

Luck is the Religion of the Lazy

By Dr. Carmen L. Battaglia

Sustaining Dog Shows and Increasing Entries for all Breeds Requires the Willingness to Learn and the Talent to Succeed.

A Plan and a Strategy with Carefully Crafted Messages is a Good Start.

Who would have imagined that dog shows would be affected by a fifteen-year slow, steady, consecutive decline in show entries? Now, after many attempts to stop this decline, exhibitors and handlers are wondering if they need some good luck to end the problem of entries of zero or only one dog in a breed. Many factors have been attributed to the entry problems and three stand out. The first is the slow and steady growth of Low Entry (LE) breeds which now have become 50% of the stud book. Another, is a steady increase in the number of clubs suffering from the greying effect. A third is the increased effort by the Animal Rights groups (AR) to influence breed clubs, breeders and the sport.

Much has been written about all three, and the sociological literature is full of material that shows how groups who use labels in their attacks on opponents, issues and organizations have been successful. Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of undefined labels in defeating proposals and candidates running

for political office. Labeling an issue, person or event with an offensive label has proven to be an effective way to defeat them and change the direction of issues. When applied to emotional issues like dog shows, dog bites and dog ownership, the impact of labels can be significant.

In the world of dogs, the primary user of the labeling process has been the Animal Rights groups (AR). They use undefined labels because they all lack a common definition and will easily generate an emotional response. Some of their favorite terms include: "Vicious Dog" and "Puppy Mill". These terms are useful when attempting to impact the thinking of those who lack subject matter knowledge and others who are looking for answers.

The newest undefined label called the "Responsible Breeder" has more potential than its predecessors because it suggests that breeders will "do the right thing". But underneath all this exterior labeling comes many assumptions that begin with the goal for quality pups from quality parents. For example, if a pup is

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born with less than ideal conformation or maybe a health problem, the “responsible breeder” is expected to make some hard choices about the disposition of that pup and the future use of its sire and dam. On the surface, no one disagrees with this approach because they see it as “raising the bar” by “doing the right thing”, which are two more undefined labels.

By not defining “Responsible Breeder”, “Raising the Bar”, and “Doing the Right Thing”, pressure can be applied to breeders through a series of questions and complaints that are used to influence them, their clubs and the public.

A favorite strategy is to combine two undefined labels in a single message. For example, targeting AKC dog registrations and dog show entries can influence the willingness of breeders to breed and register their pups. It begins with labels like, “Puppy Mill” and “Responsible Breeder”. One is used to attack the breeder by claiming they are a puppy mill, the other to attack the breeder alleging they are not being responsible. Together, the combination of undefined labels will raise questions in the minds of those who breed and exhibit causing them to not register or not show their dogs.

This same approach is used to support anti-dog legislation. In these instances, rumors, complaints and accusations are linked to issues that drive a message. Large and small breed populations are both affected. The difference is only in degree. Breeds with small gene pools are mostly Low Entry breeds (LE) which have small numbers of breeders and shrinking gene pools. Now that 50% of the stud book are LE breeds, the AR people can focus on clubs that have the least number of breeders. Their messages are designed to convince these breeders that new and novice owners do not have the skill or knowledge to breed and continue their bloodlines. These breeders are told that the way to protect their bloodlines and the years they have invested in breeding is to use the “Limited Registration” (LR) option because it is a secure way to control and protect valuable bloodlines and the pups they produce. This strategy cleverly impacts the willingness of breeders to sell pups on full registrations which later affects entries at dog shows. With this logic, they make the argument that a “responsible breeder” needs to control and protect the future of their breeding program which cannot be left to untrained breeders. Large clubs are also af-

ected, but because of their size the AR influence is less apparent. However, both large and small clubs are affected because they both need to expand their gene pools while keeping their breeds healthy (10). Restricting pups from full registrations even when pups do not have disqualifications, serious faults or health issues has been used for over the past 20 years to shrink gene pools and reduce dog show entries (5, 6, 12). Figure 1 shows the percent of users by breeder type.

