The Americans with Disabilities Act permits one reasonable accommodation, the use of “service animals” to assist those with disabilities. For example, seeing-eye dogs are allowed to accompany blind individuals at work. The EEOC guideline is reasonable since guide dogs are necessary to blind individuals, and furthermore, guide dogs are trained not to be a nuisance. However, employees with other ailments, such as depression, anxiety, or stress, now are wanting to bring their animals to work alleging these “companion animals” are a reasonable accommodation to their health or disability needs. The following case illustrates the dilemma employers face when employees with disabilities want to bring their animals to work.

In December 2007, Elizabeth Booth was hired by Case Services Corporation as an accountant in the organization’s billing department. Elizabeth is a quadriplegic who uses a wheelchair for mobility. Shortly after her employment, Elizabeth requested that she be allowed to bring her small dog, Mandy, to work. Elizabeth stated that Mandy was a comfort to her and that the dog was specifically trained to pick up small items she might accidentally drop. Elizabeth assured her supervisor that Mandy was a well-mannered dog who would cause no problems for either herself or her coworkers.

Additionally, in support of her request, Elizabeth obtained from her personal physician a letter stating that she sometimes felt stressed at work and that Mandy, as a companion animal, would help relieve Elizabeth’s stressful feelings. However, when Elizabeth’s request landed on the desk of Howard Upton, HR director for Case Services, the request was quickly denied. After learning of the decision, Elizabeth immediately filed a discrimination charge with the EEOC claiming the company did not provide a reasonable accommodation to her disability or her health needs.

Questions

1. List disadvantages of allowing companion animals to come to work.
2. Does Mandy’s ability to pick up dropped items classify her as a service animal? Explain.
3. Does Elizabeth’s work stress affect the outcome of this case? Explain.
4. How would you decide this case? Explain.

Source: This case is adapted from James J. McDonald, Jr., “Take Your Dog To Work Everyday,” Employee Relations Law Journal 32, no. 3 (Winter 2006): 86.