

June 2020 AKC Gazette (rerun from June 2014 issue)

The Dog Breeder: Idealism vs. Realism

People are creators. But I doubt that many realize this. We are not meant to go out into the world and find flawless things; we are not meant to sit down and have flawless things fall in our laps. But we are creators. We can create a beautiful thing out of what we have. The problem with idealistic people is that they see themselves as receivers instead of creators, and they end up hunting for the flaw in everything in order to measure it up to their ideals. When you see yourself as a creator, you can look at a chunk of marble and see an angel in it. Then you "carve until you have set that angel free." —C. JoyBell C.

We all know the statement "There's no perfect dog." If we believe this, why do we expect to breed our perfect dog? Idealism is the behavior or thought based on a conception of things as they should be, or as they wish them to be, with a tendency to be imaginary or visionary. Realism, on the other hand, is the behavior or thought based on a conception of things as they are, regardless of how one wants them to be, with a tendency to be practical and pragmatic.

Many new to the breeding process suffer from idealism. Although this is not a bad thing, one must have some realistic expectations when dealing with possibilities beyond our control.

The genetics of dogs can be a huge handicap. Humans have 46 chromosomes (23 pairs), as compared to a dog's 78 chromosomes (39 pairs). The arrangement or sequence of the genes of the chromosomes is astounding. So you see, when dealing with living beings, we are at the mercy of genetics.

Awareness of the intricate patterns of heredity is a good way to begin to realize why traits don't always fall into predictable dominant-recessive patterns. The varying degrees of dominance, polygenes, and environment will affect the outcome of your planned breedings.

Since there are no perfect dogs, we need to set realistic goals, those long-term goals that will eliminate undesired traits and strengthen the desirable. Study the genetic diversity of your breed, and accept that undesirable recessives will crop up when you least expect them.

Ask those who have been successfully breeding for years, and they'll tell you of their early idealism and the puppy or puppies they wish they had kept. Their idealism got in the way and set their breeding program back another year or more. To expect to accomplish one's goal in one generation is unrealistic.

Remember, there is an element of art to dog breeding. Successful breeders acquire skills by experience, study, and observation, as well as a bit of intuition. The best geneticists in the world can't predict what will happen when two dogs are mated, no matter how hard we strive for genetic reliability and consistency. Every generation is different and presents a unique set of flaws.

There truly is no formula for success. So sprinkle that idealism with a little realism, and carve until you set your angel free.

—Virginia (Jenny) Hauber, 2014