

Dog Breeding: Being a Good Mentor

Taking a closer look at the roles mentors must fill.

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Empty Nest Syndrome Our second great challenge also finds parallels in parenthood knowing when to let go.

As was pondered briefly last month, the lifecycle of mentoring relationships is difficult to define. We can usually pinpoint the beginning fairly easily and in an ideal world the relationship would never "end," but instead change to meet the shifting needs and skills of both the mentor and student. In an ideal world mentorships eventually segue into partnerships, and partnerships into equality (if there is such a thing in the dog world).

But we don't live in an ideal world. Instead what most "students" find is that their status as a relative novice is difficult to leave behind in the eyes of their mentor, no matter how many years they have invested.

Over time this can lead to situations where our student (in reality now a breeder in his or her own right) is hemmed in by unneeded restrictions and trapped in a subservient position. If a strong individual, he or she may choose to break free of these restraints or at the least make his/her feelings known, sometimes with destructive effects on the relationship. If not, he/she may instead elect to become a satellite, allowing the master breeder to reap the benefits of his/her hard work or at least control the path of his/her breeding program.

In either case, the mentor has failed.

The modern penchant for contracts, co-ownerships and controls, discussed previously with regard to their effect on the developing student, can prove equally difficult as the protege matures. Despite growing knowledge and proven commitment, many mentors still struggle with the ability to trust. This is not to say that contracts are a bad thing they most certainly have their uses. However, it is important to re-evaluate the strengths of the individual you are dealing with each time a new agreement is entered into. The same strings should not apply to a breeder you have been mentoring for five years that apply to the first-time puppy buyer.

Mentorship Plans One incredibly useful tool gaining popularity in the dog world is the use of a mentorship plan. While not precluding the use of individual contracts for particular dogs, this document clearly lays out both long- and short-term goals that both the mentor and student may aim for. Among its benefits, it formalizes the mentorship the equivalent of officially "going steady" in the dating world which eliminates ambiguity and the potential for differing expectations. Second, it gives both parties a very clear idea of the nature of the relationship, where it is going and how it can get there.