



Episode 13: Where to start when you're starting, and what makes an expert an expert

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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This is the agility challenge podcast with Daisy peel. You're listening to Episode 13. Welcome to the agility challenge podcast. I'm your host, Daisy peel. Join me as I talk about everything related to the mental side of the sport of dog agility. If you've ever felt overwhelmed by negative self talk or lack of confidence, or if your dog training to do list seems so long that you don't even know where to get started, then this podcast is for you. For more podcast episodes, training, content and coaching from me, head to [www dot the agility challenge.com](http://www.theagilitychallenge.com) where members get access to monthly training and handling challenges, in addition to league play, and a whole lot more. Let's dive in with today's episode.

Hey there, everybody. It's been a while since my last podcast, I've been on the road teaching seminars and workshops. And I've been reminded yet again, that foundation is where it's at. This last Monday, just a few days ago, I posted a Monday motivation quote. And it's a quote from somebody named Bob Bailey, who hosted several, they were called Chicken camps. And they were basically a way for people to work on their mechanical skills as they pertain to animal training. And he said that advanced training is merely more precise application of the fundamentals. Now I've adapted that over the years to say advanced handling. But the premise stands up to scrutiny no matter where you look, when we're a novice handler, we want really badly to be an advanced handler. When we're an advanced handler, we really want to be an expert handler. But when we become an expert, well, that's when we've learned the value of mastery of the foundation skills required to be an expert. And you can't really have one without the other. And we see this idea put forward again and again, in books, articles, interviews, and discussions with people who are experts, that the key is to return again and again, to those fundamental skills that underpin the entirety of whatever endeavor it is that you want to get better at.



When I teach a seminar, or a workshop or even a private or group lesson. A novice handler or a novice group of people tends to get information about the fundamentals. I'm careful not to overwhelm a novice handler with information that they may not be ready to process yet. And I do think that deciding which information to drip out and which information to hold back is itself a skill that I've learned throughout all of my years of teaching. But with a master's level group, I'm still going to hit on the fundamentals that are likely holding a team back from mastery of what we would maybe call the fancy skills. And with a master's level student, I may give more information about foundation under the assumption that with their experience in the sport and their longevity in the sport, potentially, they can hold more of that information and make more use of it. Again, being able to roll out information in a way and at a pace that the learner can maximize the information you're serving up is a skill. And I think it's one that requires practice and patience and time to master. I don't want to hold back information just for the sake of holding it back. But I also don't want to overwhelm somebody who's newer to the sport. With so much information that they feel like they're standing at the base of the cliff looking up and thinking to themselves, I will never make it to the top of this cliff because that's pretty demoralizing. So I want to make sure that I stick to the fundamentals as much as possible. With the novice handler or trainer, it's going to be presented a little bit different pace. And with the masters level handler and trainer, I can present more information and fold it into their existing understanding of Alright, well, here's how this fundamental skill that you maybe need to go back and address. We'll help you with all of these other higher level skills that you've been wanting to work on. But the novice handler and trainer may not even know what those higher level skills are yet they just don't have a big enough picture yet to know.

So that brings me to today's topics which are in my mind tied together. I had a podcast listener comment that they'd gotten back into the sport after an absence of quite a long time several years, and that they had turned to the internet for information. Now I've talked before about how being an information gathering mode can be a way of avoiding commitment to a strategy, and a way of avoiding the possibility of a strategy failing. Indecision can be a way of stalling and avoiding doing the actual training and handling work that may need to be done.

It's a way sometimes of avoiding the discomfort that can come with trying something new. Most of us are pretty familiar with indecision. So that is a familiar space to be in an indecisive space information gathering, I just need a little bit more information, and then I can decide on a strategy.



But in this case, the listener who reached out to me has realized that there may be getting stuck in indecision, and they want to know how to discern good information information that's worth following through on and committing to, and information that may be more sparkle in substance. The internet has been a fantastic equalizer in a lot of ways. But it has equalized solid information from sketchy information. And sometimes it can be hard to tell whether or not the content you're considering to committing to is being put forth by somebody who knows their stuff, or somebody who's maybe better at marketing than actually training and handling dogs. And there's a lot of information available, certainly a ton more information than when I started.

