



Patience with the Pet-Seeking Public

All too often, I receive calls or e-mails from individuals seeking information and complaining that no one they have contacted will talk to them or answer their e-mails. These people are generally looking for a pet and have little to no idea of what to expect from a purebred breeder. They have been turned away without knowing why, or even what they should have asked or expected from their contacts. Most of us do not have that many puppies available and are very particular as to where those puppies are placed. However, this does not free us of the obligation to help these people in any way that we can, even if it is only letting them know the proper questions to ask and just how hard it may be to find what they are looking for. We stress that they "buy from a breeder," but what does the public do when they find it impossible to find a breeder who will sell them a puppy or even speak to them? They obviously go elsewhere, with a bad impression of our sport and the people associated with it. Why are we obliged to help these people? Because in their minds, the person they communicate with represents the breed, or the parent club, or even the kennel club. Each time that a caller is simply turned away with "We have nothing available," or a phone message is not returned, or an e-mail is left unanswered, an image is formed - correctly or not - of everyone associated with the sport.

At a time when our sport is under continuous attack in legislatures and city halls around the country, we have a tendency to forget just how much influence we as individuals can have. It is not just a matter of supporting

our parent clubs and the AKC or contacting our representatives, although these are important steps. We must also make sure that every communication that we have with the public is positive, and conveys the values that we purebred enthusiasts share. This is something that we can practice every day.

We can use these contacts as opportunities to educate, by guiding these people to the AKC and parent - club web sites. These sites contain a wealth of information that is helpful not just to those interested in participating in the sport but to anyone considering owning and loving the breed. Most of us know other breeders in our area, and if they have anything available. In certain cases, we might guide them to rescue organizations. By using each contact with the public as an opportunity to educate and present our sport in a favorable manner, we can send a positive message. The ultimate payoff is that one more person gains a positive perception of the sport and the people involved in it.

Nothing resonates with people better than a personal example. By taking the time to assist the people who contact us, we can provide that example, and possibly make a friend for the sport of dogs. We all started somewhere; many of us started out by wanting a pet and ended up devoting much of our free time and funds to the sport. Some of the people who contact you might do the same, given the proper encouragement.

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