Let’s face it! Per sitting is basically a solitary occupation. Frankly, for some of us that is one of the chief attractions. I personally, spent many years working with executives that acted more like animals than the animals I now care for.

When our pet sitting services are just up and running, we spend time communicating with our answering machines and spouse-delivered messages. Many times we don’t expect our service to grow very fast, and when it does, we are surprised without a plan. Many of you remember a weekend when suddenly 20 visits were scheduled along with your cousins wedding. Panic attack! If you expect your business to grow steadily and plan in advance, you will smoothly accommodate the growth.

After a few years of a steadily increasing customer base, we suddenly find ourselves with several pet sitters, more administration work and communication problems cropping up. By giving a little early thought to your communication plan, you can avoid problems later on when you have a staff to communicate with.

Just as with clients, you must be available to your sitters. It is not only frustrating, but also demoralizing to have an urgent question/emergency and not be able to contact the boss. As the head of the company, you should have a cellular phone, but some will feel that they can’t afford it. I felt that way for awhile. I agonized over whether I would use it enough to justify the expense. I have had mine for almost a year, and now can’t imagine being without it. I can call clients when I am a bit late for an appointment, or to get better directions. I can call my answering machine and return client phone messages faster. My husband can reach me to, let me know when clients return early, or are delayed, necessitating an
extra pet visit. (Or to pick up Chinese food!) I can call my sitters from the car, and they know they can reach me there also. I was also able to call the tow truck when I slid off an icy road into a ditch.

Regular meetings are also important in the communication chain. Of course, the most difficult part is scheduling the meeting around everyone’s pet visits. Many sitters work full time jobs and pet sit part time, which further narrows the time available for meetings. If you have just a few sitters, it is nice to have a dinner or breakfast meeting, or maybe a Saturday lunch meeting. Buying the meal for your sitters is a nice little extra for them.

Try to arrange an occasional meeting at your home. Your sitters may never have been there and would enjoy seeing the administrative side of the business. Refreshments and a casual atmosphere add to communication between you and your sitters. You can also show videos at your home meetings. There are quality videos available on pet training, first aid emergencies, pet nutrition, new pet products, etc. Sometimes these videos are free. Share tips about getting along with difficult clients, difficult pets, the best locksmith, etc. These meetings should be more than just social occasions. Everyone should come away with valuable information.

Have a typed agenda and try to stick to the plan. It is easy to start discussing funny or bizarre pet visits and business talk evaporates! Have copies of the NAPPS newsletter for your sitters, as well as local Humane Society newsletter, and if you publish a company newsletter, pass out copies of those also. My business newsletter has a special addition, The Inside Scope, for my sitters. If your sitters feel comfortable with it, have them write short pieces for your local newsletter.

Your sitters may have very good ideas for improving service, advertising, marketing, client services, etc. Always encourage suggestions from your sitters and publicly acknowledge a sitter whose idea has increased revenue, clients, or morale. You can’t get along without quality sitters and they need accolades as much as anyone else. Especially since the pets never talk to us.

Keeping in touch is important. Remember your sitter’s birthdays and anniversaries with a card. Small gifts are appreciated on holidays; don’t be afraid to show how much you appreciate their hard work. When nice notes or tips come in from clients for them, pass that along to them, along with warm words from you for a job well done. One of the main frustrations with the workplace is that people don’t feel appreciated. If your business has had experience with poor sitters, you
realize that good sitters are worth their weight in gold. Let them know that they are valuable to your team.

Regular phone calls, meetings and sharing of newsletters, cards, and pertinent articles can go long ways to avoiding frustrations, misunderstandings and communication problems. Make them a habit in your pet sitting business.

NAPPS Network  April/May  1995