

Ringside Etiquette:

Six Faux "Paws" Not to Make at an AKC Show

By Amy Garabedian & Amanda Badillo

Everyone starts new, and everyone can remember a time when their dog did something at a show we wished they hadn't done. However, by learning some of the common ringside etiquette Faux "Paws," you can make showing a more pleasurable experience for you, your Leo, and everyone.

Faux "Paws" #1: Bringing a dog that hasn't been socialized properly to a show.

Showing is a sport, and, like all sports, it requires a level of practice, time, and training; even though some may say you're just "running in left circles." Before you enter a show, make sure you've taken your dog to many different environments, conformation classes (which are beneficial to canine and human alike), and exposed them to larger groups of people and high-sensory situations.

Be sure to practice having your dog "examined" as if by a judge many times before considering entering a show. Conformation classes are a great place to practice this, or friends and neighbors can help if there aren't any classes near you.

Faux "Paws" #2: Hanging around outside of the ring when it's not your turn.

If your dog is not actively competing in a show, it should not be ringside. This minimizes the traffic jam and the risk of dog altercations in the vicinity of the ring.

It is appropriate to arrive ringside approximately 10 to 15 minutes before your breed judging time. Make sure to keep clear of ring entrances and exits until it is your dog's turn to be judged.

Leave seating against the ring for spectators to enjoy our fancy, not for your dog to sit against while you wait for your turn in the ring.

Ringside is absolutely not the place for your dog to play with its pals or make new friends.

Faux "Paws" #3: Not observing additional courtesy if your dog is in heat.

A dog that is in heat can be shown, however, certain courtesies for other exhibitors must be observed.

Do not place an in-season bitch directly outside of the ring. The more contact a male dog has with the scent of a female in heat, the more agitated those dogs could become.

Give extra room between your in-season girl and all other dogs.

Letting your fellow competitors know that your girl is in season goes a long way. This allows other exhibitors an opportunity to help you in creating a safe distance between your dog and theirs.

Faux "Paws" #4: Not choosing your first show carefully.

There are small shows and big shows. Even if you think you have a confident dog who takes things in stride, only good can come from introducing showing slowly to a novice dog. You may want to choose a smaller show to be your dog's first introduction into this new world.

Faux "Paws" #5: Choosing inappropriate show equipment for your dog.

We have large dogs that are capable of snapping inappropriate collars and show leads. Make sure the lead you choose is strong enough to stand up to your dog's strength. If you are in doubt, have a conversation with one of the many dealers of these products and they should be able to guide you to an appropriate choice.

Teach your dog to respect and respond to its show collar.

Check your equipment regularly for wear and tear and to avoid breakages.

Faux "Paws" #6: Not knowing how to use your equipment properly and control the head of your dog.

Position your collar at the top of the dog's head (just behind the ears), not further down the neck where it will do almost no good with our strong dogs.

Pay attention to where your dog's attention is. Where is your dog looking? If they are making eye contact with another dog, they may lunge (even if it is for play). Give yourself plenty of room between dogs. It is okay to leave space.

Quite honestly, if people had good skills watching where their dog's focus is, there would be far fewer issues between dogs at dog shows.

The show ring can be a nerve-racking place for people with all levels of experience, but by avoiding these faux "paws," we can exemplify what wonderful companions we have.

See you in the ring!

Are you new in showing and want to speak with an experienced LCA member? We'd love to help! Interested in being a show mentor to a newbie? If you would be interested in helping our newer members learn the ropes or would like to talk with an experienced handler, please contact Amanda Badillo at amnadarosborough@icloud.com.

*If you'd like a more comprehensive guide to beginning to show, check out this book, recommended by Amanda Badillo, co-written by one of her mentors: **Raising a Champion** by Carole Richards.*

*Editor's note: You may also reach out to **Conformation Mentors in the LCA Versatility Program: Tiffanie Coe (West coast) & Maureen Ross (East coast)**.*