

## Dog Breeding: Being a Good Mentor

**Taking a closer look at the roles mentors must fill.**

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The traditional roles of good mentors are often discussed, so need little elaboration here. Obviously a mentor is expected to pass on valuable information on basic breeding principles, the history of one's breed and helpful grooming and conditioning tips. Discussions of the breed standard, reminiscences of great (and not so great) dogs of the past, and the exchange of ideas that go along with any learning activity are also to be expected. Of course, there is also the responsibility of the mentor to instill in their proteges a deep love and respect for the dog game a feeling that will last beyond failed relationships, breeding setbacks or losses, and sustain their devotion to dogs for a lifetime. In the end, it is the mentors of today who will create the mentors of tomorrow.

Yet mentoring is about more than transmitting information, knowledge or breeding strategies. Mentoring is about encouragement and temperance, pride and disappointment, guidance and autonomy. It is a relationship akin to parenthood minus the birth and complete with the tantrums. Knowing how to balance each of the above is what makes a mentor successful.

From this delicate balance rise the two greatest challenges mentors, just like parents, face the ability to feel pride in the achievements of another, and the ability to let go. Let's look at an example...

Dazed and Confused Today is an exciting day for "Jeff" as, after years of planning and months of training classes, he prepares for the show debut of his very first homebred puppy. Arriving at the show with plenty of time for grooming and acclimation, he waits nervously at ringside for his turn. His mentor, "Charlotte," has several puppies entered as well, and the two compete head-to-head for points. The result? Success for Jeff and his puppy!

But as Jeff relishes his first win, he is disturbed by Charlotte's attitude. After cursory congratulations in the ring, Charlotte stomps away angrily. She is later heard explaining to another exhibitor everything that is wrong with Jeff's puppy and why it "should never have won in a million years." Jeff is hurt and angry, confused by his mentor's refusal to acknowledge his success their success.

For her part, behind all of the bluster Charlotte is equally confused. She knows she should be supportive of Jeff's wins, yet she is embarrassed to have lost to him.

Pride Isn't Always a Sin As parents we seem to have no difficulty with pride sometimes to the extreme point of living vicariously through the accomplishments of our sons and daughters. Yet the complete opposite is often true in the dog