

# Team Agility

By Christy Gammage, Practice Makes Pawfect

Agility is a team sport. The nucleus of the team is you and your dog. But there can be other people on your team as well. These people may actually compete on a multi-dog team with you, or they may be the mentors, pit-crew, friends, and family that support you in your sport.

Let's start with your mentors. The first person on that list should be your instructor. While they may not be at a trial (or even practice) with you, they should be offering you information and support that make your agility experience a positive and upward journey. Some instructors use sweet words of encouragement, while others may have more of a whistle blowing, in your face yelling style. Make sure you have an open dialog with your instructor on how you react to different coaching styles. If you want more challenges and need to be pushed, tell them. If you are getting discouraged and need more boosting, let them know that as well. Getting the most from an instructor involves two-way communication.

Other mentors may be high performing athletes that you don't know well or at all. You can always learn and be inspired by watching and listening to people who are better than you. You may not know any world-class athletes, but picking out one or two you admire and studying their runs and any in-depth interviews can give you insights to emulate. If you are lucky, you have a friend who has been in the sport longer and is competing at a higher level. Discussions with them can provide a lot of good information about all aspects of agility and trialing, not just for the skills on the field.

Wouldn't it be great to have a pit-crew at an agility trial? Some people are lucky enough to have an Agility Support Spouse. Others band together with friends to help with the



logistics and support during a trial. They may share food, potty your dog while you are walking the course, video your run and have treats ready when you come out of the ring. And you should always offer to do the same for them if you can. If you are going it alone, then you must be your own pit-crew. Lots of planning, preparing, and packing ahead of time can make the trial go more smoothly. You should be doing this anyway so you can be self-sufficient if needed, even when going with friends.

While most people are happy to help, be considerate about approaching others at an agility trial with your questions/requests while they are preparing for their own runs. Everyone deserves the time and space to do their best before helping others.

Non-competing friends and family can also be on your support team. If they want to learn and help, they can be a big asset. If you have to babysit them and it adds more work for you to include them, then maybe they can just share in your celebration when you get home.

There are actual classes and whole competitions, where multi-dog teams compete. Sometimes a class has both dogs running parts of the same course in a relay, such as USDAA's Pairs class and their DAM teams of 3 dogs or CPE's Hairpin Team. Other times each handler and dog will compete separately, but their scores are combined, such as the Dog Agility Competitions of Florida (DACOF) or national teams representing their country in international competitions like the FCI Agility World Championships. In multi-dog team events, the pressure is on because others are depending on you to do well so that the team can place well. When joining a team, be aware of the expectations of your human teammates and make sure they align with yours. A highly competitive person on a 'fun' team will be just as unhappy as a 'fun' person on a 'competitive' team.

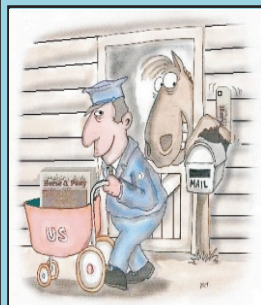
In all cases, surround yourself with positive people. These are people who truly want you to succeed and personally have an upbeat outlook on life. Complainers, whiners, and people who just give excuses are exhausting to be around and can suck the fun out of your sport. This doesn't mean that everyone has to tell you how great you are coming out of a disastrous run, but a "you'll get it next time" beats a "wow, you really blew it" or even a "no one got that tricky part right" (which might make you feel better, but won't encourage you to improve so you can get it right next time).

On all teams, the dog is your most important teammate. Listen to your dog, protect their attitude, then go out and win one for the team!

Happy Practicing!

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