
Borzoi

MENTORING IN A DIGITAL SOCIETY

In the last decade mentoring has evolved for new exhibitors and breeders. The first iPhone was released on June 29, 2007, and the first iPad on April 3, 2010. By contrast the Borzoi was first recognized by the AKC in 1891, 116 years earlier. While the standard has only had a few revisions from the original, the iPhone's software is on version 10.3.3. The rate of change is happening much faster and more frequent. Why shouldn't mentoring change also? Originally mentoring was a slow and thoughtful process of gaining trust with a mentor, listening and learning over years of conversations and spending time visiting the great kennels. My first long-distance correspondence was with Miss Betty Murray, DVM, from England, and I wrote letters to her and waited months for her responses. Today you can get on Facebook or on a Yahoo

list and get an answer within seconds by someone who has experienced the same affliction. Not all of the change is bad, but the accuracy of the information can suffer depending on the respondent.

Mentoring was a vertical relationship. New breeders sought out older, experienced breeders and listened to their every word for morsels of information. In a digital world you can Google the query and find a thousand references to the medical affliction you are researching. The speed for a response is not only good but can be lifesaving for your dog. On the other hand, nothing beats real-life experience and hands-on experience.

Not all mentors practiced full disclosure. I remember being told you need to ask all the right questions to get the right answers. If you don't ask, no one will tell. Unfortunately the answers we get via the Internet are often just opinions not based on fact but on "I read something," "I heard somewhere," or "a friend told me." Horizontal mentoring has taken the place of vertical mentoring; it is all part of the sharing economy.

In a large breed like Borzoi, where the dogs develop more slowly and it takes years to know just exactly what the finished dog will be, it doesn't mix well with the fast-paced expectation of the digital student. If you can get an answer in seconds, why can't I be an expert

breeder in a few years, rather than decades?

Breeding dogs is not a summation of bytes and bits accumulated from the Internet but practice and failure over years of watching litters grow and develop. I have written before that standards exist not only to set the blueprint for the breed, but also to ward off faults and disorders by exclusion from a standard. The quality of the responses and articles available on the Internet need to be weighted on their merits and the qualifications of the writers. Just because all my friends on Facebook think Boris has the best head ever doesn't mean that Boris has the best head based on the written standard.

The expectations of millennials is different from past generations. They have been entitled to think they know more than their parents—and indeed they do when it comes to operating systems, setting up computers, and even programming the remote. We have given them the inherent expert status on all things digital—but flesh and bone, heart and temperament are not digital.

Companies are using a strategy called reverse mentoring (go ahead, look it up on Google). We should consider the idea of pairing an older breeder with a younger enthusiast—not in the old, standard way of giving information, but sharing ideas and concepts from both the mentor and the mentee. In a

digital world the expectations of the new breeders and the rate at which information is made available challenges our conceptualization of the historical exchange of information.

The next generation has a lot to offer, but we need to consider changing the mentor model if we want to make sure this sport survives into the next millennium.

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