

## Judging positively

by Lavina Diamanti

We have been subjected to a huge amount of negative information in recent months, more so than usual. Daily news broadcasts are filled with all the bad news stories of COVID-19, and its economic effect. For many people it is hard to remain positive with so much doom and gloom surrounding us. That got me thinking about the effect of negative influences when we are judging.

When was the last time you complained about poor service or returned something that wasn't up to standard? What about the times you have reported good service or taken the time to write a letter or email of thanks for a job well done? For the vast majority, the complaints outweigh the compliments. What does that have to do with judging dogs? Probably more than we think.

It is human nature to talk positively about ourselves and not so positive about others and this transfers over to the show ring and ultimately, judging. How often do we hear an exhibitor say "today I was beaten by a really good dog?", or "today, the judge preferred 'xyz' over my dog". I would venture to say that is not often said. Usually we will hear comments about the winning dogs' faults or poor judging. Why? because it is easier for us to justify why we lost rather than admit our own dogs' faults or admit we were beaten by a better dog. For exhibitors it is easy to get caught up in this approach and I think we have all been guilty of it. We all know the saying, "there is no perfect dog out there". Every dog has something we would like to improve, and those who think they have the perfect dog in their back yard are either extremely lucky to have the one in a million dog or are wearing rose tinted glasses!

When we start our judging journey, we are told not to "fault judge" but this is easier said than done. After all, collectively we spend substantially more time finding fault with our competition than we do pointing out their virtues. Many inexperienced judges fall into this mode and sadly, the result of fault judging can often be a line-up of mediocre dogs with no real faults and no real virtues.

Anyone can fault judge, it isn't that hard, but judging positively instead takes time and practice. It requires a reframing of our judging thought process. One approach is to decide what you will reward, what will you forgive and what the standard instructs you to penalise. This approach allows you to look at all the positive points first and then look at the things you would like to improve and to what degree those points depart from the standard. Once

you have done this you can decide whether you forgive those in favour of the positive points. If you decide that you cannot forgive the faults, then you need to ask yourself the question: Can I take this dog any further or do I withhold awards? And remember, you need to do all this in less than two minutes!

So how do we, as judges, counteract the constant barrage of negativity that surrounds us in the show ring so we can reframe our approach to one of judging positively? Again, this isn't easy, but it certainly can be done. Also, I believe whether you are a judge or not, your response to negative comments can influence others.

Always look at the positives first, whether you are judging, sitting ringside, or in discussion with friends.

- Make a point of not referring to a single negative thing until you have considered the positives.
- Be objective and specific. "I really like that dogs head, coat and movement. I would prefer if he had a better tail set and tighter feet".
- Challenge those around you to say something positive — "tell me what you like about that dog?"
- All dogs have virtues, even if it is just the colour of their coat or their correct size. New exhibitors need to hear this!
- Practice, practice, practice - until it becomes second nature.

Happy judging. 🐾

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