

Building Better Trainers Through Education: What's Good Is About To Get Better

The APDT Education Task Force (ETF) was created by your Board of Directors with the charge to explore the profession of dog training. The first ETF meeting resulted in the creation of the APDT Education Survey. The second ETF meeting, the Planning Workshop, assessed the survey results. Based on these findings and the educational needs of the membership your ETF then formulated recommendations to the APDT Board of Directors.

The Dog Training Dilemma

Half of the APDT members we surveyed consider it important to make a full-time living from dog training. The other half falls into the category of part time or "hobby" trainer. In each half, many APDT members consider themselves to be professional dog trainers, insofar as they behave in a responsible, ethical manner and adhere to the APDT Vision and Mission Statements. This highlights the need to define the profession.

We Define the "Profession" as:

- Practitioners who recognize what they are doing as a profession and a way to earn a living.
- A profession:
 - requires specialized knowledge
 - is recognized by those in related fields
 - has public recognition
 - has barriers to entry including schooling, testing, certification, regulation and licensing.

In order to have both real and perceived value any profession must accomplish a marketplace advantage. To achieve this, the dog training profession must be recognized by dog owners and respected by veterinarians, other animal care providers and the public. Trainers who currently and conscientiously pursue continuing education may have little or no advantage over others who simply "hang out a shingle."

Will it Take Legislation to Make Dog Training a Profession?

Since most professions are regulated, the ETF feels that the APDT should take a proactive approach to frame the definition of the dog training profession. The ETF feels this proactive approach is preferable to letting government

agencies or others define and thereby regulate the profession.

The ETF recommends to the Board that the APDT build the profession of dog training.

The pet owner currently has few criteria in selecting one trainer over another beyond cost and accessibility. Some veterinary clinics, groomers, boarding and day care businesses refuse to recommend any trainers while others accept all who offer brochures. Far too often trainers see little value in pursuing professional status or, perhaps, as mentioned above, consider themselves to have already attained it. However, the bottom line remains that the "profession" of dog training does not yet fully exist.

In order to have value any profession must accomplish a marketplace advantage.

Logically, the ETF questioned supply and demand. What does the market look like? About 6 million dogs are born each year in the United States. (New J.C., Kelch W.J., Hutchison, J.M., Salman, M.D., King, M. Scarlett, J.M. & Kass, P.H. (2004). Birth and death rate estimates of cats and dogs in U.S. households and related factors. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* (74), 229-241). Let's assume that each of those attends one puppy class at an average rate of \$150 per class creating \$900 million in revenue. If only one in four of those puppies attends a class, there still remains a sizable market, \$225 million, for professional dog trainers. The market for professional dog trainers certainly does exist.

The general consensus of the ETF is that the APDT needs to become *the* dog training parent organization much as the American Veterinary Medical Association is to veterinarians, the North American Veterinary Technician Association is to veterinary technicians, and the Pet Care Services Association is to kennels.

The APDT needs to become the dog training parent organization!

Some of the ETF recommendations to the Board are that the APDT should establish the curriculum necessary for its members to become professional dog trainers, identify education sources, certify schools, academies, presenters and colleges that offer elements of the curriculum. Additionally the APDT should oversee regulation including barriers to entering the profession, the marketplace and internally oversee the ongoing and future needs of the profession.

The APDT needs to become *the* dog training parent organization! The professional dog trainers' curriculum can be produced for the APDT by the APDT, contain pieces purchased by the APDT from others or contain pieces produced by the APDT for others. The APDT Foundation will become the subcontractor for curriculum development, Web delivery, video presentations and marketing.

The ETF envisions the APDT educational conference of the future remaining a venue for the newest information (scientific, advanced topics) as well as being of shorter duration, possibly even regional. This last would result in our conference becoming more accessible and more affordable to more members.

As we look to the future, the ETF stresses three things that need to happen concurrently:

- 1) curriculum development
- 2) structure and delivery methods
- 3) public relations/advertising.

In short, we suggest a basic business model: research and development, manufacture and marketing.

Your ETF recommends forming a Curriculum Task Force (CTF) to create the outline or blueprint necessary for one to become a professional dog trainer. This CTF would report details of each piece to the Board to monitor progress. The curriculum will experience a natural progression to include specialty fields. All this will put the APDT in competition with many other organizations which the ETF feels can be an opportunity to form strategic alliances. Strategic alliances should be productive for all concerned.

Structure and delivery methods will be assessed concurrently with curriculum development by the Curriculum Task Force. The existing conference materials that are currently available for our members to download can provide many basic necessary curriculum components.

Various delivery methods must be explored: hands-on, academies/mentors, seminars, digital, on-line, CDs/DVDs and eventually in the classroom via community colleges and trade schools.

Public relations and advertising for these programs will be crucial. The majority of the APDT members must recognize both the educational and market place value of professional status. Veterinarians and other animal care interests will need to come on board as well. The public, too, will need to be educated to recognize the importance of professional status. Obviously, all three segments are vital to achieve success.

The ETF recommends that the first step is to hire a Director of Education. The APDT Director of Education will be a person from the world of education, not necessarily from dog training, who will report to the Executive Director on a daily basis, report advances to the Board of Directors, work with the Communications Director and move toward specific goals within established time frames. Further,

the Director of Education will coordinate curriculum development, delivery systems and public relations programs, assist the Communications Director in creating a promotional plan to launch all programs, and develop relationships with schools, academies, colleges to achieve acceptance of the curriculum. The Director of Education will coordinate with the APDT Foundation, clarify market segments, develop delivery systems for all educational venues, and create a profit center from educational venues.

In summary your ETF recommends that the APDT:

- develop programs to encourage part-time or hobby trainers to obtain professional status
- establish and control an official curriculum
- define and establish entry barriers
- hire an APDT Director of Education
- appoint a Curriculum Development Task Force
- investigate alliance opportunities

Your ETF realizes that it is a tremendous undertaking to define, build and market the profession of dog training. We feel the membership is ready to benefit from the recommendations put forth here. We feel these recommendations can be achieved within a time frame that can see the year 2012 and truly building better trainers through education.

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