

**Moving to Adoption Guarantee:  
How to Overcome Resistance and Gain  
Community Support**  
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Richmond SPCA



Sadie and her new family

**Why embrace adoption guarantee for  
your organization and your community?**

- Because it saves many more lives.
- Because it is the way of the future.
- Because it teaches the community the right messages.
- Because it moves the goal posts in the right direction.



Mosby adopted from us during the miserable winter of 2009-10

**Why would you not embrace  
adoption guarantee for your  
organization and your community?**

- Because, if you don't challenge the status quo, you can't be made fun of, can't fail, can't be laughed at.
- Because you have fears: that you cannot raise enough money, that people will attack you, that those within your organization will resist change.
- Because it would suggest that the way things have been done in the past was wrong.
- Because you believe that your community is harder to change than mine – that there is not enough money, sincere caring for animals, or whatever to be able to do it where you live.

**If you try, you will at a minimum move  
your community in the right direction.**

- If you try to do it and fail:
  - You will have made it safer for others to change the boundaries.
  - You will have at least ensured that fewer animals die in your community.
  - You will have asked the appropriate questions and started people of good conscience thinking in the right direction.
- The best part is: If you try and are tenacious, you will probably succeed!

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*  
– [Margaret Mead](#)

*Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently – they're not fond of rules... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can't do is ignore them because they change things... they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world are the ones who do.*  
– [Steve Jobs](#)

**First Step: Getting Your Board's Buy In**  
Strategic Planning is essential:

- Allow enough time for them to research and learn.
- Choose committee members who are open to change and have courage.
- Have an uninvolved and preferably professional facilitator
- Set a tone of willingness to examine and challenge old notions.
- Keep bringing the rest of the Board members along with regular reports.
- Allow supportive Board members to carry the ball as much as possible.
- Understand that this presents risks for you and the organization: this process is not for the faint of heart.



Jade happy with her new home

**Leadership is earned not conferred.**

- Understand that 100% support from your Board is not likely. Get supporting board members comfortable with that.
- Be respectful but do not give in to continuing the status quo. Be persistent; be tenacious. Be a leader.



Bruce, rescued from a Virginia puppy mill

## Once your Board has adopted a new plan for the future:

Move swiftly to:

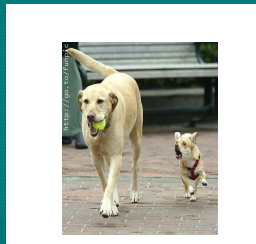
- First, present the news to your staff, donors and volunteers before they hear it from elsewhere.
- Get the support of other respected people and organizations quietly.
- Consider carefully how to present this to the public – distill messages.
- Have people lined up to write supportive letters to the editor, etc.
- Focus on the ones you can convert. A new true supporter is worth much more than a mollified critic.
- Have a single spokesperson and no one else talks publicly!



Portia adopted last summer

## How to deal with anger and resistance

- You are likely to be attacked any time you seek to significantly change the status quo.
- People remember how you behave when under pressure and the stress is high, not when all is well.
- Emotional maturity is vastly underrated. Especially in our field.
- Acknowledge the anger and respond rationally. Your real audience is the sane but uninformed ones who you can educate and convert, not the nasty and emotional ones.
- Never doubt that you will survive the attacks. And, be the stronger for it.



## Dealing with Staff Resistance

- Help them to understand why this will save more lives.
- You need to get the right people on the bus.
- Make no commentary that what they did in the past was wrong.
- Give them a reasonable period of time to embrace the change. Then, make clear that the Board determines the vision of the organization and they must support it or leave.
- Firmly establish an organizational culture of discipline and an environment that encourages creativity and receptiveness to trying new things without retribution for failure.

## Foster a staff who will be receptive to change and progress.

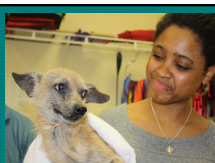
- Create a culture that allows mistakes, experimentation and failure and does not punish those things.
- Accountability is essential but it must not be used to smother resourcefulness and creativity.
- *Skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it is or where it was.* Wayne Gretzky
  - Create a culture that believes in skating to where the puck is going to be.



