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## Contents

<b>Please Read This First.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<i>Terms of Use .....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Disclaimer.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About the Author .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The Best Option for Owners? .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Asking a Favor .....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Hiring an Unqualified Sitter .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Boarding the Pets.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<b>A Great Business .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Work Experience.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<b>Services to Offer .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>Free or Paid Extras.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<b>Set Limits to Ensure Success.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>Customers .....</i>	<i>13</i>
<b>Insurance .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>The Cost and Value of Professional Advice .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Employees .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Your Personal Qualities .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Your Mindset .....	22
Dealing with People.....	22
<b>Money Matters.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>Late Accounts .....</i>	<i>24</i>
<b>Hidden Hazards.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Loose threads .....</i>	<i>26</i>

*Newsprint* .....26  
*Snail Bait* .....26  
*Chemicals*.....27

**Pre-booking Interview** ..... 28

*Your Checklist*.....28  
    *Keys and other Security Matters*.....30

**Caring Tips for the Pets** ..... 31

**Additional Services**..... 33

**When to Decline** ..... 34

**Meeting the Pets** ..... 35

**Dogs and Cats**..... 36

    Dogs .....36  
    Cats .....36

**Other Pets You Can Sit For?**..... 38

*Snakes, geckos and other reptiles.* .....38  
    *Pigs* .....38  
    *Rabbits*.....39  
    *Ferrets*.....40  
    *Birds, large and small* .....40  
    *Small Birds*.....40  
    *Fish, tropical and cold water* .....41

**Promoting Your Pet Sitting Business** ..... 43

    Signs .....43  
    Business Cards etc. ....43  
        *Phone book?* .....44  
    Web Site.....44

**Shelley's Farewell** ..... 46

## About the Author

Shelley Smith has always shared her life with one or more pets.

Shelley knows that many people want to have their own business and would really love to be able to work with animals.

She said, "Pet-sitting was a job I enjoyed and I met many wonderful animals and really nice owners. Almost everyone that hires a pet-sitter care a lot about their pets."

Shelley wants her ebook to help people that want to be pet-sitters, either working for an established business or on their own.

"I have tried to cover what my readers will need to know so that they can get a good start with pet-sitting. I show them what I found out – that it is a great way to use their particular interest in animals to provide a very valuable service which helps the owners and their pets."

Shelley said that readers will find out what they need to do to be a popular and successful pet sitter.

"I've included a section about setting up and managing your business because that is just as important to your success as dealing with the animals."

"I also cover how to deal with owners and their pets as well as vets and other people who are so important to pet-sitters."

"Pet-sitting is a business which you can start from your home and build to whatever size you want. Or, you can keep it small – depending on your circumstances and the goals you set."

Shelley said, "I think it is a business for which the demand will only grow. As business life becomes more hectic and more people travel for business and holidays, there will be more opportunities than ever for a first-class pet-siting service."

"I wrote my ebook to help my readers fill that growing need and achieve the success they desire with their own business. Being able to do that by working with animals is a huge bonus."

## Introduction

Some people think that all they need to start and operate a pet sitting business is to like animals and have had some experience with a variety of them.

That experience can help to give you confidence. But, you will need more. Your potential success is going to depend on the quality of your personal and business skills.

A pet-sitter will deal with all the same issues which confront anyone that operates any other kind of service business.

You are providing an important service to people.

At the same time, you need them to give you a high level of trust and cooperation.

That puts some heavy demands on you, but the potential rewards are worth it.



Pet sitting is an established industry in many countries and the demand is likely to keep growing, even when times are tough. There are opportunities for people to establish and grow pet sitting businesses in many areas, even those where there may already be one or more established operators.

I cannot guarantee what the potential of your new business might be, but I am confident that you will be better prepared for your new venture after you read through my ebook.

I suggest that you read the whole book first, to give yourself a broad overview of the potential benefits, requirements and problems you may encounter.

Please don't skip any of the sections during that first read-through. For instance, you probably won't need or want to hire anyone when you are just starting out, but that section could give you a better idea of what qualities

and knowledge which you will need yourself to deal with the pets and the people that you work for in those first few months.

Then, read again through those sections which cover the tasks which you actually need to do.

Print your personal copy of the book or keep it easy to reach on your computer so that you can refer to it when necessary. Some sections will be useful reminders as your business develops even though you probably don't need them for your operations when you are just starting out.

I have tried to cover as many relevant topics as I could. I hope that my words are easy to read and encouraging.

But, I could not suggest that a pet minding business is entirely a bed of roses and hundred dollar bills. That would not be fair or truthful.

I want to make you aware of all aspects so that you are well-equipped to see any signs of a problem developing because that will make it easier for you to handle them with minimum stress or risk.

So, I include some material about some of the potential problems and disappointments you may meet in your new business. That will help you to be ready to handle the problems should they occur.

This ebook will also give sufficient information for anyone that is interested in becoming a pet sitter by working for someone else's established business rather than setting up their own business themselves. That can be a good supplementary income stream. It is also a good way to learn the business and practice your interpersonal skills which may lead you to decide to start your own pet sitting business later on.

