

# Characteristics of a Good Service Dog

Not all dogs are suitable to become service dogs. There are certain characteristics that make a dog perfect and qualified to help people in need. If you want to make your dog a service dog, here are the characteristics that your dog should have to become one.

Dogs that exhibit these traits are much more likely to become successful service dogs.



Since the typical guide dog doesn't begin his working life until he is nearly two years old, and he requires very careful rearing and training costing typically \$20,000 to \$30,000, a good candidate for guide training must be young enough and healthy enough to have a long working life. Guide dog candidates are screened for health issues such as hip dysplasia before they begin formal training.

Guide dogs should also be of an appropriate size: large enough to work in a guide harness (with its ridged handle that signals the owner) yet small enough to fit in small spaces under chairs and tables. Most guide dogs are German Shepherds, Labrador Retrievers, or Golden Retrievers.

- Your dog must be calm and well mannered. They should be able to relax and play just like normal dogs because although they are working dogs, it doesn't mean that they have to work 24/7. Your dog should know how to tell the difference between relaxing time from working time.

Dogs that can be qualified to become a service dog are dogs that can easily adjust to new people and environment. Dogs that tend to get anxious and uncomfortable in new surroundings are not suitable to guide a disabled person. For example, you're in an emergency situation and you ask your dog to look for help but the dog got nervous when he saw a marching band outside your house. In any situation, a dog should remain calm because the dog's partner depends on them for assistance. The animal must learn how to ignore the distractions and focus on the task. It will not be beneficial for the person in need if the service dog can not easily adopt in new environments and situations.

- Service dogs must be confident. These dogs will need to assist people with different needs. Some may even have equipments. A dog should be confident when approaching and helping the people in need. For example, an old man in a wheelchair needs a service dog. The dog is doing its job correctly but when the wheelchair starts to move, the dog gets scared and ran away. This will not be favorable for the man as the dog will not be able to help him if he starts to move his wheelchair. The dog should be confident and calm in order to support its partner.

- It is important that a service dog is friendly and cooperative. The dog should be calm and allow people to pet him/her. They should be cooperative with their partner and not be stubborn. Dogs that are too friendly to the point that they will leave their partner's side to greet and play with people is not good either. Although they should be friendly, they also need to have self control. A balance of the two will be perfect. Also, a good service dog knows how to respect his/her partner's space and property. For example, when the dog's partner is sleeping, unless the person wants the dog beside him/her, the dog should not climb into bed and sleep with its partner.

- Of course, all service dogs must be easy to live with. Since the dog's job is to help its partner and make their partner's life easier, it is vital that the dog should have a calm and well behaved attitude. They should be quiet when inside the house. If their partner has kids or other animals, they should get along with the kids and the animals. They should not chew the slippers or the sofa, they should not rummage the garbage, they should urinate or defecate outside the house and they should not bolt right through the door or gate when it is open. They should wait patiently for their partner to give the cue.

- First and foremost, a guide dog should have rock-solid nerves. He should be calm and confident, obeying even in the midst of chaos. He should not be easily frightened but also should not be ignorant of real danger when it presents itself. Just as you wouldn't want a guide dog who trembled at the sight of a passing car, you would not want one who stood happily in the road as one speed straight toward it. In other words, you want a dog with an abundance of good common sense.

- He should be biddable, which means he should have a desire to please his master and to work as a team member, choosing to perform his job out of loyalty even when it is unpleasant and he'd rather be doing something else (like staying home warm in bed instead of out on the streets in the sleet taking his master to the pharmacy for essential medication).

- He should be intelligent and trainable. He should be an excellent problem-solver because it is impossible to predict every possible puzzle a dog might

encounter in his working life and he must be able to apply what he knows creatively in new situations to make safe and reasonable decisions.

- The ability to exhibit "intelligent disobedience" is also prized. A guide dog intelligently disobeys a command to go forward when it would put his master in danger, such as when a car is coming. When the dog refuses the command, it falls to the owner to determine why and then make an informed decision on whether to proceed anyway, wait, or take a different path.

### **How long does it take to train a Service Dog?**

Assistance Dogs International approximates 120 hours over 6 months. A well-trained Service Dog should be trained 1 to 2 hours per day over 6 months – in other words 180 to 360 hours.

Less than 50% of the dogs who are bred to be a service dog actually become a service dog. Becoming a service dog is equivalent to being an Olympic athlete. All the training in the world cannot change what is meant to be.