And, more often than not, we tend to learn about somebody in dog sports based on their competitive accomplishments, rather than their accomplishments as a coach, instructor, or mentor. And there are plenty of accomplished competitors who are also wonderful coaches, instructors and mentors. But there are also coaches, instructors and mentors that you may never have heard of beyond the local level because they're not accomplished competitors. And the two aren't tied together. There are plenty of really great coaches in professional sports, who never played the sport but who are amazing coaches. So coaches and competitors are two different things. Now you can learn a lot about being a competitor by being a competitor. But your ability to communicate that to others in a way that they can learn from it is a different skill than being a competitor. So today, I'm going to turn to one of my favorite books. It's called the little little book of talent. And it's written by an author named Daniel Coyle, who also wrote a book called The Talent Code, I highly recommend both of these books. And I've put links to both books in the show notes at [podcast dot the agility challenge.com](https://podcast.theagilitychallenge.com), forward slash 13. So the following five tips plus a few more, but the following five tips are from Daniel coils, little book of talent. And I want to take some time to unpack each of the five tips in the hopes of providing you some clarity when it comes to evaluating and choosing your next coach, instructor or mentor. So here we go. Tip number one, avoid somebody who reminds you of a courteous waiter. This is the instructor who focuses his or her efforts on keeping you comfortable and happy, and on making things go smoothly with a minimum of effort. This is the instructor who covers a lot of material in a short period of time smiles a lot and says things like don't worry, no problem, we can take care of that later. This might be a good person to have as a waiter in a restaurant. But this is a terrible person to have as your teacher, coach or mentor. This person is also often focused on making sure you feel good and happy, and really spends a lot of time pumping you up and cheering for you regardless of how well you're actually doing with a particular effort or skill. Now, I'm not saying that your coach, mentor or instructor should never give you a pat on



the back. I'm just saying that that shouldn't be their primary objective to just pump you up. After all, you're there to get better not just to feel better.

Tip number two, and that they all kind of relate to one another is to seek someone who scares you a little or makes you feel uncomfortable. So in contrast to encounters with courteous waiter types, encounters with great teachers, coaches and mentors tend to be feel filled with unfamiliar emotion, feelings of respect, admiration, discomfort, and maybe even something that you might describe as fear, even though you're not really afraid of this person. But this is a good sign. You want to look for somebody who watches you closely. Because they're interested in figuring you out. And they want to know what you want. They want to know where you're coming from. They want to know where your dog is coming from. And they want to know what motivates both of you, not what you say, but what they learned from observing.

And you might feel scrutinized and you might feel really scrutinized. And that's because this person is going to be scrutinizing you and your dog, but they're doing it with an eye toward

on helping you improve, not out of judgment, although sometimes it can feel that way. Because most of us are not used to being watched all that closely. And a lot of us are also typically hoping that nobody's watching that closely.

This person is also pretty action oriented. A good coach, mentor or instructor isn't going to want to spend a lot of time talking, they are going to want to jump in with a couple of activities or short sequences right away, so that they can get a feel for you and your dog and vice versa. You can explain your issues to a good coach, instructor or mentor, but I guarantee you that they will see all of your issues right away once you start engaging with your dog. And even though they may be seeing you for only a few minutes in the context of a seminar or workshop, and even though they may never have seen you before, they're still going to be able to pretty well nail things. And that can be uncomfortable. But again, that's a good sign.

A good coach, mentor or instructor is honest, sometimes unnervingly. So it may feel like they're being blunt, or way more direct than you're used to. This person is going to tell you the truth about your performance in clear language. And this can sting at first. But you should know that it's not personal, it's



information that you can use to get better. And a good coach or mentor or instructor is not going to want to beat around the bush, they're going to want to get right to the reason that you're there. They know time is valuable, your time is valuable, their time is valuable, and they're not going to want to waste time. And that goes right in with number three, which is to seek somebody who gives short, clear directions. Most great teachers, coaches and mentors are not going to give long winded speeches. They don't give sermons. And they don't give lectures, they give short, unmistakably clear directions, and they're like a missile to the target. A good coach, teacher or mentor is a good communicator. They know how to use spoken word efficiently to communicate physical actions. They also know when to demonstrate when words won't work. Although I side note on this, I would be aware of the instructor who likes to spend a lot of time demonstrating with their own dogs, since that's often not really useful for most participants in a learning situation. If an instructor is wanting to demonstrate with your dog that may be beneficial. And it also means that that person is opening themselves up to not being magically successful. But they are also opening themselves up to digging into your dish, your issue your issue, to digging into your issue more deeply, even at the risk of looking like they don't have all the answers themselves. And that is a good thing. Number four on that list is to seek somebody who loves teaching the fundamentals.

Great teachers will often spend entire practice sessions on one seemingly small fundamental, for example, the single step required to move laterally away from your dog on course, or the footwork of a front cross, or a front of blind cross cue combination. That kind of stuff. This might seem strange or tedious. But it shows that they understand the importance of the fundamentals that are at the core of your skills.

The more advanced you are, the more crucial those fundamentals become. And this goes back to what I mentioned at the beginning of this podcast episode, how fundamentals are fundamental. They're not always fun, at least maybe not for you. Although, of course, you have to work to make them worthwhile for your dog and fun for your dog. But fun isn't always the same as valuable, right? Something can be valuable, but not always enjoyable. And I have to say I've been to seminars where I felt like there was a lot of coursework, and I've been to seminars where I came away with one fundamental that really shifted my understanding of things. Guess which seminars I found more valuable. It's not about how many obstacles you sequence. It's about how solidly you grasp what's happening for each and every moment that you're out there with your dog. And that is where mastery of the fundamentals like



footwork, reinforcement structure, mastery of the principles of classical and operant, conditioning, and all that other stuff are going to come into play.