My book will also help pet owners that want some guidance when they want to find the best possible person and pet-sitting service to look after their pets and their property.

## The Best Option for Owners?

Pet-sitting is just one of the options which pet owners have for the care of their pets when they cannot look after the animals themselves for whatever reason.

### *Asking a Favor*

Many will ask relatives, neighbors or friends. That will be a cheaper option and has the important advantage that they already know the people, have a personal connection and trust them. Their pets may also know and trust the person who is asked.

But, this is a really huge favor to ask of anyone. Looking after someone else's pet carries a lot of responsibility and can be difficult for many people, however willing, to fit into their own daily schedule.



The physical tasks involved are not all pleasant or clean. But, the main drawback is the responsibility, especially if the person that was asked does not have any experience with the care of that sort of pet themselves.

Cat owners are probably in a better position than most dog owners because cats are generally more self-sufficient than dogs.

But, asking someone to look after a member of their family (which most pets are) is something which should be given very careful consideration by the owner and the person whom they ask.

What if there is an accident or some other problem? Apart from the challenge of dealing with the pet and the vet while the owner is probably not able to be contacted at the time, there could be serious consequences for the relationship between the owner and the volunteer and their families long into the future.



### ***Hiring an Unqualified Sitter***

The owner may offer to pay a nominal amount to a neighbor or a local teenager to do the necessary tasks.

They see it as a win-win situation where they have some trust in them because of a long-term, but casual, association and the amateur sitter is probably also known to the pets, which can help to reduce any stress.

This may work well, but the sitter may not have the maturity or the knowledge to deal with any unexpected situation which might arise. If there is any injury or upset to the pet (for instance, if it becomes ill or lost), there will be ongoing damage to their relationship and the owner will have to deal with the consequences.

### ***Boarding the Pets***

This is a good option for many owners and their pets. It's probably the closest alternative to hiring you to look after their pets in their own homes.

Many people find this their best choice. Most services are well-run and most of the pets are happy.

But, a significant number of pets are likely to become stressed when they are taken from their regular home environment for even just a short time.

The presence of other animals can increase the risk of infection or accident. The owner also has to arrange to deliver their pet(s) to the boarding premises and also to pick them up afterwards at times when the facility can receive them. This can involve considerable amount of time and hassle at each end of their absence.

It can also be quite stressful for the owner and the pet when the owner has already been travelling for some time and the pet is being moved around.

All these considerations can be dealt with and no pet-sitter should ever suggest that boarding someone's pet is not a good option where the service is well-managed.

Making negative statements about any alternative to your own service makes a very poor impression with most pet owners.

My experience is that almost all boarding establishments are well-run. They often depend to a large extent, as pet-sitters do, on referrals from their current clients to get new customers.

They are also a good source of referrals when they get enquiries from people who cannot afford the charges for the boarding establishment or whose pets cannot be fitted into the boarding facilities for the period which they want.

## A Great Business

Pet-sitting can be a part-time or full-time business. But, it is a business which must be done in a fully professional way.

If you want to sit pets on a part-time basis, you need to be sure that you have the time and the ability to take on the work.



Do you have other commitments, such as a job or family responsibilities, which could interfere with you doing your pet sitting on a regular schedule?

Will your regular commitments also allow you to spend extra time with those pets if, without warning, they need extra attention or there is some emergency?

Anyone that is doing pet-sitting work, even if it is part-time, will probably need to have a bond and will definitely need insurance. After all, you will be in other people's homes and have to bear some responsibility for the safety of their property as well as their pets.

Although a caring attitude for the various types of animals that you encounter is a very important consideration, it is also important that you have the knowledge and physical strength to care for, control and help them in any type of situation which might occur.

### *Work Experience*

If you want to get some experience before you decide whether to launch your own full-time service, you could apply to work for an established service in your area.

You should always be completely honest with anybody who you asked to employ you that you are considering starting your own pet-sitting business in the future and wanted to learn the business from someone with a good reputation.

## Services to Offer

Standard services would probably include feed and water maintenance, cage or litter box cleaning, play time (including a check of the pet for any current or potential problems), exercise and light grooming.

If you are experienced and confident to be able to do it well, you might also offer nail clipping, full grooming and similar services where the client wants them.

Your visit would usually be for a minimum time of thirty minutes to an hour, depending on the type of pet and specific needs of the client.

### *Free or Paid Extras*

Many Pet sitters will also:

- ✓ Collect mail from the letterbox on the property. One less clue that the owner is away.
- ✓ Open or close curtains or blinds.
- ✓ Water plants and check their condition if requested and you know the signs which matter. A spray of the owner's bug spray could stop an insect or disease infestation quickly, while leaving it could mean the owner comes home to a seriously damaged plant. But, only do this if the owner specifically asks and always check exactly what they want you to do. Follow their instructions and methods and specify in the written agreement that this is on an "all care but no responsibility basis".

I suggest that you do the little extras which you are comfortable doing and which fit in with your schedule, but do not charge for them unless they require special care, significant time and effort and are of significant value to the owner. If they do, get full instructions, include a copy of those instructions in the agreement and add a special fee for doing them.

