

A letter to our new judges

by Lavina Diamanti

We have seen an unprecedented number of new and aspiring judges join our organisation. This is fantastic and we welcome you all. I thought it might be an opportunity to give you some insight into the journey you are about to embark on.

My journey started 20 years ago. I never thought it was going to be an easy ride, but I was up for the challenge.

The recent changes in our regulations due to COVID-19 mean that you may be able to complete this a little faster, but don't be in a hurry. Quality of learning and knowledge is much more important than merely ticking the box and passing the exam. Not everyone wants to be an All Breeds judge and not everyone has the temperament and skills to be a judge. If you realise part way into this journey that it's not for you, then that is fine, it isn't for everyone.

But if you find, like I did, that your love of dogs is enhanced with each judging experience, then this is for you. If you are embarking on this journey because you think it will help you win in the ring, then you are sadly mistaken, and even if you do get the odd win along the way because "you are a judge" then ask yourself if that win is really what you want. If you are doing it because someone else thinks you should then maybe you should consider if the years of hard work ahead of you is really what you want to do. Now this may sound quite harsh, but judging isn't for those who just want the ribbons or can't accept hard knocks. "Broad shoulders" and an "eye for a dog" are important qualities in our best judges.

So here is my advice:

- Make a commitment to be the very best judge you can be. Attend every possible lecture, seminar or Kennel visit, study beyond the written material and always be open to learning. Every discussion with a breeder or fellow judge is an opportunity to learn.
- Don't expect others to provide you with your study material. Some Branches have great teachers and mentors, and others don't. Remember they are all volunteers, and it is up to you to take control of your learning. Your branch is there to support and guide you, but they can't do your learning for you.
- Gather information from as many sources as possible. I started collecting breed supplements from the then NZKC Gazette when I first joined our hobby and I also have folders full of pages I have retrieved from many different publications and websites.

These are a valuable source of information when studying the different breeds.

- Speak less, listen more and be humble. I remember my early years judging. Once I had a few appointments under my belt I thought I was great, I wasn't!! The more I learned the more I realised how little I knew.
- Be prepared for failure. Few judges at All Breed level have passed every exam. The best thing that happened to me was failing a practical exam not once, but twice. The disappointment was huge and of course I blamed everyone but myself! After the second failure I re-evaluated my study process and realised that if I was to pass these exams, I needed to not only learn the

breed standard, but I needed to really understand the breeds. I never failed another exam after that.

- Be prepared for disappointments when completing judging assignments. Not all appointments are full of quality dogs and not all clubs are really organised and look after their judges well.
- Treat every exhibitor with respect. They have all paid good money for your opinion, and they love their breed, even if you don't. Deliver your opinion with courtesy and a friendly attitude. They may not remember your placings, but they will remember how you treated them.
- You can't please everyone so don't even try, so just please yourself.
- Don't be indecisive. Judging is all about making decisions. You will make mistakes, but it is only a mistake if you don't learn from it. Make it quick and move on.
- Learn resilience! The only person who will really think you have done a great job is the exhibitors you give Best of Group or Best on Parade/ in Show to. Everyone else will think you could have done better, and some will think you should have stuck to your stewarding! Get used to it but don't get arrogant!!
- Don't comment on an exhibitor's dog in the ring. Not only is it against the regulations but chances are they will know a lot more about the breed than you.
- Be prepared. I still laugh about the appointment where the weather forecast was for very hot and sunny, so I dressed appropriately. The thunderstorm and torrential rain that arrived mid judging left us all drenched and looking more like it was a wet T-shirt competition than a dog show!! Somewhat embarrassing but a valuable lesson learned, I always pack wet weather gear regardless of the forecast.
- Similarly, my luggage going missing taught me that when travelling by air, I always travel wearing something I would be happy to judge in.
- A full day's judging is tiring and mentally draining, add to that any adverse weather conditions and you may need to draw on your energy resources to get through the day. Your exhibitors and the club deserve your best version of you, and you can't deliver that if you have neglected your body. Get plenty of sleep, eat well and stay hydrated.
- And lastly, but possibly one of the most important, always remember that you are now considered a senior member of the dog world and, in time, a representative of New Zealand. Your behaviour should be in line with the Code of Conduct both as an exhibitor and as a judge.

If you are reading this and you are not a judge, then maybe you can get an insight into what our judges sacrifice to be in the centre of the ring, especially our new and inexperienced judges. Be kind to them and help guide them on their judging journey.

Lastly, for our new judges, the journey is long and full of obstacles and at times you will despair, but the rewards are immense and totally worth it. Happy judging. 🐾

Important Dates

22 March 2022	Theory exams
21 May 2022	NZDJA Seminar, Christchurch
22 May 2022	AGM, Christchurch
9-10 July	South Island Practicals
16-17th July	North Island Practicals

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