

Training of Service Dogs

Introduction

Service dogs are those that assist people in need of help, or the disabled. Dogs such as seeing-eye dogs for the blind, assistance dogs for the deaf or those confined to wheelchairs are considered service dogs, and they provide something invaluable to those that need assistance the most (Resende). The correct training of a service dog is crucial for some people to function in their daily lives. If a dog is trained incorrectly it can be unbeneficial or even dangerous in crucial moments. The training begins in the puppy stage. During this time the puppy is socialized and the first steps of training are begun. Advanced training is when the puppy has reached adolescence and has successfully completed the puppy training. During this time the dog is submitted to more advanced and complex training skills and commands. After this training is completed, the dog will take a test to see if it can become a certified service dog. However, it is commonly debated whether or not a program trained service dog is better than an owner trained service dog, and vice versa.

Part I: Puppy Training

The training for a service dog begins when a puppy is taken to a foster home at 9 weeks old. The process of puppy training typically takes twelve to eighteen months ("Service Dog Central"). Puppy raisers socialize and habituate the puppies in their care ("Service Dog Central"). The raisers teach the pups



Figure 1: A puppy wearing its training vest while lying down calmly next to its trainer in the grass. (Pfeifle)

basic skills and obedience under the supervision of a trainer from a guide dog school ("Service Dog Central"). Along with the traditional obedience commands, the puppy must learn shake: which tells the puppy to offer its paw in greeting, dress: is a command that tells the puppy to place his head calmly through the collar and stand while its service cape is put on, say hello: which means the puppy rests its head on the owner's lap, my lap: means the puppy should place its front paws across the lap of the owner, relaxing on its elbows, jump on: tells the puppy to jump entirely on top of something, and go in: commands the puppy to crawl under a small space or table and lie down (Orth, and Weil) . While the puppies are in their first set of training, they must become comfortable in many settings and situations with many different types of people as



well as with other domestic animals. Granted, at certain periods in the puppy's developmental stages, the trainer should not take the animal to specific locations.

Part II: Advanced Training

The time for advanced training usually begins between twelve and eighteen months of age, and

usually lasts from nine to eighteen months (Petso). During advanced training the dog will learn about fifty complex new commands, such as pull, retrieve (Petso), pick up dropped items, open and close doors, and turn on and off lights. After advanced training, the dog will usually go through an additional two weeks of training with the new potential handler or owner of the dog (Hogendorf). During this time, the handler learns how to act with the dog while out in public and in the home. The handler is taught what commands the dog knows and how to give them.

While puppies are periodically tested during their initial training, once the dog reaches an advanced level of training the testing becomes more extensive and complicated. This occurs once the dog is returned to the training center. Service dogs are required to exhibit certain character traits that are tested for during frequent evaluations in the advanced training process. These traits are that the dog needs to be healthy ("TopDog.org: Service Dog Resource and Information"), work consistently in spite of distractions, have a good temperament that enjoys their challenging work ("Dogpark.com"), biddability, and trainability.

Part III: Program Trained Dogs and Owner Trained Dogs: which is better?

When a person applies for a program trained dog the wait for the dog can be virtually nonexistent or can take many years. During this waiting period, many people still need the help the dog would give. At this time people decide to either wait on a waiting list with countless other people, or they decide to train their own dogs to give them the help that they feel is needed by them. But the question continually comes up: Which is better, a program trained service dog or an owner trained service dog?

Program trained dogs go through two types of initial trainings, puppy training and advanced training. During these times the dog is frequently monitored



Figure 3: A diabetes service dog training with its handler at home. ("All Information about Pharmacy")

and tested for effectiveness. If the dog is not training properly or there is something found that prevents the dog from being trained properly or working properly the program lets it go to a normal family. With this testing the dog can be trained properly and can be eventually certified successfully. With a program it can be guaranteed that the dog was trained professionally by a certifiable person. But, it may take a while for the service dog to adjust to life with the new owner (Markley). Also, it may take a while for the dog to learn its position when walking with the owner. However, Owner trained dogs are not just automatically certified because the owner says it has been trained by themselves to be a service dog. The monitoring and tests may not be done properly because the owner may either not perform them correctly or may not perform them at all. Even though the dog and owner already have a preconceived relationship it may or may not be beneficial for the dog to be a service dog, because even after months and months of work the dog may simply not be able to handle the job (Markley). While owner training is quicker, it may not be as effective as a program trained dog. With an owner trained dog, before you can start the service work the dog must be trained in obedience or the desired result may never be received (Markley). If special aids are needed, such as a wheelchair, walker, or scooter, the dog will learn from the start how to walk with you (Markley).

Conclusion

Service dogs are needed to help people with their daily lives. Service dogs are for the blind, deaf, and those confined to a wheelchair. However, they can be used for other reasons as well. Service dogs must be trained properly unless they will be unbeneficial to the person who needs them. Service dogs go through multiple trainings to be certified. The service dog starts with basic puppy training. During this time basic commands are learned and socialization is

done. Advanced training is done after the dog has passed puppy training and has been returned to the training center. When in advanced training a service dog learns complex commands, such as how to open a door or turn on and off a light switch. Many people debate whether a program trained service dog is better than an owner trained service dog. They both have their own pro's and con's, but I believe a program trained service dog will probably be a better dog to have. This is because you have the assurance that the dog is trained properly. Service dogs can be very helpful when they are trained properly.

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