## Set Limits to Ensure Success

As you start to develop your new pet-sitting service, you will probably discover opportunities which seem like short-cuts to success but which may instead involve more risk to you and your new business than you realize.

### *Customers*

The ongoing success of your business will always be dependent to some degree on getting new customers and providing the best possible service which you can to all the customers you have.



It is likely to be at least a year before you will have a regular customer list which might provide you with the basis of a regular income because the needs of your customers will vary widely over time.

Some customers will become regular users of your service but the demand will vary and you can expect some quiet times even in periods that are usually busy.

It is inevitable that you will lose some customers for various reasons, many of which are beyond your control. So, you may be tempted to get as many customers as possible to ensure that the vital cash-flow is maintained.

But, you need to ensure that you do not take on too much work for the time and staff which you have available. That can lead to disaster.

The best approach is to limit the number of clients and the services which you provide to them below the level which you believe you can do.

This safety margin will help you to avoid problems like missing appointments, perhaps because a pet you went to earlier in your rounds required more time than expected or you need sometimes to attend to urgent personal matters.

Sometimes, you will actually find that some customers will cost you more than you could ever possibly earn from them and you will have to find a diplomatic way to end your professional relationship.

This can be very hard to do, but trying to please a very difficult client can cause your services to everybody else to be less effective over time.

## Insurance

This is an area where I can only give you some general suggestions because the requirements and types of insurance available will vary with each country and also between states.

You will need more than one kind of insurance to operate as a pet-sitter.

You should consider adjusting your home insurance policy and vehicle insurance if suitable additional coverage is available on them, as well as adding some specialized types to your portfolio.

If you ever have animals belonging to other people coming to your home as part of your business, you will need to have special insurance.

It is unlikely that your normal householder third party insurance would cover any damage to them or their owners or even any damage which they did to your property, pets or family unless you had made suitable arrangements with your insurer.

When you start using your car or other vehicle for business, you will need to get more appropriate and expensive insurance cover.

You should also get cover for having any pets in the vehicle, whether you regularly transport them or want to be covered if you have to take an injured pet to the vet or for any other reasons just on rare occasions.

If you will ever have someone else's pet in your vehicle it would be wise to have reliable air-conditioning installed.

Leaving a car window slightly open will not be sufficient for many pets in really hot weather even for a relatively short time.

If you have airbags fitted to your vehicle, you must not put the pets on those seats. The airbags could injure or even kill animals that are restrained in the seats. You will need to get a vehicle with space for the pets to be carried in approved cages which will need to be anchored in the rear of the vehicle.

You will need to be bonded, which is a form of "honesty insurance". This sort of policy covers gives cover for loss of your clients' house keys and other valuables.

You will need to read all the fine print on each type of insurance carefully. If you do not understand something in a policy, get it explained. The explanation should be added in writing by the agent.

I would also ask for recommendations from any other pet sitters or vets.

Make sure that you disclose all relevant facts which the insurer requires and keep them informed about any changes in your business, such as changing vehicles or offering new specialized services, because any claim you make could be disallowed if the company can establish that you did not disclose something to them which they believe is relevant.

Something which many self-employed people overlook until it may be too late is the need to insure themselves against the possibility of not being able to work for a period of time. When you or your family is completely, or largely, dependent on the income you provide, disability or loss-of-income insurance could be a wise investment.

Just ask yourself what reliable sources of income replacement do you have? Even if you are able to claim and receive an insurance payout or a government payment, those payments may take far too long to start flowing and may not be sufficient to cover your regular expenses as well as those which come from your injury.

As a service provider, you will only get paid by your clients when you provide the services. So, health insurance is probably essential, even though premiums are constantly rising and many have significant limitations on what they pay for.

I already mentioned liability insurance, but want to emphasize that you need broad cover which has to be clearly stated on the policy. As well as damage to your clients' property, including their pets, you need to be covered if they cause any damage to other people or their property while in your care as well!

No insurance company is likely to have the best options for you in every category I mentioned here. I suggest that you look for an insurance broker who deals with several companies.



Your business advisors, such as a lawyer and an accountant, may have recommendations. The vets you know or other sitters may have advice based on their own experience which could be useful.

If you are a member of a professional group for pet-sitters, small business people or whatever, they often have discounted policies available from one or two insurance companies. This can be a good saving, but you need to check that the policies will suit your type of business closely.

## The Cost and Value of Professional Advice

You will need to use professional services when setting up your pet sitting business and to ensure that you comply with all the relevant laws and regulations through the life of your business.

Professional advice is not cheap but it is likely to cost you much less than if you try to battle through without it.

Arranging for help from an accountant and a lawyer will save you time, frustration and money over the life of your business.



You should seek advice from any business owners that you know and trust before deciding on a particular professional advisor.

One way to test possible advisors is to phone the offices of the people that are recommended to you so that you can judge the sort of response you get.

When you have just a couple you are still considering, I suggest that you make a short appointment with each. This will let you see whether each one is someone whom you can develop a professional relationship with and also find out whether they have relevant experience.

Ask about their fees and payment terms.

If you have to deal with your own accounts, tax returns, local government licenses and regulations, you will find yourself short of time to operate and promote your business.

