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Dear Jill,

I am currently happy in my job; however, I feel that I am getting too complacent. I want to be prepared if another position comes along with more advancement and monetary potential. Do you have any ways I can get ready?

– R

ASK JILL



JILL MCGILLEN

Dear R,

Your instincts are correct not to get too comfortable in the ever-changing work world. Here is a six-step strategy to prepare for opportunities.

1. **Network.** Your career growth is up to you. Over 67 percent of job seekers find jobs through word-of-mouth. It is not who you know, it is who knows you. This means joining and becoming active in related professional associations. Attend events related to your industry. Get to know people in different departments within your organization and industry—people who are well networked and working on interesting projects or research in your field.
2. **Focus on talent, not title.** When someone asks, “What do you do?,” tell in plain language what you actually do, not what your title is. Rather than answering, “I am an events planner,” you might say, “I am a project manager responsible for overseeing and planning large work conferences and events.” By describing your actions, you are explaining transferable skills more than a title would.
3. **Become a student.** What skills in your industry are you lacking? Find out what training or education will give you the state-of-the-art skill set for tomorrow’s world. Read industry magazines to find out what competitors are doing, creating, etc. Consider how to stay a step ahead of what the future will bring. There is an old expression: The more you learn, the more you earn.
4. **Save.** Financial experts recommend a minimum of six months’ salary saved in case you experience an unexpected change in your work situation.
5. **Give first.** People are more likely to look favorably on those who have helped them or others. What do you have to offer? As an example, a former architect colleague often helped in the Habitat for Humanity house-building events. This colleague enjoyed using his skills to help others in need. He had no expectations of reward for his work. However, a year later when a promotional opportunity came he was chosen

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At Work With:

Steve Bettcher, Dog trainer, president of the Dog Squad

By JoAnna Rodriguez



PHOTO BY JIM CHAPMAN

STEVE BETTCHER (left) operates The Dog Squad, a dog training company. He’s shown holding Sooty, and joined by Patrick Gibbons, director of training services, plus Nibbles, seated on the sidewalk.

STEVE Bettcher has always loved training animals. Growing up, he taught his parakeet to play fetch and chickens to dance. But it wasn’t until he adopted his dog Tippy that training became more than a hobby. “With Tippy this process of training really tapped into something,” he said. Since then, he’s made a career of dog training and has helped correct behavioral problems ranging from object guarding to car-related aggression. We talked with The Dog Squad president about discipline, structure and helping dogs understand their place in the pack.

When did you first start working with dogs?

I’ve owned dogs all my life, but it was my 16-year-old dog, Tippy, that really sparked my interest in training. When she was a puppy, I became interested in doing obedience competition and discovered agility competition, where the dog and owner run through an obstacle course in a certain amount of time. Soon, we were training and competing all over the country. My dog pack expanded to three dogs and they all competed in agility. After winning several championships I started teaching an agility class, which grew into a part-time business where I was teaching three to four classes a week.

Why did you want to become a trainer?

It really stems back to my love of animals. My mother was very lenient when it came to having pets so growing up I had every pet imaginable: dogs, cats, ducks, rabbits, rats, hamsters, pigeons, parakeets, even chickens. I tried to train all of them, even going as far as hypnotizing the chickens and teaching them to dance. My parakeet learned how to ride on the dog’s back and play fetch. I always loved animals but didn’t see the career potential until later in life. It’s been the most rewarding career. I wouldn’t want to do anything else.

So training was your second career?

Yes. I owned a multi-media business for 20 years. When I decided to turn my hobby into a business I wanted to do in-home dog training but lacked the experience of running a dog-training business. Since I was semi-retired I decided to take a low-paying, entry-level job as a dog trainer with a company that had a very strong hands-on training program and a business model that really made sense to me. The company went out of business one year after its start but it left me with a foundation to launch my company. The day they closed their doors I was in business and making money. In 2004, I merged my business



Steve Bettcher

Job title:

Dog trainer, president of
The Dog Squad

Place of employment:
Dog Squad

Years on the job: 10

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PHOTOS BY JIM CHAPMAN/BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

BETTCHER and Gibbons put dogs through their paces, demonstrating some of the skills they teach their canine students, including when to sit quietly, as at right.

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with my partner Patrick Gibbons to form The Dog Squad. The business continues to grow month by month. Patrick's path to dog training was a little different. It was his first career. He just jumped right in to what he knew he would love. He worked for some companies at an apprentice level, did a stint with a local dog trainer then decided to go to an accredited dog training school and successfully completed National K-9's Master Dog Training Course. What behavioral problems have you helped correct? Almost every problem you can imagine. House-breaking, dog-on-dog aggression, aggression toward people, barking, chewing, digging, destroying things, escaping, separation anxiety, jumping on people, car and bike chasing, killing animals, begging and stealing, object guarding, car sickness and car-related aggression, hyperactivity, jumping on furniture, not coming when called, not walking on a leash and more.

