

## A Dog Groomer's Dilemma

**A groomer must explain to an owner that shaving a dog is necessary for the pet's health and comfort.**

*By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG*

**Q.** I have been grooming for about seven months. I have a client with a Golden Retriever-Poodle mix who is badly matted. I feel he needs to be shaved. How can I convince the owners that it will make him feel better and eventually look better? Also, will his coat grow back the same? Since the mats are really tight against the skin, do I use a #10 blade?

**A.** You are caught in a frequent dog grooming dilemma, torn between the wish to please your customer and the desire to do what's best for the dog. Being a born people-pleaser myself, I can relate. It took me many years of experience and the confidence that comes with it before I decided that the best interest of the pet must always come first in my salon. By this I don't mean that you should simply refuse to demat a dog that is a walking pelt without first explaining your reasoning to the pet owner. I believe that part of the job of a professional pet groomer is to educate the owner on the grooming schedule their dog requires, the amount of upkeep it will need between salon visits, the proper tools and products to use at home, and how to use them.

Most folks simply don't realize that when a dog's coat gets tightly matted to the skin, it's not only inhumane to try to demat it, it's often impossible. Since time is money in the grooming shop, it can become very costly for the owner as well. Even if dematting was possible, the end result would probably look sparse and moth-eaten and the poor dog would have had to stand on a table for an extended period of time while you use a dematting tool that is razor-sharp to cut through the mats, often a painful process. Brushing out what's left of the coat would most likely irritate the skin, already in poor condition from being sealed up in that fur overcoat for a substantial amount of time.

Any curly-coated mix like this has the tendency to become matted if not brushed all the way to the skin at least twice a week. If the owner bathes the dog at home without completely brushing it out first, the moisture from the bath sets those mats in even tighter, another point that needs to be explained to the owner.

It is imperative that groomers examine each and every canine customer brought in for grooming. If the client tells you she wants a show trim on her Bichon Frise as she drops it off and bolts out the door and you then find out it is severely matted, you will need to chase her down or reach her by phone to get her permission before clipping that coat down. This is one lesson most groomers learn the hard way. Otherwise, you will be faced with an irate and heartbroken client when she returns to find her bouffant baby has been sheared like a sheep.

It's also a good idea to ask the owner of a badly matted dog to sign a release form granting you permission to strip down the coat. This lets the owner know that the pet's health is a top priority while you protect yourself and your business. Your release form should explain that the clipping process on a matted dog carries with it possibility of skin irritation and nicking. Removing a coat that has turned into a solid pelt is akin to a surgical procedure so it should also authorize you to give the pet a soothing medicated bath once the matted coat has been removed.

In the vast majority of cases, the owner will appreciate your sincere concern and will set up a grooming schedule for the furry family member so this will not happen again. After all, it is not your fault that the client's dog is matted. You are there to help the animal look and feel better – isn't that why you went into this line of work in the first place? And yes, the coat of a Golden Retriever-Poodle mix that you transform into a "smoothie" will grow back to its original condition. As to blade size, I would prefer to use a #7f just to keep the dog from looking stark naked but I know there are instances where only a #10 blade will get underneath those tightly set mats.