You will also avoid a lot of stress about whether you have filled in all the forms correctly and submitted them within the permitted time.

There are also benefits which are not advertised. When you deal with these professional advisors, you may sometimes get their advice about other businesses in your area and even introductions to people or groups which can be very valuable for a small business with a limited ability to promote itself.

Having a lawyer examine the forms which you use in your business to sign up new clients and lay out each person's responsibilities and expectations is very wise.

They can keep you from making mistakes which could leave you with responsibilities but no claims on the other person.

Yes, you do need written agreements which detail all relevant aspects of the service you provide and the responsibilities of you and the client.

Writing them yourself or copying one that someone else uses could probably leave you open to claims for breach of copyright. Also, they may have made mistakes in their forms which you copied!

This is likely to cause you trouble, which may include loss of reputation or financial penalties.

Many places have laws about the care of animals which you may not even be aware of.

Laws and regulations are frequently changed by the outcome of court cases and government action. You need to have access to a professional who keeps up with those changes and can explain relevant parts to you when required.

## Employees

If you are setting up or taking over a business which has employees, you will have extra responsibilities and definitely need professional help from a lawyer and accountant, even when the workers are defined as independent contractors or whatever term is used in your jurisdiction.

Independent contractors will need to be covered by your insurance although they should also have their own. Check that their insurance is relevant to the special requirements of the pet sitting business.

In most places, I suspect that the Tax and Insurance requirements are likely to be fairly heavy.



Then, you need to ensure that they do their duties in a way which reflects well on you and your business.

Any employee will also need to have the same sort of insurance which I described before, including a bond and a police check which details anything on their record for several years past.

I suggest you get the employees and contractors to sign non-disclosure agreements, covering all aspects of your business, especially your client list, forms and practices.

You will find some people are working for you with a view to learning about the business and hoping to start a similar business of their own in the future. That's unavoidable – they are the people who are most likely to do a good job because they are motivated to continue in the industry. But, you should have them read and sign a non-compete agreement where they agree to not set up too close to your operation for a specific time period after working for you.

All forms should be reviewed by a legal advisor to see that you don't breach any regulation because of the restrictions you put on the employees or contractors or by using any other content in the agreement.

## **Your Personal Qualities**

### **Your Mindset**

Your mindset is very important. When you are stressed and run-down, your level of service will be downgraded and that will cause more stress. That will cause you to be less effective.

If you let that occur, your clients will be dissatisfied and your reputation, as well as your income, must suffer.

You will deal with a wide variety of people and some will be very demanding while others may not give you enough information about exactly what they need you to do to properly care for their pets and fulfill their expectations.

That is one of the main reasons why I advise that you put everything in writing, so that there is no misunderstanding.

That can protect you from the client that wants you to check on their pet (and their home) after 11 pm or six times every day.

### **Dealing with People**

Pet sitters have to be as good at dealing with pet owners and other people they meet as they are with the pets.

You will find it hard to make a success of this type of business if your people skills are poor. You will be dealing with a wide variety of people and accepting responsibility for their pets, which are probably second only to their immediate family in importance to them.

You will need to remember that you are a service provider, not a friend of the family. If a friend or business colleague hires you, make sure that you use all the same forms and procedures.

## Money Matters

The only way to stay in business and prosper is to pay your bills in time and ensure that you are paid on time too.

Use credit sparingly and try to keep your payments within any interest-free period.

It is worth considering getting some training in the basics of doing your business accounts and other small business matters even though you will have an accountant doing the main work for submission to the Tax office etcetera.

In some communities, there are courses for adults at local education centers after normal school hours. But, there are also companies which offer this sort of training.

I suggest that you check with local and State business groups which you may belong to. They may either run courses themselves or be able to arrange discounted fees for their members with some organizations.

If you buy and use one of the computer packages for small businesses like [QuickBooks](#) or [Sage](#), you can get information about experienced trainers for those packages in your area. Most providers of these quality packages have branches or agents in each country as well.

Some Pet-sitters say they ask for upfront payment to keep everything simple and avoid having to chase accounts. But, not all clients will have the money available or want to pay in advance, even if they can.

I suggest that you discuss this with other pet-sitters that you have established contact with in your area.

You have to decide your own policy which might be something like pre-payment for first bookings, fifty percent up front of bookings of two weeks or longer or whatever you feel is likely to fit well with your clients and minimize any problems.

### *Late Accounts*

When someone is slow to pay, there is often a good reason. Some are just forgetful or have a family emergency.

But, it's inevitable that you will get one or two that are slow payers. This is common with most types of businesses but pet owners that cherish their pets enough to hire you are very likely to be good risks as well.

A quick email or polite mailed reminder is likely to get a check by return and an apology most times.

For the problem client, send them a second reminder by certified mail.

If there is a tribunal in your area where small businesses can seek payment of delinquent accounts, that's probably the next step for you to take.

It is time-consuming but tells the client you are serious. It also won't do their reputation in the local community any good.

That's the farthest I've had to go with any claims because I don't let any accounts run more than a specified length of time without at least a partial payment.

And, most of my clients really like the service, so the problems are few and far between.