Can every behavior be improved?

In general almost any behavior can be improved. But it depends on the owner, the dog, the problem and how long the problem has been going on. We have fixed a lot of very difficult problems that have seemed unchangeable when the owner has called us. We have saved many dogs from being euthanized and from being thrown out of their homes.

What common mistakes do owners make?

If you spoil your dog you can end up with problems. When they are treated as people they can get really neurotic. In most situations bad dog behavior is caused by lack of discipline, structure, training and leadership. It comes from the dog's misunderstanding about his place in the pack and what behaviors are expected of him. Training helps the dog understand that he is not in charge and that rules need to be followed.

What's the typical training process?

Sessions are in the home at first and we set the owner up with homework assignments every week. Once the dog is ready, we move them into the class, where they are totally immersed in real world distractions. Sometimes when dogs get to the class, despite making progress at home, they have anxiety and we have to rebuild their skills. When is the best time to start training a dog? As soon as you get one. We break up the training into two phases: puppy and adult. During the puppy phase, which lasts from about eight to 16 weeks, we focus on house-breaking, socialization, structure and some basic obedience skills. We don't demand perfect behavior during this time, but we want to establish some basic knowledge and set the rules for good manners. We begin teaching adult obedience at adolescence — we

teach the dog that when we ask them to do something they do it without question or protest.

Do you have a favorite breed?

Different breeds have different characteristics, but in general if you treat a dog like a dog, not like a certain breed, you'll have more success. My favorite breed is whatever the last dog is that I worked with. Every dog is good.

What experience would help someone be a good trainer?

Anyone who wants to be a trainer has to be good with their own dogs. Their own dogs have to be a showcase of good behavior. Having multiple dogs and different breeds is helpful too because you want dogs that offer different challenges. Work at a shelter walking dogs, at a doggy day-care or at a vet. Or be a dog walker. Join a dog training club and attend seminars about dog training. Also, read as much as you can. You can also go to an accredited dog training school such as National K-9.

What qualities should every trainer have?

You have to love animals and working with people. I have seen too many dog trainers who are burned out not because of the dogs, but because they don't know how to handle people. Ninety percent of what we do is working with people. Also, have the ability to

teach and to communicate. You need to be flexible, have a lot of patience, be able to read a dog's body language and the people you are working with and in all of this, always be professional. That's a successful dog trainer.

How much can a trainer make?

On the lower end, from \$12-\$25 (per hour) for an assistant trainer or kennel worker. Most are \$12. Full-time you can make \$40,000 and up. There are a few who are doing extremely well.

What's your advice to prospective trainers?

If you want to get into the business the first thing you should do is work at a dog training company. Work as an apprentice or with a master trainer, do a lot of reading and think about going to an accredited school such as National K-9 or Triple Crown Academy. In order to be really successful you should think about owning your own dog training company. Be prepared to pay your dues for a year or two and don't just look at it as a job, but a chance to observe the ins and outs of the dog training business, learn what works and doesn't work for you, and then incorporate that into your business plan.

Visit the Dog Squad at the Web site www.dogsquad.biz or call 510-632-6594.

ASK JILL

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- over equally competent rivals. His new boss cited my colleague's volunteer efforts as part of the reason for his choice: "A person with those kinds of values is who I want leading my team."
- Be prepared. Make sure you have an up-to-date resume. If possible go on a few job interviews so that you don't get rusty. If a friend is looking for a job, help him or her by practicing mock interviews.

Dear Readers,

I'd like to share with you some key results of the annual Ken Blanchard Companies survey, as reported in the June issue of Training and Development magazine. The survey interviews corporate leaders, human resources and training managers. It reveals enlightening facts and trends in U.S. business from 2002 to 2010—the kind of information that well-informed, proactive workers will find useful.

Past:

- Developing managerial and supervisory skills remained the top employee development challenges for the last five years.

Present:

- The top two business challenges for 2007 are new competition and the feasibility of growth and expansion while facing a lack of skilled labor.
- 50 percent of top management and 57 percent of HR workers said the skills shortage is the most important organizational problem in 2007.

Future:

- Respondents expected both industry consolidation and global competition to increase by 2010. They also expected technology issues to intensify.
- Respondents predicted an increasing need to focus on selecting and retaining key talent, succession planning, and innovation.

Jill McGillen is president of NEXT TURN Consulting. Send questions to askjill@nextturnconsulting.com. For additional work advice go to www.nextturnconsulting.com.