

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

A leader's responsibilities are tremendously diverse. CFRs and other puppy raising program staff are always happy to provide additional information and tools as needed.

There are many elements involved in providing effective leadership. A puppy raising leader is responsible for helping club members successfully raise puppies for GDB and for representing GDB in a positive manner to raisers and the public.

Primary Qualities of An Effective Leader

- Understanding of GDB's current dog handling techniques and the ability to apply and teach them
- Understanding of and commitment to GDB's mission, policies, and protocols
- Team building skills
- Ability to coach others
- Willingness to delegate
- Communication skills
- Ability to resolve conflicts
- Ability to lead by example

Understanding of the GDB Mission

The GDB mission as it applies to puppy club leaders is to have or create a club that provides the teaching and activities necessary for raisers to successfully raise their pups. This involves inspiring raisers to develop their dogs to their full potential. Along with communicating the mission, a good leader demonstrates through their own actions how others can achieve the mission.

Team Building

A successful leader builds a club into a cohesive team while at the same time encouraging each member according to their individual strengths and interests. A leader recognizes genuine teamwork by placing equal value on each team member's contribution. A leader is not simply delegating jobs. Rather, a true leader invites the input of others and allows discussion of club plans and activities. In this way all members of a club, raisers and leaders alike, feel valued and united as they work together in raising their puppies.

Coaching

Good leaders are also good coaches. Coaching helps raisers achieve their own and each puppy's full potential. A good leader gives praise and support, and acts as a sounding board when someone is working on a new idea. They help raisers develop new approaches to problems when they are facing discouraging situations.

Delegating

Leaders are doers. They enjoy working toward goals and also enjoy working with others to achieve those goals. In delegating a job or responsibility, a leader allows another person in

the club to make a decision or perform a task independently. By delegating some of the tasks involved in leading a club, a leader will be less burdened by the work involved and will have more competent, confident, and satisfied raisers and co-leaders to work with.

Communication Skills

Communication is the key to effective leadership. Communication is a two-way street: one must be careful and clear, both when speaking and when listening to another.

A key to effective communication is listening. Active listening means that as someone is speaking, the leader is listening to what is being said as well as to what is not being said.

Allowing for feedback is another aspect of communication that an effective leader must promote. As a team, club members need to be able to share their opinions and suggestions freely.

Decision-Making Responsibilities

A leader and Community Field Representative share responsibility for the safety, emotional wellbeing, and skill development of the volunteers and puppies under their supervision. At times, decisions need to be made that a raiser or other volunteer may not regard as favorable. Some actions are within a leader's area of responsibility; others belong to the CFR. In order to avoid confusion of roles, the following details the duties of each position in possible stressful or confrontational situations.

A CFR's Responsibilities

- Transferring a dog from a home and into a new home
- Career changing a dog
- Sending a dog for health or behavior evaluation
- Denying an individual's participation in GDB activities
- Approving or denying all applications in consultation with the club leader(s)

A Leader's Responsibilities

- Assigning puppy sitting
- Temporarily removing a puppy from a home for evaluation
- Requesting the CFR to temporarily take a puppy for evaluation
- Temporarily removing a puppy from a home if it is in danger or in a situation unsuitable for its proper development
- Temporarily removing a puppy from a home if it is endangering other people or animals
- Submitting any letters of dispute, reprimand or any other sensitivity to the CFR for review prior to distribution

CFRs are responsible for supervising the leaders, raisers, club assistants, and puppies in their territory. GDB asks that all volunteers and their family members work with their CFR in a cooperative fashion. A CFR's decisions represent those of the organization. If any volunteer has concerns about a CFR's decision or actions, they should contact the Puppy

Raising Manager.

Conflict Resolution

In spite of a leader's best efforts and skill, there is bound to be conflict within a club at some point. Conflict can actually lead to new ideas and highlight possibilities not yet explored. When a conflict surfaces it should be dealt with quickly and honestly.

If a leader is directly involved in a conflict it is even more important that they remain objective. If necessary, the leader should have a co-leader or the CFR help mediate so all involved know that the leader did not have undue influence over the resolution.