## Hidden Hazards

There are many things which present a hazard to pets which you should be aware of.

**Never offer any food or treat to any pet which has not been specifically approved by its owner. No exceptions!**

Do not ever give any dog any sort of chocolate, not even very small quantities. It's not worth the risk! Dogs can be poisoned with chocolate and other common foods. There is a substance called Theobromine in chocolate which will cause serious illness.

**Small birds** should be handled with great care and only when absolutely necessary. They can die if they become too excited. I was advised of this possibility specifically with budgerigars (the popular domesticated Australian Grass Parrot) and canaries, but I suggest being equally careful with other types as well.

It is very important that all pets have easy access to clean water. Make sure



that the containers cannot be spilled or they may have an accident between your visits and have no water available until your next visit.

That could be fatal for some, especially if there is hot weather, but problems could happen any time it is not available.

Always clean up any spilled seed or other material so that your actions do not attract rodents. They are very attracted to seed and small birds, so keep everything as neat and clean as possible.

Always remove husks from the seed cups of caged birds by pouring it from cup to cup and either let the breeze remove the empty husks or gently blow away the husks as the seed pours from the top cup to the lower cup.

If the husks accumulate, some birds will not be able to get at the seed which is in the cup but below the husks and they could become sick and stressed fairly quickly.

### ***Loose threads***

Loose threads on the cloth covers which their owners use to block the light from their cages so the birds can sleep can be dangerous for the birds. A friend found her small bird dead with a loose thread tight around its neck. They had been away for a few hours that evening, so they did not hear the poor bird's struggle.

### ***Newsprint***

I would not use newspapers with any animals or birds because of the risk of poisoning. Any animal could pick up the ink on their paws or fur and then swallow some when they lick themselves. This would be very easy if the newspaper became wet.

Another pet owner bought blank newsprint to use on the cage floor instead of newspapers so there was no ink which the birds could chew at.

She usually put empty facial tissue boxes filled with torn-up blank newsprint in the cage for the birds to sleep in. But, when she had no empty tissue boxes, she used a regular cardboard box. That plain box had a small printed area on the back and one of her favorite birds chewed that area and was poisoned!

### ***Snail Bait***

Most pet owners are well aware of the danger from regular small baits which contain metaldehyde or similar chemical compounds. There are now some snail baits which are claimed to be much safer for pets as they have a different compound in them. But, my vet said that he has treated a few dogs which had swallowed some of the new type of snail bait and he would not use them anywhere that pets were able to get access.

### *Chemicals*

Some bird owners like to use branches as perches for their birds. This can be a valuable thing because the birds get exercise by chewing the bark. My small parrot seemed to thrive when it got some natural perches from a cherry tree to replace its machine-made ones.

But, it is very important that the branches are not from any plant which may be harmful to the bird. Also, the plant must not have been treated with any dangerous chemicals which remain in the bark or wood.

Some chemicals actually build up over time, so they can be a high risk, even if the plants have only been sprayed with the chemicals at low concentrations over a period of time.

## **Pre-booking Interview**

You must arrange to meet the owner and the pets in advance of confirming a booking.

You expect the pet owner to want to see that you are suitable to look after their pet(s).

But, you also need to be sure that you are comfortable with all aspects of the arrangement before taking on any further obligation.

This meeting is like a job interview but you are reviewing whether the owners and the pet are ones which you will be happy working for at the same time as they are checking you and your services out.

It is important that you find out as much as possible about the pets and the owners, which is relevant to the services they need from you, in the preliminary interview.

You also need to encourage the owner to ask any questions which they want to so that you are both fully aware of each other's needs and responsibilities. This is a good and subtle way to find out if the owner's views on how their pets should be treated is in line with your own. Some owners may want things done which you might find too risky.

Your agreement, which the owner must sign before you can accept the booking, should include all the details I have listed here.

Be sure to add anything which you find out during the preliminary discussion which you feel is important enough to be recorded.

### ***Your Checklist***

You will develop a checklist which will cover the items you need to consider before you confirm a booking with a new client.

Some of the items would be:

Name of Client(s):

Their full contact details: Work/Home/mobile/Internet.

Nearest person to contact when Client is away. This is their trusted deputy only for contact in emergency situations who can make decisions which you feel are beyond your authority on their behalf.

Names and photos of each pet.

Details of any medications, past or current medical conditions, behavioral problems (I would politely decline the job if they have attacked other animals or people unless there were exceptional circumstances which were independently verified), special needs including allergies and fears, vaccinations and worm treatment (do not sit or even touch if these are not up-to-date with paperwork available).

Some pet owners may have their pets vaccinated but not for all the conditions which are important in your area. You should advise them of any which they have not done. Because there is a period after vaccination before the pet is protected, don't accept a booking until that period is over.

### ***Keys and other Security Matters***

You need to see around the whole house so that you know your way around. Where is the cleaning gear, pet food, etc?

Always try each key in each lock before leaving their home for the first time.

Have signed permission for having, transporting and using their keys.

Ask the owner to make sure that they tell their neighbors and postman that you will be visiting to look after their pet(s) for that period.