Finally, of those five tips, all other things being equal, pick the older person, or at least a person who's been in the sport longer. It's tempting to go after the latest and greatest agility performer who is on the teaching circuit or who won the big last big competition or whatever. But for an instructor or coach or a mentor, all of the things being equal. Pick the older

person or the person who has been around longer. As I mentioned earlier, teaching is a skill like any other, it takes time, and perseverance to develop. Of course, there are good teachers at any age. And of course, it's not true that every older instructor is a guaranteed genius. But if you have the choice to go with somebody who has been in the sport longer, and has been teaching longer, they're probably older. All are the things being equal go for that person over the newcomer, there are plenty of people in the sport. Now, this has to do with people who've been in sport longer. So there are also plenty people in the sport, who get good at the sport at a particular stage, and then they stay there, they get good, they have some success. But then as the sport evolves, that person does not evolve, they get left behind. But those who have been in the sport for several, several years, and those who have seen trends come and go and those who have a bigger overall picture of the sport, even if they're not competitive themselves anymore. Those are the people that you want to pick as a coach or mentor or instructor because those are the people who have seen how things are shifting and can predict how they're going to continue to shift. And they have a pretty big overall picture of the skills that remain constant to success in the sport. So those are the people whose instruction you're going to want to chase after whose online content you're going to want to chase after whose seminars and workshops you're going to want to try and get yourself into.

Now, there are some other things that I'm gonna add to this list, particularly things that pertain to online learning.

Being skilled at developing or presenting online content is obviously going to be important to the learner. But a website does not need to be flashy for the content to be good, the information should be well presented, it should be concise, and there should be good solid explanations that are based on solid fundamentals to back up that content. Also, I don't think you need to be a participant in an online



learning environment to benefit from the content. If you're looking for instruction, get the information first, get the information from somebody who fits the criteria that I mentioned previously. And then really dissect that information. If this person has training videos of their own, watch those training videos, and really be looking for what are the unspoken and unwritten things that that person is doing with their own dogs and their training videos. Plenty of great trainers are poor communicators. And the real key to their success may be in what they're doing with their dogs not in what they're telling you to do. I mean, they might be doing the things they're telling you to do. But there may be some other really important things that they're failing to mention simply because they're not aware of what they're doing.

So look at the content, but also read between the lines, watch the training videos with a critical eye and see how the unwritten, but demonstrated information fits in with any explicit instruction that's presented. And if you do feel like you need the critique of a mentor or coach or an instructor, be sure to regularly video your own training, since you never know when you may need to send a clip off to somebody to review and critique. And simply watching your own training videos will go a long way towards solving a lot of your issues. And it'll make you easier. It'll make it easier for you to provide video to somebody who can lend a fresh set of eyes to your training and handling problems. You'll be able to send off a video clip with some pointed questions about hey, why is my dog doing this? At this moment? I can't really see what's happening here. I've watched the video but I'm not really sure. This is what I've been trying and can you help me out here.

Finally, and this is this is kind of a separate topic, but also related. If you're looking for a good mentor, a good coach, or a good instructor, or particularly somebody that you're going to have a more long term relationship with, I do think that you should expect to outgrow them. And a good mentor or instructor or coach is going to want you to outgrow them, they're going to want to lift you up and help you fly.

They're not going to hold you back in order to keep you from outgrowing their instruction if they're good, but they may hold you back. If they sense that you're skimming over fundamentals that are going to help you fly the nest at some point.

A good coach mentor or an or instructor does not need to be a good friend. They're your coach. They're your mentor. They're your instructor, they may also be a friend, but they don't have to be.



And if and when you do outgrow a coach, mentor or instructor, it's going to be something that's mutual, that person will likely tell you that they think you've outgrown them. And while you're welcome to stay because after all, who doesn't like having a star pupil around your growth may not continue as rapidly as if you set out on your own. So how to part ways agreeably with a coach, instructor or mentor that you've outgrown is a totally different topic for

or maybe another podcast episode.

So there are some thoughts on how to sift through all of the information that's available to you these days for dog agility, training and handling growth, and how to settle on who might be a good coach, mentor or instructor for you. The last couple of podcast episodes have been topics that have been prompted by listeners. So if you've got a topic that you'd like me to touch on, I encourage you to reach out at [podcast dot the agility challenge.com](http://podcast.theagilitychallenge.com). And leave a comment. I'd love to hear from you. Until next time, bye bye.

If you enjoyed today's podcast, and you've got somebody in mind who you're pretty sure could benefit from discussing the things we talked about today, head to the webpage for today's episode [podcast dot the agility challenge.com](http://podcast.theagilitychallenge.com) forward slash 13. And scroll to the bottom you'll see a section that says Share the love that has some instructions and links for how to subscribe to and share this podcast and also how to leave a rating and review in Apple podcasts. I'm a pretty tech savvy person but even for me it was a little tricky. So I've included a how to link for you at the bottom of the page. So go ahead and head on over to [podcast dot the agility challenge.com](http://podcast.theagilitychallenge.com) forward slash 13. subscribe to the podcast, leave a review and share it with a friend. Also, you can leave a comment below the episode and let me know your thoughts about what we discussed today. I'd love to hear from you, and maybe discuss your thoughts on a future episode.