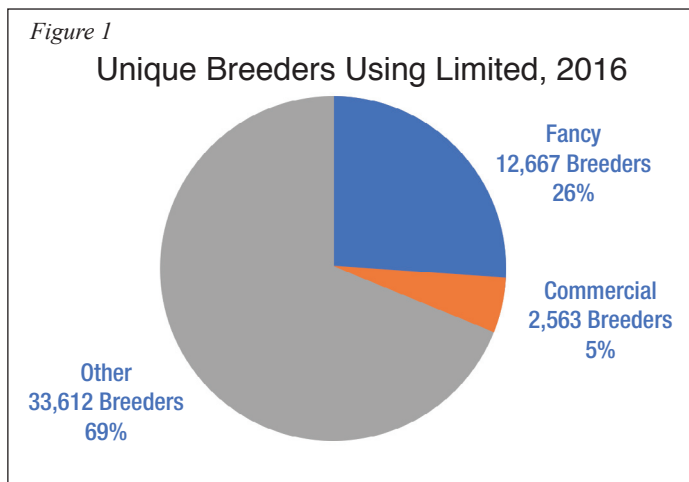
Another technique of the AR is to connect specific issues, incidents and stories with carefully crafted messages that promote ideas that can influence the uninformed public. Subtle messaging is used to drive opinions as seen in a recent sign posted on the back window of an SUV.

***“I save lives. Don’t breed litters”
“Help me end euthanasia”.***

When a TV station or print media has a release on a dog bite, injured person or incident, the AR begins with their version of what happened and reshapes the story to influence public opinion and policy. Their story line often begins with “another puppy mill raid was carried out early this morning on the South side of the city “. The readers are led to believe that puppy mills are everywhere and caused by breeders who are not responsible. The media release embellishes the issue and characterizes breeders in a bad light. By linking breeders and their dogs to undefined labels, they are able to continue a negative mindset and drive story lines that influence elected officials. This strategy is used when restrictions on dog ownership are proposed. Three ideas are used:

1. Target the breeder who registers dogs and litters
2. Demand pups be placed on limited registrations or not registered at all
3. Question the disposition and future use of the sires and dams

When breeders use good science to produce better dogs, the AR groups attack them. A favorite strategy involves canine health tests. When they become available breeders must learn how to use and interpret test results so that the affected animals and the carriers can be controlled and/or eliminated (10). This requires an understanding about the differences between direct and indirect tests because there is an inclination to remove from breeding all dogs that test positive for a disease. For example, many breeders are using the DM test, yet only a small percentage of those who test positive will actually develop the disease. For example, 72% of Boxers test positive for DM but only 1% develop the disease (16). In the absence of breeder education test results will be misused and valuable breeding stock will be lost. When tests are not available, the risk and education required is different (14). Without tests, more knowledge is required because in a three-generation pedigree there are 14 ancestors whose strengths and weaknesses need to be known. When new breeders are not provided with mentors and education, they cannot adequately evaluate their breeding stock and



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the consequences are seen in their litters. This lack of preparation allows the AR to focus on making breeders pause or become less willing to breed. To offset many of these educational problems, the AKC Canine College and the AKC Government Relations Departments have joined forces and are working together. The AKC Canine College is using its website to list breed seminars and online courses. Drs. Jerrod Bell and Anita Oberbauer recommend that breeders need to be educated about tests and pedigree analysis in order to expand their gene pool while keeping their breed healthy (15, 16). To do this, they must be willing to breed and use new ideas like “Depth and Breadth” of a pedigree which involves the study of littermates, parents and grandparents; and “Formula Breeding” which involves line-breedings that concentrate the genes from an important quality sire (9).