Get a list of anyone that might come to their home while you are there. If they want you to admit them, you need full identification details. If you don't get them, you might not want to take the responsibility.

You want one, or preferably two, sets of keys to all doors. If they cannot give you a second set of keys, ask for a signed note so that you can get a second set. Pay the locksmith and charge the client for them.

Always collect the keys from them and return them to the owner in person. Never collect or leave keys in those well-known places like under a stone or in the third drawer of their desk.

Make sure the agreement has been amended to take account of any new agreed conditions and signed by both of you.

## **Caring Tips for the Pets**

Ensuring the safety of the pets in your care involves many things, some of which may not be obvious. So, I have tried to cover some of the most common in this section.

Handling the animals and birds is critical and sometimes very high risk for you or the pet.

Make sure you get instructions from the owner if you are at all unsure about how to handling the pet.

You also should learn from a vet or experienced owner how to handle each type of pet if it is injured. These instructions should be learned directly from someone with practical experience and not from any book unless it is current (published within 12 months) and endorsed by your local vet.

All of these matters should be covered in the paperwork which you and the owners sign.

If there is cat-door or similar hatch for a dog to get in and out of the house, I suggest that you ask for it to be secured while the owner is away. There is a strong risk of a dog going looking for the owner if the opportunity arises and cats are, unfortunately, notorious for disappearing for up to several days in similar circumstances.

Of course, the pets are always at risk of being injured or worse when they are loose and unsupervised. That's why people hire pet minders.

But, you cannot accept any responsibility if the hatch is not locked shut all the time the owner is away.

I feel strongly enough that I would not accept the job if they leave the hatch open because I could not be sure of the pet's safety. And, if they could get out, a strange animal might be able to get in while there was no-one there to protect the pets.

You will check the vaccination status and other possible health matters regarding the pet(s) which the prospective client has as part of your discussion before doing anything with the pets. This ensures that you know

whether or not they are safe for you to touch without any special precautions.

If the owner said that their vaccinations or worming were not up to date, you should not handle the pets at all and ask the owner to ensure that everything, including their paperwork from their veterinarian, is up-to-date before you start caring for the pets.

That's essential for the safety of yourself and the other pets and owners whom you deal with.



## Additional Services

There are many additional services which you can provide if you have the time as well as the required knowledge or training.

Grooming would be a money-spinner if you have professional equipment and the time to do it well.

But, if the owner just wants you to brush their pet because they are a type which gets a matted coat if they are not regularly brushed (or the pet just likes to be groomed) you could offer the service for a small fee.

There are also some things which I would do as part of the service I provide. Collecting newspapers and mail from the box and putting it at an agreed spot inside the home would be a good security measure.

Watering plants is another service where I would charge if there were a large number but not if there were just a couple.

**Warning:** Watering the plants can cause damage if the water from any of the plants drips onto areas which become damaged. You need to specify in the agreement exactly which plants are to be watered, how often and how much. Also, that all responsibility for the watering is the owner's (and get them to initial that clause). Always double check that you have turned off any taps that you use.

Get specific written permission before you use any equipment in their home and always ensure that you leave everything at least as clean as you found it (better if it was really dirty!)

That includes kitchen utensils equipment and food, radios and bathrooms.

I always carry a pack with my own snacks, a drink, hand sanitizer and other supplies.

## When to Decline

If there are things which the owner does and asks you to do which you believe may be bad for the pet, you should politely refuse the work.

That might be:

- Confining the animal to a small enclosure without sufficient exercise time
- Requiring a dog to be fed shortly after exercise (this can cause bloat which is a serious problem) or
- Using choke chains or physical punishment or
- Anything else which could cause pain or distress for the pet.

You also need to be confident that the booking will be profitable for you. If you find the owner is particularly aggressive about wanting discounts or extra things done without any payment, you may want to decline the booking and plan to find a customer who you feel will be more compatible.

I think that a little diplomatic white lie, such as that you have all the bookings for that period which you can give your level of service to, is better in many cases than bluntly declining the booking.

If you find the conditions which the owner or the pets live in are unhygienic, then you should decline. You would be putting your health at risk and also risking your reputation if the pet became sick because of those conditions while under your care.

## Meeting the Pets

Introduce yourself to the pets while the owner is present. But, leave this until after you have had your discussion and you have verified that their immunizations are all up to date and they are able to be safely handled.



If everything is in order, you can focus on the pet(s), but just offer them the back of one hand to sniff. Being too demonstrative is likely to reduce the chance of forming a trusting relationship with the pet because it will still be trying to judge where you fit into the household.

Your objective is to closely follow the routine which the owner has established for the pet in all possible respects.

You are likely to care for many more dogs than cats because many cats are relatively comfortable looking after themselves overnight where most dogs develop a need for companionship to a greater degree.

## Dogs and Cats

Here are some general tips about sitting the two most popular types of pets you are likely to work with.

Many people have a dog and a cat or some multiple of that. They will ask you to care for all the pets but you will usually find the dog(s) needing more TLC more often.

In multi-pet households, the placement of food and water bowls becomes more important.

### Dogs

Most dogs have access to their food only at meal-times because many dogs will eat everything that they can, including food meant for cats or other pets in the household.



