

HANDLER'S RESPONSIBILITY AT DOG SHOWS

Being a dog handler at a dog show carries a LOT of responsibilities. Professional dog handlers sometimes care for and show a large number of dogs for one or several owner/breeders. If you go to a professional dog show, take some time to go "behind the scenes". Walk around the campers and motor homes and watch how they prepare for the show ring. A good handler takes a lot of pride in the fact that they can, and do, take complete care of the dogs they show, from bathing and grooming, to collecting that Best Of Breed trophy. But they have one thing in common - they all had to start somewhere, with one dog. Many of them were no older than you when they began, and many were no better. It all begins right here, in 4H, FFA or a backyard fun match, and the rules are always the same.

YOU are responsible for the care of your dog at a dog show. It is up to YOU to have the dog bathed and groomed. It is up to YOU to be sure you have the right lead(s), that the collar is on correctly, that you have bait in your pocket, that you are at ringside when your name and/or class is called. It is up to YOU to make sure the dog has "done it's duty" before going into the ring. It is up to YOU to see that the dog has shade on a hot day, shelter if it's raining, and plenty of water. NOT the owner of the dog (if it belongs to someone else), NOT your parents or siblings, NOT your project leader.

As a dog handler, one of the most important things is to be one with your dog, to be a team. The best way to form this bond is to spend "quality time" with your dog. It may sound funny, but a dog's personality is really not that much different than people. They are pack animals and love to socialize. Your dog's mental and emotional health is just as important as his physical health to have a happy, well trained dog.

Take your dog for frequent walks - it's good exercise for both of you.

Talk to them! They may not understand what you say, but they sure do listen, and they love the silly little sounds and voices you can make. Don't be embarrassed to do this in public, if you go to a dog show, listen to the handlers, lots of them do it. They know what makes their dogs' respond.

Play with them, fetch, chase me, whatever you and your dog enjoy.

One of the best ways to bond with your dog is to feed him. Dogs are pack animals and respond to an "alpha" member of the pack. Wild dogs obey a pack leader. When a pack of wolves kill a deer, the "alpha" wolf always eat first, then "allows" the other members of the pack to feed. If you and you alone feed your dog, he will begin to look to you as the "boss". It does take time however, some dogs take longer than others, because some dogs, like people, think THEY are always in charge, and you have to convince them to change their way of thinking. It takes a lot of patience, because this will not happen overnight, but if you are persistent, you should notice a difference before too long.

The MOST important thing is to not take it too seriously, make it enjoyable for both you and your dog. You will make mistakes (everyone does), but use them as a learning experience. Ask lots of questions, practice and HAVE FUN !!!