The AKC Government Relations Department has developed a system to support and inform clubs and breeders via a series of initiatives that begins with legislative tracking and analysis; advice on legislative and regulatory issues, release of policy reports; meetings with constituents, legislators and coalition partners, and preparation of educational/advocacy materials. They also have developed the [AKC Task Force on Anti-Breeder Harassment and Retaliation](#) which supports and educates breeders and those who participate in the political advocacy for dogs. The AKC strategy includes information about how to avoid becoming a target, what you can do if you become one, reporting harassment, and understanding what AKC can do to help. These efforts include a one-stop resource for information organized by topic on major canine policy issues, links to alerts, model legislation, sample letters and webinars/videos. The Government Relations Department has also collaborated with the [Canadian Kennel Club](#) on problems related to the importation of dogs at the border. They have also entered into a joint effort with NAIA to produce legislation called the [Healthy Dog Importation Act \(HR 6921\)](#). This act was introduced in Congress on May 19, 2020 by the three members of Congress who are also veterinarians (Reps. Abraham, Schrader and Yoho). The Healthy Dog Importation Act is designed to protect the U.S. pet and the public health by addressing issues related to the import of dogs, dangerous contagious diseases and non-native parasites. It requires:

- A health certificate issued by a licensed veterinary authority recognized by the Secretary.
- The health certificate must show all required vaccinations and demonstrate negative test results.
- Health certificates must be maintained in a centralized, publicly available database.
- Permanent dog identification

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bring about efforts to save the sport and increase show entries for all breeds. But lingering in the background is the popular AR strategy to pass legislation that bans breeds from a community. This is called Breed Specific Legislation (BSL). These bills ban and restrict breeds regardless of their behavior. Many BSL proposals focus on “Pit Bulls”, which they define as American Pit Bull Terriers (not recognized by AKC), American Staffordshire Terriers, Bull Terriers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, or any mix of those breeds. Most breed-specific legislation is tied to a specific incident, however time has shown that BSL does not work (7) because:

1. It does not **protect communities** because they hold all dog owners accountable for the behavior of a few.
2. **Is difficult to enforce** because they rely on law enforcement officials and their ability to identify the breed at the time of the incident.
3. **Is unfair to responsible owners** because BSL **unfairly** penalizes responsible dog owners without holding owners of truly dangerous dogs accountable.
4. **Increases costs to the community**
5. **Unfairly targets breeds** that generally cannot be adopted out.

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6. **Generally, leads to legal challenges** based on improper identification and its constitutionally.

Conclusion

Many efforts are now underway to address problems related to breeders, their clubs and the dog sport. When combined they are being used to increase interest in the dog sport. Some of these efforts are focusing on the education of clubs, their breeders and the public. None rely on luck, but rather the willingness to organize, prepare and fight for the right to own and breed dogs.

The increased efforts by the AKC, its breeders and their clubs have produced a renewed willingness to use existing talent who have the willingness to succeed. They include the definition of labels and implementing the ideas offered by Bell, Hughes, Oberbauer and others who have suggested that education be combined with mentoring in order to shift the conversation from undefined labels, hearsay and gossip to constructive ideas, breeder education and positive legislation.

Many departments of AKC are involved. This article focused on some of the efforts of AKC’s Canine College and their Government Relations Department who have already defined terms like: “Puppy Mill”, “Responsible Breeder”, “Raising the Bar”, and “Doing the Right Thing”. The new strategy extends education to all dog owners, breeders and their clubs. It also includes

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a steady diet of information about proposed legislation by zip code so that officials who vote can be contacted and given better information on which to make a decision.

The era of undefined labels and the crafting of messages that drive public opinion in the wrong direction is coming to an end. A new, multi-faceted approach has been launched that focuses on better education and compelling messages about purpose-bred dogs, registrations, entries, research and science. These efforts are all designed to build a pyramid of easy choices where each success can be used to repeat actions for long-term gains. Luck is not part of the answer.

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Carmen L. Battaglia holds a Ph.D. and Master's Degree from Florida State University. As an AKC judge, researcher and writer, he has been a leader in promoting the better ways to breed dogs. An author of many articles and several books, he is also a popular guest on TV and radio talk shows including several appearances on Animal Planet. His seminars about breeding, structure, pedigree analysis, selecting sires and choosing puppies have been well received by breed clubs all over the country. Those interested in learning more about his articles and seminars should visit the website.