If this happens, it can mean they eat too much or they become sick because the food meant for the cats or other pets is rejected by their systems.

Most dogs are likely to eat all the food which is left out for them. That can cause problems, especially if they have exercise soon after eating.

Some dogs may eagerly eat any cat food they find which may make them sick.

So, follow the owner's instructions about where to place the bowls, when to feed which animal and whether any of them need to be supervised at feeding time.

Clean up the dog's bowls after they have eaten. Use the paper or cloth towels etc., which the owner specified.

### Cats

Cats are usually fairly self-sufficient (there are exceptions!)

Many households have one or more dogs and cats together. It is important that you know where each animal is fed and whether they share water bowls.



The cats will probably have access to their food all the time

Most cat owners can leave a bowl full of cat food and the cat will just eat what it needs.

There are always exceptions, so check with each owner before assuming this is the case

with any cat you are caring for.

## Other Pets You Can Sit For?

Dogs and cats are the most common pets which you will provide services for, but there will inevitably be inquiries from owners of others creatures about whether you can provide a suitable level of service and security for their pets.

Some which pet sitters are asked to look after include:



### *Snakes, geckos and other reptiles.*

If you have some experience and knowledge of what is involved, most reptiles are not much trouble to care for. You would be expected to be able to restrain the creature if it got out of its enclosure.

But, you may want to not accept the offer if giving a live mouse to a snake or live crickets to a gecko upsets you, or you are uncomfortable around most reptiles. The owners will probably understand because they will have had that sort of reaction before.

### *Pigs*



Most pet pigs are the pot-bellied type and they are popular though many are abandoned or even killed when they start to grow and the novelty of the little piglet wears off.

They should all be neutered at an early age. Of course, that's not your decision but an un-neutered older pig, however cute, probably has some bad habits. The males have a bad smell around mating time too!

They are a great animal when properly cared for but I would decline the opportunity unless I had some personal experience of caring for them already and really liked pigs.

## *Rabbits*

Rabbits are a very popular pet which also have a high rate of abandonment once they start to grow or because the owner does not know how to care for and connect with their bunny.

If you have to care for a single pet rabbit that is part of a multi-pet



household, the rabbit may be stressed due to not being given much attention. They are not as domesticated as dogs or cats and really need to have another rabbit for company or at least a few hours of human companionship each day.

But, for the people who understand their needs and give them plenty of attention, they respond well after a while and can be very entertaining.

They can be trained to use a litter tray and walk

on a lead.

Rabbits are at more risk of injury and should not be handled by very small children. Don't pick them up unless you have to. Always support them under their back and front feet when you do. Picking them up by their ears is cruel – magicians stopped doing it a long time ago!

They appreciate the chance to get some fresh air and clean grass but must be closely guarded because cats and other creatures will kill them.

They need to gnaw a suitable wood and dig. But, they should be housed inside the home for security and companionship. They are very clean but the one problem letting them roam inside the house is that they will gnaw electric cables and other things and cause considerable damage to the owner's property and themselves.

They need to be immunized for Myxomatosis and a couple of other diseases. They should also have an antibiotic added to their water which protects against coccidiosis. The rabbit type of coccidiosis is different to the types which affect other species, such as parrots and dogs, and the virus cannot be transferred between the different species.

## *Ferrets*



This unusual animal has strong appeal for some people. They are used to hunt rabbits but many are just kept as pets.

They need to be watched because they are very inquisitive and like to get into things and cause damage.

They chew just about anything and can swallow small objects which get stuck, risking serious injury. Ferrets can be trained to use litter boxes but always check what sort of litter the owner uses for them and do not use anything else. Some types of cat litter may cause serious problems.

They can be fun to watch but you need to be sure how well they get along with the owners' other pets before letting them all mix together.

There is plenty of information on the Net about them but always verify it with acknowledged experts. It's possible that some vets may not have treated ferrets since they were first trained.

## *Birds, large and small*

**Bird Flu is Still a Problem!:** Caring for birds which are kept outside, especially larger ones such as ducks and geese, may involve some risk in certain areas of contracting bird flu. It is still a very significant risk even though the media has less interest in it when I'm writing this. If you are considering looking after birds in these sort of situations, at least check with your local agricultural service for advice or where you can get the most current information.



### *Small Birds*

Don't handle birds unless the owner is happy for you to do so. Many small birds may react badly and even die if someone they don't know holds them. They can also harm themselves if they are frightened by sudden movements or loud noises.



If you are not supposed to handle them, it will be difficult if you are supposed to let them fly around the room while you clean the cage and refresh their seed and water.

The only suggestions I can give is to put a treat (pre-approved by the owner) just inside the open door of their cage. But, this is not guaranteed to work every time and you may have to extend your time at that home without increasing your charge if you can't persuade the bird to return to its cage.

Before you let the bird fly around the room, check that they cannot get out through a window, door, pet flap or any other opening. Put something in front of any large window or the bird may fly directly into it if it thinks there is a way out.

### ***Fish, tropical and cold water***

Fish are fascinating to watch.

But, you need to be fairly careful if you have responsibility for some. You need to know whether they are fresh or salt water, okay in cold water or need special heating.

