

NZDJA



A Question of Ethics

by Lavina Diamanti

The subject of ethical behaviour is bantered around a lot in the dog showing world, and judges are not excluded from that discussion. Our position in the dog fraternity means our behaviour is more likely to come under scrutiny, and unethical behaviour from a judge is far more likely to damage our reputations.

Exactly what is and what isn't ethical behaviour is a hard thing to define since unlike our Regulations and Code of Conduct there is no list of "should" and "should not" to specify what is ethical and what isn't. The Cambridge Dictionary describes ethical as "Relating to beliefs about what is morally right and wrong". To put it more broadly, ethics consists of the moral code that guides a person's choices and behaviours throughout their life. It is based on their moral values and principals which are most likely formed early in life and cemented in early adulthood.

Some people are of the opinion that unless there is a rule or regulation against it then it must be ok. But can we, or should we, legislate for every situation that might possibly arise? I think you will agree that it would be impossible to do so. For me, that is where our own personal standard of ethics comes into play. The NZDJA Code of Conduct guides our judges as to what is deemed to be acceptable behaviour. That, in itself, is fairly straightforward but the fact that this code is often mistakenly referred to as the "Code of Ethics" indicates that there is an expectation that judges behaviour is also morally ethical.

So how do we define what behaviour is ethical and what isn't? In my opinion, that comes down to the individual. I will always remember Bill (Taffy) Morris's insistence that as an All Breeds judge he would not handle any dogs in the show ring. Despite being given numerous arguments against his decision he stood steadfast and refused to budge. This is an excellent example of a judge who had a high standard of ethics. There are a lot of other situations I can think of — the person that refuses to exhibit under a judge they have had dealings with in their breeding programmes or the judge that declines to host another when they know that in the not too distant future they will be exhibiting under them. There are many situations and decisions we face as judges where our ethics come into question, not forgetting that this includes social media.

So does it really matter? Some may say the only person directly affected is the person whose actions are being questioned; other than possibly being overlooked for a judging appointment, there are few consequences. But, in my opinion, unethical behaviour affects everyone in our sport. We all know the end results of a slow decline in standards, be it the care we have about the way we dress or the language we choose to use. History has proven that over time the abnormal becomes the normal and the unacceptable becomes accepted.

In my opinion, as judges, we have a role to play. We have the opportunity to set an example to our fellow exhibitors and just possibly influence, in a positive way, decisions they make. We can do this by choosing to follow a path of ethical behaviour. I take a simple approach: just because something isn't breaking a rule or regulation doesn't mean it is right and even if no-one else would know about it, I would know and I have to live with my conscience.

In the words of Potter Stewart: "Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do". If in doubt, ask yourself the question: is it ethical? If the answer is no, then you have a decision to make, always remembering that you can influence others by your decision. 🐾

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31 January, 2020	Closing date for exam applications
17 March	Theory exams
27/28 June	Auckland practical exams
4/5 July	Christchurch practical exams
11/12 July	Wellington practical exams (if required)