit!

**Next question:
Has there been a point when you decided to stop working in the animal sheltering and rescue field? Why? What brought you back?**

Please submit your responses (150 words or less) at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak or send them to Editor, *Animal Sheltering/HSUS*, 2100 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20037. **Your answer may be printed in a future issue of *Animal Sheltering*.** If your response is chosen for publication, you will be entered into a drawing to win a **free coffee break (valued at \$50)** for your organization. Responses may be edited for length or clarity; no donation or purchase is necessary to win. See animalsheltering.org for contest rules, or send an e-mail or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.