



Invest, Train, Sustain: Building Effective Behavior Structures in Shelter Organizations

Presenter Name

Brittany Linkenheimer KPA-CTP,
CPDT-KA

Monday, March 16, 2026





**Behavior programs
thrive when
resilience and
expertise meet
intentional
leadership support**

Why this is a Leadership Priority

Decisions made in behavior programs directly affect:

- Length of stay
- Pathway planning and outcomes
- Staff morale and retention
- Community relationships
- Ethical decision -making within the organization
- Our animals' welfare
- Many, many more...

Because behavior work touches every aspect of an organization, leadership support is essential.



Why this is a Leadership Priority

When decisions and systems are unclear or inconsistent, organizations often see:

- Burnout and morale distress
- Unclear expectations
- Confusion around decision pathways
- Insufficient training and coaching
- Lack of cultural or psychological safety

Burnout is a check engine light for our organizations.



Invitation to Explore...

Invest

one place where you
could invest differently

Train

one way you could train
more intentionally

Sustain

one system you could
adjust to increase
sustainability

Invest

Invest in the People

Invest in the qualities and expertise to form the foundation of effective behavior work.

- Emotional regulation and resilience
- Values alignment and ethical decision making
- Curiosity and willingness to learn and collaborate
- Appropriate shelter behavior experience, education, professional certification
- External expertise

People development requires a comprehensive approach



Invest in the Systems

Identify the systems to prioritize and the training necessary to execute them

- Clear protocols, SOPs, and guidelines
- Shelter -specific behavior tools and models
- Handling and safety protocols
- Assessment frameworks and documentation
- Internal decision -making process - Voice Roles

Systems work best when intentional tools are developed and paired with skilled staff and leadership support.



Invest in Expectation Setting

Organizational Capacity Fluctuates

- Provide protected time and staffing support
- Align expectations with available resources
- Define clear roles and workflows across departments
- Maintain ongoing communication about resources and capacity

Aligning expectations with capacity strengthens performance and protects programs.



Train

Training That Transfers

Developing skills to support the work the role requires

- Knowledge (know): policies, terminology, protocols → *Where most online training stops*
- Application (do): handling, assessments, documentation → *Requires structured, hands-on practice and repetition*
- Analysis (interpret): patterns, triggers, environmental factors → *Requires guided coaching and feedback on real cases*
- Decide (adapt): risk assessments, ethics, quality-of-life decisions; creating/adjusting behavior plans and protocols → *Where real organizational risk and accountability live*

Knowledge informs the work
skills make it possible.



The Leadership Role in Adult Learning

Five Principles to Consider

- **Relevance** → Why this, why now?
- **Experience** → Leverage prior learning; address bias and habits.
- **Application** → Practice beats information; skills require reps.
- **Psychological safety** → Safety allows people to try, reflect, and improve.
- **Coaching** → Feedback builds skills; repetition creates consistency.

Training is more than an event; it's a continuous, supported process.



Sustain

Sustainability Requires Feedback Loops

Supporting Staff, Volunteers, and Community Needs

- Creating feedback loops to capture information to identify and support needs.
- Making edits to your leadership support
- Balancing this with Board and Donor expectations

Organizational outcomes:

- Enhance employee well-being and retention
- Higher trust and engagement
- Improved animal outcomes
- Stronger organizational culture

Leadership plays a vital role in creating feedback loops that supports our teams and programs through continuous improvement.



Contact and Resources

Brittany Linkenheimer, KPA -CTP, CPDTKA

Senior Manager, Shelter Behavior Training
Learning Lab, ASPCA

b.linkenheimer@aspca.org

Resources

aspca.org

[learn.aspca.org](http://aspca.org/learn)





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