You need to make a list of the fish so that you can check if some cannot be seen one day. There can be an innocent explanation but you will need to check in case they are dying or being eaten by other fish.

Most owners will have small spare bowls or even tanks which can be used to isolate any fish which appear sick or may have been attacked by a parasite or other fish. You may have to avoid using water from the regular tap if you are asked to top up the water in the tank or put water in an extra tank for a fish which has to be kept away from those in the main tank.

Ask the owner for the contact details of another fish owner who may be able to help you decide whether a fish is so sick it should be taken to the vet or not. Most owners of fish will have lots of knowledge and friends who will be only too happy to help them and advise you in a possible emergency

Before you handle any pet fish, wash your hands in clean water with unscented pure soap and dry them thoroughly.

Ask the owner for a demonstration about how to handle a fish and whether there are any which they don't want you to handle at all, or which may be dangerous.

Only use the same equipment which their owner does and get a quick but careful lesson from them about anything you might have to use which is unfamiliar to you.

Ask them to show you exactly how much of which food to give which fish and how often?

Write everything down and check it by reading it back to the owner.

If there are some fish in separate tanks, don't get them mixed up. If you find a fish alive on the floor beside the tank, it's okay to scoop it back in but don't put it in the wrong tank because it may eat other fish in there or be attacked by them.

Don't use aerosols or any other sprays in the same room as the fish tank. Some chemicals will coat the water and prevent more oxygen going in. This can cause fish to jump from the tank on to the floor where they will die or suffocate because there is no oxygen getting into the water in the tank.

## **Promoting Your Pet Sitting Business**

You can use any of the standard methods of promotion for getting the word out about your new business.

But, a little thought and creativity can save you money and help to avoid some simple mistakes which can cause problems that are hard to undo.

### **Signs**

Be sure that any signs which you do have are okay under the local authority's regulations.

You can have a sign at your business premises but I would not have one at your home. It might attract the occasional casual passerby but they could land on your doorstep at inconvenient times.

Having signage printed on your vehicle can be effective but some pet sitters prefer to use magnetic signs which can be removed from the sides of the vehicle when you are only using it for family outings and the like.

You should be careful to remove your car signage before you start your rounds of your clients' homes. It may reassure their neighbors that you are a legitimate visitor but the signage could also tell a potential thief that the home is vacant – otherwise, why would a pet sitter's vehicle be in the driveway?

### **Business Cards etc.**

I always have a few business cards with me and some fridge magnets which are often more effective. Be careful to only offer them when it is not an intrusion.

I think that you could always give your clients a few of the cards or magnets and suggest that they give one to their neighbors and any relatives who might pass by their home when you are caring for their pets.

### ***Phone book?***

I think an advertisement in the local phonebook is okay but I would not try to compete to have the biggest or most colorful advertisement. That's because I think that a good web site is a much better investment these days.

### **Web Site**

Although many people will tell you a good web site requires an investment of several hundred dollars just to get started, it's possible to set up your own web site much more cheaply and get good results.

If you don't have a college student who can make a good site for you in your family, some of your close relatives or friends will know someone.

Or, you can learn from a local adult learning course in just a few weeks.

The eBookwholesaler member that supplied this book to you may also be able to recommend some quality resources to you as well.

The advantages of your own web site over a more expensive advertisement in the phone book include:

- ✓ You can change the text, color, pictures and design of your web pages at any time. You have to wait until next year to change your advertisement in the phone book.
- ✓ If you make a mistake on your printed advertisement, changing it would be quite expensive. But, fixing an error on your web pages will probably just take a few minutes and cost you nothing!
- ✓ When someone is looking at your web page, yours is the only one they see. There are not several other larger advertisements for competitors trying also to grab their attention.
- ✓ You can use your web address (<http://www.example.com/>) on all your stationery and other promotional material so people can get your information any time they are using their computer or other Internet enabled device.
- ✓ Extra colors and pages cost no more.

There are some things which you need to be careful about when making your web site.

- Do not use anyone else's pictures or text or design without specific written permission.
- Be very careful that you only get pictures from the person or company which has the rights to supply them to you with permission for you to use them. Many people have been sued for large amounts because they used something which they may have thought they had permission to use.
- I would not use pictures of my clients' pets because I am very careful about protecting their privacy. But, you may want to do that where the client gives you permission for you to use the testimonial on your website.
- But, please, never publish their full contact information.
- Use a separate email address for your business or maybe even more than one.
- Do not send advertising to people unless you have their specific permission to do so. It's called spam.

Think about what name you want for your web site very carefully. Don't use anything which resembles a well-known business, cartoon character or other trademark, no matter how clever it may seem.

If the name of your site conflicts with someone's registered mark or copyright, you are likely to be required to remove the image and you may have to give them the site as well!

## **Shelley's Farewell**

Thank you for buying my book.

I hope that the information and tips which I've shared will smooth your journey to great success as a pet sitter of distinction.

Pet sitting can be very satisfying and profitable.

You will also gather many wonderful memories of wonderful pets and their owners whom you have helped to get through their times apart much better.

*Shelley Smith*

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