

What It Takes to Be a Dog Groomer

Find out what interests, skills, and other qualities are necessary to become a dog grooming professional.

By Denise Flaim

Jonathan David is a New York-based dog groomer who bathes and pampers the pooches of celebrities like Mariah Carey and Ralph Lauren, and who made it to the final round of the Animal Planet reality show "Groomer Has It."

A good groomer, he says, needs more than just great technique. As simple as it sounds, "a successful groomer needs a deep love for animals." Oftentimes, this is cemented in childhood: Growing up in suburban New Jersey with a Cairn Terrier, a Doberman Pinscher, and a black Lab, David later sought out work in a pet store, where a groomer who rented space there taught him how to groom.

In addition to a long fuse, a groomer needs empathy. "You need to understand things from the dog's perspective," David says. Working with a dog rather than trying to dominate is the best approach, and that requires a deep reserve of confidence. "Dogs can sense when a person isn't in control, so having a calm, yet confident manner helps to keep the dog at ease."

Grooming isn't a good career choice for those who are lackadaisical about keeping appointments or keeping their work space tidy. "Punctuality and professionalism are also key factors," David says. "If you, your salon, or even your mobile grooming van are well-kept, it shows that you have an eye for detail, and that can help to convey the message that your work is the same way."

Finally, David says, a good groomer has a natural sense of curiosity, and knows there is always more to learn. "A groomer that attends industry shows and seminars will be better prepared for the unexpected," he explains. "Styles change, and new products that can help a groomer are being developed all the time. Staying current can give one groomer an edge over another."

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