

## Judges, Exhibitors and the Code of Conduct

by Lavina Diamanti

There has been a lot written recently about the decline in dog shows and who (or what) is responsible and what we can do to turn it around. Reading all the different opinions indicates there is no single factor that is causing it, nor is there an easy fix, but as judges we certainly can play our part. Time and again I have heard new exhibitors or those with minority breeds feel that they never get “looked at” or worse still, felt they were treated poorly by the judge or totally ignored. Some of the comments I have heard are along the lines of;-

“The judge wasn’t even looking at my dog, they were watching the judging in the other ring.”

“They hardly touched my dog”

“The judge made a comment regarding my dog which clearly indicated that they didn’t know my breed.”

“They walked straight past me in the line up and didn’t even look at my dog.”

Are these comments valid? Too right they are, and in every case the exhibitor will most probably have felt they have wasted their time and money. I think as exhibitors we have all been on the receiving end of at least one of these judges. As seasoned exhibitors we are more likely to brush it off but the effect on a new exhibitor or one with a minority breed, can be the difference between them staying or going, and we really need them to stay!

I think it would be fair to say that as judges we sometimes need to better understand our position in the scheme of things and how we can affect the future of dog showing. Lets first look at the expectations from our Judges Association. Our code of conduct is on our website and available for everyone to read. It states (in part)

- Judges shall demonstrate a sound knowledge of anatomy, New Zealand Kennel Club Rules and Regulations and all relevant breed standards.
- Judges shall be seen to be honest and have integrity in all their dealings relating to judging.
- Judges must impartially evaluate each dog they judge and award each animal the appropriate placing relative to the written NZKC standard, regardless of the dogs record, advertisement, friendship, or any other consideration.

But does this go far enough? The ANKC judges code of conduct includes -

- A Judge shall give every exhibit and exhibitor fair and equal opportunity in each and every class.
- A Judge shall act in a polite manner whilst carrying out each judging assignment.

Should we be looking at including the ANKC points in our own code of conduct? How often do we, as judges, read our code of conduct and more importantly, how often do we self-evaluate at the conclusion of an assignment against our code of conduct?

If we are to continue to improve as judges and to contribute to the continuation of our sport, I believe that it is important that we analyse our own performance regularly, after all, essentially the exhibitors are our customers and all good businesses regularly evaluate their performance. Every exhibitor pays the same entry fee and has the same expectation, they want to be judged fairly and honestly and be given consideration for awards. If our exhibitors, like any customer, gets value for money and has a great experience then it is more likely they will keep coming back.

When we talk about self-evaluation, it’s not about the results and which dogs you put up, it’s about customer satisfaction. Lets start with this list;-

- Did I give every dog and exhibitor equal time and consideration?
- Was I polite and friendly to every exhibitor?
- Did I give each dog my full concentration?
- Did I give each dog a thorough hands on examination?
- Did I refresh myself on the breed standards before the assignment?
- Did I study up on breeds I haven’t judged in large numbers before the assignment?
- Did I make my decisions honestly without influence of other factors?

You can probably add more questions to this list, but this is a good starting point. Even our most experienced judges understand that we never stop learning and improving and may well benefit from asking these questions of themselves. So, what then? It is simple, if you complete each assignment comfortable that you have judged the best you could then you can be happy in the knowledge that you are doing your bit as a judge to support our sport. If you can honestly answer that you didn’t always get it right, you know where you can improve and what you need to work on.

None of us are perfect and we can all improve, but more importantly we need to appreciate the effect that our judging manner and knowledge has on exhibitors and ultimately our sport. ■

### Important Dates

19 March	Theory Exam
13 & 14 July	Christchurch Practical Exams
20 & 21 July	Auckland Practical Exams