Sometimes an acceptable solution cannot be reached within the club regardless of attempts made to do so. In that case, a leader should follow the chain of communication described below, by following steps one through five:

1. Parties involved in conflict try to resolve problem together
2. If unsuccessful, ask for help from leader(s)
3. If unsuccessful, request assistance from the CFR
4. If unsuccessful, contact the Puppy Raising Manager
5. If unsuccessful, the Vice President of Community Operations may become involved

Supporting Community Change

The role of leader includes the task of helping club members understand and embrace changes in GDB's training methods or policies as they relate to puppy raising. This task is not always easy. It is a leader's job to first understand the rationale behind changes as much as possible, adjust to the change, present the change positively to the club, and help the group adjust to the change.

GDB has a commitment to continually improve its programs. It also has a commitment to its puppies and to all of its volunteers to provide them the support and resources required for full participation in the program. It is important that leaders trust that changes are being initiated for the improvement of GDB and convey that trust to their club members. The desired improvements from changes to methods and policies may not be readily apparent to an individual. GDB is an organization that values and depends on leaders' feedback. Leaders are encouraged to share their feedback with their Community Field Representative or through communication with the Puppy Raising Department.

Recognizing Raisers and Other Volunteers

Leaders are in a unique position to offer support and guidance to puppy raisers. They can help shape how their raisers respond to challenges associated with puppy raising. By maintaining a positive working atmosphere, fostering teamwork and support, and presenting puppy raising as much more than a simple pass or fail, the leader can guide, develop, and retain raisers and promote their skill and leadership in the club. By treating each raiser as an individual, leaders can make the puppy raising experience more personally rewarding.

Other volunteers can also be recognized for the tremendous support they provide to the leader and to the club. Their talents in publicizing club activities, fundraising, puppy sitting, planning events, etc. are crucial to the club.

Foster a Positive Environment

- Develop an atmosphere of trust and encouragement for both puppies and people
- Express all opinions and intentions with honesty, even unfavorable ones
- Be available to answer questions, instruct, or give emotional support
- Return all calls and emails within 48 hours; 24 hours if urgent or a complaint
- Recognize a person's potential and encourage their development
- Point out successes; small, as well as large
- Acknowledge attempts even though they may have not been successful
- Give a raiser a break from a challenging puppy by providing puppy sitting

Tools of Recognition

- Verbal praise at the time of the person's effort
- Praise in front of other volunteers or GDB staff
- A special phone call to say "thank you," "good job"
- Thank you or recognition-of-effort card
- A certificate
- An award as part of a formal ceremony
- A silly or fun award that is rotated throughout the club to recognize special efforts
 - a unique trophy
 - a special shirt to wear at meetings
- Promote the club or a club member to the local media
- Ask the Community Field Representative to write a special letter of support or recognition

Providing Emotional Support

One of the most difficult aspects of raising a puppy for GDB is returning a dog for formal training (recall). Likewise, having a puppy career changed for a health or temperament issue is a great disappointment for a raiser and sometimes for a whole club. Leaders are the first line of response for raisers when these things occur. It is also important to remember that leaders can call on GDB for support as well. For example, asking a CFR to take a little extra time to explain the reason for a career change or requesting that veterinary staff answer the questions of a puppy raiser whose puppy is experiencing an illness or injury.

Teaching Raisers the True Meaning of Success

It would be easy to think that successful puppy raising results in a dog that graduates as a guide dog. Puppy raisers aren't responsible for producing working guides. Raisers are responsible for nurturing and socializing puppies, productively supporting their club and fellow volunteers, and promoting the puppy raising program and GDB to their communities.

Leaders can help emphasize that fact by rewarding puppy raisers and their families for their activities within the club. Raisers should be recognized for their efforts all along the way:

- successfully housebreaking their pups
- teaching their puppies good manners

- introducing the puppies to new situations
- teaching the puppies to respond to cues
- properly introducing GDB dog handling techniques
- providing a positive image and education to the public about the mission of Guide Dogs for the Blind and the puppy raising program
- being a positive part of a team within the club
- participating in club and GDB activities

The staff at Guide Dogs for the Blind knows from the beginning that not all dogs will become guides. The success or failure of each dog rests on the results of the dogs' health, temperament, and guide dog training.

Raisers succeed when they develop a puppy to the best of its abilities.