

Instructors Students

Most of us who compete in performance events take classes in their chosen venue. I think most of us train in a class situation throughout our dog's career. Only a very few have the knowledge and willpower to train completely alone. A funny thing happens on the way to class thoughone day you become the INSTRUCTOR!!!!

Instructing is a wonderfully rewarding job – but it is a mentally tiring job, as well as physically tiring. If you look at it honestly, most would think that instructing is a lose, lose situation. You are not training your own dog; your time is not your own; students often don't listen; and the dogs can be very hard to control or motivate. If you instruct at a club you are not paid, except perhaps with free floor time.

But I'd venture to say most Instructors view teaching as a WIN situation. The rewards are outstanding in that you make new friends, you learn much from your students, you get to see dogs progress from a non-emotional perspective - because when it's not your dog, it is very easy to see what's wrong! (In obedience training, when we hit a wall, we would often step back, and decide what we'd tell a friend if she had the same problem – in other words, we'd take the emotion out of it.)

What makes a good instructor? I feel that a good instructor needs to give each student the time they deserve. It is not fair to only help the talented teams, or conversely, the ones having trouble. Every handler is in class because they love their dog. To them they have the "best dog in the world". We *all* feel like that, don't we? Instructors need to keep that in mind when teaching. I remember a dog that was so afraid of even being in a class situation that I wrote it off. Thank heavens I wasn't the instructor - this dog today is a great agility dog and his confidence brings a smile to my face every time I see him! I conjure up an image of that dog when I'm challenged in a teaching situation and it always helps. Instructors must make it a priority to ensure that their student is comfortable in class. A nervous student will not be able to learn, let alone train her dog. It does "go down the leash" and will affect how the dog learns. This can be hard as people's personalities are so different. My style is to tell every new student that I teach in agility is that they must be able to laugh at themselves – agility IS a funny sport and if the dog's don't do something funny every night, then at least one human will.

Instructors need to keep the class moving, and be open to new ideas as well as different methods and styles of training. Not every trainer wants their dog to heel with their head up or do a running A-frame.

Instructors need to remember to repeat information every once in a while. (I've heard that people in general only remember 40% of what they hear orally!)

Instructors need to remember to NEVER "covet" their students. All students will and SHOULD outgrow their instructors. It really is a compliment for a student to outgrow your classes and seek advancement through seminars or other advanced instructors.

What makes a good student? From an instructor's viewpoint, I'd say a student who trains outside of the classroom is the best student you could have! In other words, this team does their homework.

Students also need to remember to be on time for class. That means arriving early enough to exercise and warm up their dog before class begins. Often at the beginning of class the format for the night will be explained as well as a critical sequence. (In deference to road construction and unexpected delays, I do try to start the class with fun play, brags, tricks, etc. so that a latecomer can slide in to class without missing an important component of that night's lesson.)

A student who listens in a class situation is an instructor's dream team. It gets very redundant when an instructor repeats the same sequence, method or reason more than three times in a session!

Students should not be afraid to ask questions, request clarification of a skill, or ask for a demonstration. Chances are most of the other students will be glad you did!

Students should never feel that they must stay with an instructor if she is not learning, progressing or is made to feel inferior in the class. I think too, that not all instructors are made for all students; and, likewise, not all students are a match for every instructor.

Hopefully these tips and suggestions will help both sides of the training "triangle", but most importantly, I hope that the DOG – who is the recipient of all that is good or bad in training or teaching - will benefit. Bark! Bark!

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