Jinx (the one on the right) in her new home

## Your philosophy should be clear to you and to your community and you must be true to it. Always.

- The Philosophy of the Richmond SPCA:
  - We are committed to creating a no kill community.
  - We will take no more animals than we can responsibly care for without euthanizing any that are healthy or treatable.
  - We will provide our community with the programs and services it needs to end the loss of life of healthy and treatable animals.
  - We will not participate in or facilitate their reliance on lethal methods of pet population control.
  - We believe that every private organization has the right to determine what role and how extensive a role it plays.
  - We believe that every dog and cat deserves to be treated as an individual.



## If yours will be an adoption guarantee shelter:

- Your spokesperson must be able to:
  - Clearly and succinctly explain why having a private adoption guarantee shelter that limits admissions is crucial and why the new approach will save lives. It will.
- Crucial messages are:
  - euthanizing animals is not an obligation of any private organization,
  - the goal is to ultimately end the loss of life of healthy and treatable animals community wide,
  - the plan will not increase the burden on other agencies
    - there is much empirical evidence that refutes that notion and none to support it,
  - that the assumption that there always must be just as many or more animals to kill is faulty.

Partner with groups you can work with respectfully and sanely. Avoid interacting with those you cannot.

- Most valuable are public/private partnerships – ours with Richmond Animal Care & Control and Hanover Animal Control have been great successes.
- To work with others you do not need to agree with them, but you do need to be able to treat each other respectfully. If others cannot do that, just leave them alone.
- Report statistics collectively and always be transparent to the community.



Richmond Combined Statistics:  
Our Partnership was agreed to in 2001 and began in operation at the beginning of 2002.

2001 Calendar Year – The Baseline Year					
Richmond SPCA			RACC		
Total Intake	4287		Total Intake	3782	
Intake from RACC	38		Transfers to RSPCA	38	
Other Intake	4249		Other Live Releases	1247	
Live Releases	3255	76%	Total Live Releases	1285	34%
Total Euthanized	887	21%	Total Euthanized	2336	62%
Combined					
	Intakes	8069			
	Live Releases	4540		56%	
	Euthanized	3223		40%	

First year of New Model:  
yielded improved results for both organizations

2002 Calendar Year					
Richmond SPCA			RACC		
Total Intake	2504		Total Intake	4034	
Intake from RACC	660		Transfers to RSPCA	660	
Other Intake	1844		Other Live Releases	1183	
Live Releases	2247	90%	Total Live Releases	1843	46%
Total Euthanized	167	7%	Total Euthanized	1717	43%
Combined					
	Intakes	6538			
	Live Releases	4090		63%	
	Euthanized	1884		29% (42% fewer than in 2001)	

2006 was our first full year of no healthy homeless animal dying anywhere in Richmond.

2006 Calendar Year					
Richmond SPCA			RACC		
Total Intake	3426		Total Intake	4234	
Intake from RACC	851		Transfers to RSPCA	851	
Other Intake	2575		Other Live Releases	1750	
Live Releases	3344	98%	Total Live Releases	2601	61%
Total Euthanized	33	1%	Total Euthanized	1581	37%
Combined					
	Intakes	7660			
	Live Releases	5945		78%	
	Euthanized	1614		21%	

We are now saving all of the healthy dogs and cats and 75% of the treatables.

2009 Calendar Year					
Richmond SPCA			RACC		
Total Intake	2962		Total Intake	4106	
Intake from RACC	1148		Transfers to RSPCA	1148	
Other Intake	1814		Other Live Releases	1533	
Live Releases	2908	98%	Total Live Releases	2681	65%
Total Euthanized	36	1%	Total Euthanized	1416	34%
Combined					
	Intakes	7068			
	Live Releases	5589		79%	
	Euthanized	1452		21%	

## Final Thoughts

- *Whether you prevail or fail depends more on what you do to yourself than what the world does to you. Jim Collins*
- Transitioning to Adoption Guarantee is challenging but the lives it will save will be your reward.
- Success is all about tenacity. Just keep on despite resistance.
- Conduct yourself with dignity.
- Never attack your detractors; ignore them – your ultimate success will silence them.



Sheelock with his new family