

## First impressions

by Lavina Diamanti

You are probably wondering what a title like “first impressions” has to do with judging, but as it turns out, probably more than we think.

Let me create two pictures in your mind... Firstly, the business woman in an elegant suit, hair pulled back into a bun and immaculate makeup. Secondly, the guy who is wearing grubby shorts and shirt, and sporting more than a few days stubble. Both of these people are representing companies that you have sought out for advice. What is your first impression? Be honest. Would you immediately lean towards the professionally-presented woman or is your first thought to engage with the somewhat scruffy man? I would venture to say that most of us would be impressed by the professionally-presented woman and are more likely to engage with her and trust her decisions.

Yet the scruffy man may well be more knowledgeable, have more experience and be the better choice. But he will have to overcome the initial obstacle of first impression and will have to work harder to secure trust and respect.

“You never get a second chance to make a good first impression”, a quote often attributed to Will Rogers, is a mantra for business people worldwide, which is why most business people wear suits, use eye contact, and have a firm handshake. It creates an impression of knowledge and therefore trust. It is a well-researched fact that people are more likely to do business with someone who is professional in their presentation and projects themselves in a positive manner with their body language and verbal communication.

Now let us transfer that to the judging arena. We are in a role where we want exhibitors to respect and accept our decisions, to view us as knowledgeable. They also expect us to treat them fairly and with respect. We may be judging their dogs, but they are judging us — the way we look, the way we conduct ourselves and the way we manage our ring. Whether we like it or not, these things do matter. A less than favourable decision is more palatable from a judge for whom that exhibitor has respect, and that respect must be earned.

The way in which we conduct our ring also plays a part. Ring efficiency is important, especially if you have large numbers to judge. A decision as simple as where you place your table and how you move the exhibits can add or subtract up to an hour or more to your finish time. How you assemble your breed winners in the group line-up and how much you do or don't run each dog at group judging time can also add or subtract valuable time.

Messy, inefficient ring procedure is frustrating to exhibitors and spectators and can create a poor impression. A good rule of thumb is never do something just because you have seen someone else do it, such as short listing in the group. Inexperienced judges can come unstuck here with both their ring craft and decisions in the classes. Make sure you have a reason to back up your actions.

The number of shows being live streamed nowadays gives you the opportunity to watch yourself on a video afterwards. This can be quite an eye opener. It is amazing how we do things which we don't realise until we see ourselves on the screen. Next time you have the opportunity, watch the video with a view to doing a self-assessment. Be critical and honest of your performance. Or ask a fellow judge whom you respect to watch you judging with a view to giving you some honest feedback. Check to see that you were:

- Consistent in your handling of the dogs i.e moved them all in same manner?
- Efficient in your control of the ring (you can time yourself with each dog to check this).
- Considerate of spectators with the assembly of your group line up.
- Polite and friendly to all exhibitors.
- Professional in your presentation and confident in your ring manner.
- Decisive in your decisions.

Also, check that you don't automatically put your hands in your pockets or pace unnecessarily around the ring. What about your steward: was your ring set-up helpful for them when assisting you? It is easy to fall into bad habits and sometimes we don't realise we do things until they are pointed out to us.

Remember, if you want to be respected for your judging decisions then your demeanour, your presentation, and the way you behave determines the way you will be respected. 🐾

### Important Dates

19/20 September **Christchurch Practical exams**  
7/8 November **Auckland Practical exams**