

Dog Breeding: To Mentor or Not to Mentor?

A young dog fancier asks if it's really all the "new" dog people's fault...

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Finding out how others perceive this document can provide fodder for many interesting conversations and realignment of positions on both sides. The Challenge At its base, the relationship between mentor and mentored is a naturally unequal one. The mentor must agree to teach and the student to be taught, and both must accept the innate hierarchy that relationship suggests. The question is, when does that relationship end or does it? How do successful relationships change over time? When does a student graduate? When does the new breeder achieve equality of thought and opinion? How can autonomy be successfully achieved without hurt feelings?

Unfortunately, all mentorships do not end happily. While personalities and circumstances obviously play a large part, relationships that start well and end badly have a variety of common attributes. Too often the blame for such failures is placed at the feet of the newbies but is it always solely their fault?

Let's look at an example:

After deciding she wanted to purchase a puppy to show, "Patty" researched her chosen breed and spoke to breeders across the continent. She asked all the right questions in her search for not only a great breeder but someone who could serve as her mentor as she entered the sometimes chaotic world of dog breeding. During the ensuing years she showed her new dog successfully. Under the tutelage of her mentor, "Beth," she learned as much as possible about the breed. She read countless books and magazines not only on her chosen breed but on whelping, training, canine anatomy and breeding practices. She joined her national breed club and volunteered on a number of committees, eventually serving actively on the board of directors.

She watched videotapes of past national specialties and pored over breed magazines until the pages were dog-eared learning about other lines and practicing her evaluation techniques. She showed and finished several dogs for her breeder, both as a favor and as a way of becoming a more experienced handler. With the help of her mentor she progressed to the point of confidence in her opinion regarding the breed, her ability to evaluate it fairly and to defend her choices. To learn more about breeding, Patty helped whelp and take care of several litters of puppies. Eventually, Beth gifted her with a bitch with which to start her breeding program. This was no small feat Beth rarely sold breeding stock to others. After years proving herself, Patty was eager to start her breeding program, so when the contract attached to her new bitch required her to hand over all but one of the puppies in each litter that bitch might produce she readily agreed. When her mentor required that she be added as a co-owner to any puppies kept, she agreed. When stipulations regarding what Patty could or couldn't do with the puppies she kept were detailed she agreed. And when she was told that all puppies would have to carry her mentor's kennel name only, Patty agreed.