

“What the judge sees is what you get!” This is the principal thesis in the very informative book, *The Winning Edge, Show Ring Secrets*, by the noted handler, George Alston. A judge can only judge what is presented in the ring. The judge is allowed only about a minute and a half per dog and cannot wait to assume. He or she must judge what is seen, and, if you do not present what the judge wants to see, you are certain to lose. Hence, you must learn to present your dog as efficiently as possible in the least amount of time. This requires work, practice and dedication.

Alston notes that professional handlers weren't born with a lead in their hands. They have developed and honed their skills by diligence and sacrifice. They know exactly what they intend to do with each of the many dogs they must handle in the course of a day. Yet amateurs have a great advantage, if they will use it to their own benefit. They usually have only one dog to show, so they have the time to train the dog, condition it, learn about its strong and weak points and practice showing it under all kinds of circumstances. When they go into the ring, there should be no surprises.

There are several attributes that go into the makeup of what Alston calls “the perfect handler.”

Invisibility - The perfect handler is invisible. You should be able to watch a Best in Show lineup, walk away from the ring and say, “That was an absolutely gorgeous dog that went Best in Show. Who handled it?” If you overhear, “Boy that was a good handler. Did you see him work?” Then that handler is not doing his best, for the handler should fade into the background, putting the dog forward with a minimum of hand motions. The judge should think that the dog is doing it all alone, so a good handler does not continually fuss with the dog, move around the dog, adjust its position, stroke, push, pull or poke at it or draw the judge's eye away from the dog itself at any time. A good handler does not constantly smile, grin or talk to the judge to get attention. Judges hate exhibitors who fawn over them in the ring.

Adaptability - The reason that adaptability is so important is that you will never show the same dog exactly the same way twice, even on the same day. The dog will react to its environment differently, and at every level there will be different competition, different judges, different ring conditions. The ring may be small or large, the weather hot and dry or rainy and cool, the grass may be slick or the ground may be hilly. Some dogs react differently to being shown in the morning than later in the day. You must prepare yourself to adapt to all these variables by training yourself and your dog to respond to these different conditions.

Consistency - The most difficult thing in showing a dog is to be consistent in the way you show it. Once you have learned to do any one thing correctly, you must do it correctly every single time thereafter. Your dog must look the same in the Group and Best in Show ring as it did in the breed ring, and it must handle in the same top form. That takes practice, practice, and more practice.



The handler is presenting the head of this dog as if it were a work of art. Photo from The Winning Edge, Show Ring Secrets, p 9.

The Handler as an Artist - When in the show ring, you will emphasize strong points and attempt to conceal faults. You position the dog in a way that will look good to the judge. In order to do this, you must know your dog's good points and its faults. You must have studied your dog standing and gaiting so that you are familiar with all its parts. Just as an artist creates an illusion on canvas or paper, the handler creates an illusion for the judge. Professional handlers know what the judge wants to see, owner handlers must practice in order to create the picture they wish to present.

Pride - You must have pride in your dog, and you must treat it with respect and make that pride evident to the judge. Just as an artist takes pride in his work, you must take pride in presenting your dog as the best animal you have ever seen; you are doing the judge a favor to allow him to put his hands on this valuable animal. Exhibitors who manhandle their dogs, pulling them around, grabbing them by the muzzle or yanking them here and there, are saying that this is just a piece of meat. If they have no pride in their dogs, why should the judge? If you do not believe that your dog is a precious commodity, get a different attitude, or a different dog.

Anyone can handle a dog, but it takes skill to present one so that judges think this is the greatest specimen of the breed that they have ever seen and they are honored to have it in their ring.

REFERENCE:

Alston, George G. and Vanacore, Connie, *The Winning Edge, Show Dog Secrets*, Howell Book House, New York, 1992, pp 2-11.