

THE VALUE OF A MENTOR

When I started in Aussies many years ago I was privileged to have gotten my first show dog from someone that proved to be an invaluable mentor. Her guidance set me on the right path from the very beginning. I was not to know until many years later how fortunate I was to buy a dog from someone that was willing to mentor me.

This mentor taught me how to show dogs, but more important than that, she taught me how to know a good dog when I saw one. In mentoring me her focus was on the dogs - not on the shows, the wins or the rankings, though she was very successful.

She went over the nuances of her dogs, both the strengths and weaknesses... She sat with me ringside at shows... She helped me understand what sound movement was... She was often brutally honest... She took time to teach me...

It seems since that time that there has been a shift away from these true mentoring relationships. It is easy to blame those that have been around for awhile for not caring enough to spend the time mentoring new people in the breed. I have heard more than my share of complaints from newcomers about this. While there may be an element of truth in this I think that the problem is more complex than that.

On the mentor side, in addition to showing and breeding themselves, often those persons have full time jobs. They may even have become judges and spend a fair time traveling. Our general culture is also much busier than it was years ago, often making it more difficult to find the time to mentor others. Even if a mentor is able to overcome all the time constraint hurdles, there are also some other challenges involving purpose and expectations on the part of the newcomers.

For newcomers that desire true mentoring relationships, I would like to recommend the following things that would make mentoring relationships more likely to begin and continue:

- If possible, get your dogs from breeders that are willing to mentor you
- Be considerate of your mentor's time
- Always be teachable – remember that you will never stop learning
- Be willingly to hear the truth when you ask a question, especially about your own dogs
- Spend a lot of your own time educating yourself on dog structure and movement - it will help both of you to “speak” the same language, and give you more tools to work with
- Be patient about what you know – your mentor did not learn what they know overnight and neither will you
- Be patient about your successes in the ring and in the whelping box - even if you are fortunate enough to get an outstanding dog that you may have some early success with, that does not translate into knowledge
- Never forget – it is about the dogs – not about what you accomplish
- Listen, listen, listen

Let the mentoring begin!

Reprinted by permission of the author from the September 2008 AKC Gazette

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