

Two Left Turns
Don't Make It Right
by Dr. Al Grossman

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For the past five years, part of which I spent as an AKC Delegate, I have seen AKC inadvertently shoot itself in the proverbial foot. The PAWS legislation, which tore the fancy apart, and the “clandestine” approach to the agreement with the Petland Pet store chain come immediately to mind.

During this period PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and the HSUS (Humane Society of the United States) turned themselves into a powerful legislative juggernaut backed by millions of dollars that were milked from a gullible public and have become a royal PITA (Pain in the Ass). AKC was slow to recognize their growing influence and has suffered the consequences,

Three major tsunamis occurred during this time to create a perfect storm for AKC and the world of purebred dogs. First was the expansion of leisure time and the phenomenal growth of the recreation industry. Many different opportunities arose for leisure time activities from Little League baseball to the explosion of the cruise industry. The cadres of die-hard fanciers stopped growing as the next generation found other pursuits more interesting and challenging. Breed and All Breed clubs began to wither and die on the vine as few new members were to be found.

A growing number of entrepreneurs saw an opportunity to make a fast buck from the growing pet dog population by starting “registration” bodies and issuing a piece of paper stating “Your dog is now registered with God All Mighty Kennel Club” - no need for a stud book, inspections, DNA testing or whatever. You now have a purebred dog registered on the cheap. With a PC and a printer you too can become a registration body. Just print the meaningless document and collect the dough.

At last count, AKC had 26 competitors in the registration business. For many years the only “real”

competitor was the United Kennel Club. At least they maintained a stud book, published magazines, and held dog shows. Everyone could live with such legitimate competition.

Interestingly enough the number of homes with dogs as pets has increased as AKC registrations dropped. The registrations of AKC began a steady decline as people either were not convinced of the value of registering a dog with AKC or were deceived by effective advertising and promotion to register with other bodies. Of course, it did not help that many puppy mills, discouraged by AKC's growing number of stringent rules about inspections, frequent sires' DNA confirmation, and emphasis on health and good animal husbandry, turned away from the AKC bureaucracy and created their own registration bodies, which for them simplified their registrations and cost them less money. The new registration bodies were able to promote these "new" registration entities to the pet shops, which sold their products, by giving them kickbacks.

Some of these entrepreneurs also found another gold mine. They helped foster the breeding and promotion of so-called "designer dogs." CockaPoos, Labradoodles, Puggles and the like began to be the "in" thing for the unsophisticated public. Eureka, another vein to mine.

Now along came the most vicious threat to the sport of purebred dogs - the resurgence of the Animal Rights Movement. This is a movement so insidious that it grows like a cancer. An unhealthy amalgamation of extreme environmentalists, Greens, Greenpeace, ALF, PETA, HSUS, etc., has learned to prey upon weakened institutions like a bunch of jackals. It appeals to the young and idealistic who are seeking a cause to give meaning to their lives. They practice all of the techniques of cults and give them a philosophy of veganism, environmentalism and radicalism. Upset the status quo, be in the forefront of a new movement, change the universe and you will be part of the new chosen ones, is their motto. This has high appeal to impressionable young people and is a message as old as time now supported by money, advertising and hucksterism.

These people have become dangerous. They have destroyed facilities using animals for research. They have killed and maimed animals in their quest for the new nirvana. They have harassed researchers and others involved in vital medical research. Lastly, and most telling, they have learned the art and skill of manipulating legislative bodies. With their huge cache of money, they have been able to mount punitive anti-dog legislation in city after city and state after state. The punitive, anti-dog legislation in Louisville, Kentucky shows that the inmates have taken over the asylum.

Many years ago, when I was the publisher of Doral Publishing, Patti and Rod Strand came to me about publishing a book exposing the takeover of the Animal Humane movement by groups of fanatics. We published it under the title THE HIJACKING OF THE HUMANE MOVEMENT. It was a great critical success. As a result of its publication, I received a number of death threats, but I also got to participate in the founding of NAIA (National Animal Interest Alliance) and served on its first Board of Directors.

As I became more and more concerned about this insidious cancer, I approached AKC to take some affirmative action against these fanatics. I got plaudits for my writings but the powers-that-be at AKC indicated that the situation wasn't too serious and that I was being an alarmist. So much for foresight.

As these events hovered in the background, they finally came together to form a perfect storm which hit AKC and the fancy with unprecedented violence. AKC and the fancy reacted with shock and dismay at our failure to anticipate the results of our inaction and the support of PAWS and Petland without consulting the delegate body and the fancy in advance. The realization of unintended consequences struck us like a thunderbolt. We have been scurrying around ever since trying to regroup and decide on a corrective course of action. As the famous Oliver Hardy of the Laurel and Hardy comedic team would say, "Well, here is another nice kettle of fish you've pickled me into".

Having painted this canvas full of gloom and doom, I would like to take this opportunity to change my pallet and paint another type of picture. Hopefully one that uses brighter colors and offers some clues to a better future.

First off, we need to recognize we are no longer in a growth industry. We need to re-identify what business we are in. Just like the Pennsylvania Railroad, who discovered they were not just in the railroad business but the transportation business, we are no longer just in the dog game. We are a part of the leisure and recreation industry and must begin to act accordingly. We must change our constitution and by-laws to accommodate this change.

- We need to recognize that the sports of Agility and Rally are the growth portion of our new industry, and begin to give them the recognition and representation they deserve.
- While the emphasis on the bottom line is important to our survival, we should not become overly dependent on the roller-coaster stock market for a major share of our income.
- We should initiate a study of the possibility of acquiring the UKC so there would be one strong body representing purebred dogs. Greater economies of scale would be possible with this concentration of resources.
- AKC should move out of New York, sublease the current facilities, and join with the Raleigh portion of the company. As our registration income shrinks, it is folly to stay in New York with its ultra-high costs. Admit the division was a mistake and now rectify it.
- Let's admit that the delegate body has become unwieldy as the number of clubs joining AKC increases. The new constitution and by-laws should address a new way of representation, making sure that it's duties and responsibilities are more clearly spelled out.
- The archaic notion that the Board of Directors of AKC must come from the delegate body has to be reviewed. We should have the opportunity to bring in expertise from other arenas to give us wise counsel as needed. We need to open our eyes to the realities of the 21st century. Our flexibility is being limited by our own "inbreeding". We need what we extol in our dogs - "hybrid vigor," which some good outcrosses can give us.
- The Board of Directors should cease micromanaging the organization and delegate more authority to the President and staff.
- The National Championship show should be permanently located in one city so it can grow its' identity. It needs to be placed in a location that can rival New York City as a destination city. Tampa and Long Beach do not meet those criteria - Las Vegas does. Good transportation, lots to do and see, and excellent facilities. It's a natural.
- We need to change the direction and philosophy of how to combat animal rights legislation. AKC should take a leaf from Union organizers and hire people to go to the hot spots, organize the campaign, help letter writers, and lobby the local/state legislators in place. They should spend at least a month on-site to do this.
- AKC should retain a PR firm whose sole job is to poke fun and ridicule at some of the preposterous things that animal rights groups do. They need to point out that these people don't realize the consequences of their own actions and spell out the unintended consequences. Humor can be very effective, especially biting humor.

I leave you with the following guideline. Tactics knows what to do when there is something to do; Strategy

knows what to do when there is nothing to do.

Dr. Grossman, a long time judge of Sporting Dogs and publisher of Doral Publishing is now the President of WinningSolutions.info, a website devoted to developing the Professional Mentor concept via vital information for the beginning breeder/exhibitor at <http://winningsolutions.info>