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Analyzing Applications Within the Animal Rescue Community

Communities of practice are defined by Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner in

"Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction," as "… groups of people who share a concern

or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly." (1).

Animal rescues are one example, even if they aren't the first thing that comes to mind when you

think of a community of practice. All rescues have a common goal and interest: Saving animals

lives and providing them with forever homes. To further prove that rescues are communities of

practice, Wenger-Trayner also says that, "In pursuing their interest in their domain, members

engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information." (2). In rescue,

it is necessary to work together and share information about individual animals with one another

to find them their most suitable home.

In order for the community to find these animals their forever homes, they must use a

variety of genres to communicate and get things done. An example of a Florida dog rescue that

uses genres for this purpose is PolkaDogz Pet Rescue in Winter Garden. PolkaDogz is a small

dog rescue, and while the rescue takes all types of small dogs, they specialize in sick, injured,

and elderly dogs. Because rescues are volunteer run, basic literacy is needed to be a part of the

community, and members learn on the job only after they have completed orientation.

Volunteers complete orientation and can later be certified as a "B" person, meaning that they can

work at the rescue on their own, and/or have a "C" person accompany them, since they are

uncertified to work at the rescue on their own because they are either too young, have not been trained or are unwilling to be trained. These labels are specific to our community and sets it apart from others. But what makes it similar to others? Genre.

Most rescue organizations have applications. There are many of them, and, in the Polka-Dogz community, there are four. All of the applications can be found on the Polka-Dogz website including a volunteer application, a foster application, an animal surrender application, and an adoption application. These applications have a similar layout, with a header at the top to identify the form, fill in the blanks, selection bubbles, a notice on the side of the application, and questions with text boxes to be filled in. Because the applications have such similar formats, they fit in with what Kerry Dirk says in "Navigating Genres", "Genre used to refer primarily to form, which meant that writing in a particular genre was seen as simply a matter of filling in the blanks." (4), and what Charles Bazerman says in "Speech Acts, Genres, and Activity Systems: How Texts Organize Activity and People," "Recognizable, self-reinforcing forms of communication emerge as genres" (316).

The rhetorical situation being responded to is simply an inquiry of some sort about the rescue. For example, you would fill out an adoption application if you were interested in adopting a certain dog. The rescue would set up a time to meet the potential adopter and do a home visit with the dog being inquired about. If all goes well with the house visit, and everyone in the house is happy with the new pet, including the other animals in the household, the volunteer doing the home visit leaves the dog with its new family. If you were surrendering an animal, you would fill out an application, it would be processed by someone at the rescue, and eventually a decision to intake or reject the dog will be made. If you wanted to volunteer, you would fill out the application online, wait to be rejected or accepted, attend orientation, and begin

volunteering. And lastly if you wanted to foster, you would fill out the foster application, wait for it to be processed, have a volunteer do a house check, and then start fostering the dog of choice.

Because the rescues mission and common interest is about saving dogs lives and giving them a happy forever home, it is extremely important that the application forms are easily understood and ask all the right questions. Not only that, but they must all have a professional tone. Potential adopters will most likely want to adopt from a rescue that sounds professional, so that their adoption experience goes smoothly. Not only that, but if someone is surrendering a beloved family pet for any reason, they would want them to go to a seemingly capable rescue. Many volunteers at the rescue chose to volunteer and adopt from Polka-Dogz because of their professionalism.

Furthermore, the usage of pathos encourages clients to adopt or surrender their unwanted animals. On the rescues website, which contains all of the applications, there is a message underneath their banner with a button to donate. The message reads, "Rescue organizations are making great strides and combating animal abuse in all forms, but we MUST have help from individuals everywhere. This is a daunting task, and sometimes seems impossible, but when you look into the eyes of the animals you have saved, it means the world to them. We cannot and will not turn away. Your contributions are sincerely appreciated." Also, the banner displays messages such as "Give them a forever home," and on the side of the home page it shows all the dogs that are currently available for adoption. Most rescues use pathos to influence clients as well. Examples of these rescues include but are not limited to "Poodle and Pooch Rescue", "A Forever Home Animal Rescue," and "Hound Haven."

In conclusion, the tone in which the applications are presented and the amount of detail the applications use when asking questions, makes for a more successful rhetorical situation. This is true for all four of the applications on the website, and all of the applications were created with the same goal in mind: to save the lives of homeless dogs. So how can the rescue community save even more lives? By asking the question, "How do the rhetorical features of the genre affect client's willingness to adopt, rather than shop for homeless animals?"

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