

More Than Ten Commandments for Rescue Groups Working With Shelters

* Shelters need income, just as rescue groups do. Unless *the shelter* offers more favorable arrangements, if you want a dog from a shelter plan to either pay the full adoption fee or wait until it's clear that the dog won't be adopted from the shelter. Many shelters will offer more generous terms, but don't expect it of them.

* Shelter staff have harder jobs than you do. That's a given. (Would you trade jobs?). In any event, even if they didn't, you need their cooperation and your actions reflect on your rescue group. ALWAYS be courteous and professional. If a situation threatens to escalate, back off and take it up later with those in charge. No single animal is more important than a good, on-going relationship with a shelter, something that in the long run will save many dogs.

* Do not ask shelter staff to be responsible for evaluating the dog, but listen carefully to, and welcome, the insights and observations that they offer. They see a lot more dogs per day than you do, and spend more time with any particular dog than you are able to.

* If a shelter worker, especially one you have good relations with, asks you to consider a dog that they consider "special" and would like have saved, give it every consideration possible. If you can't take that dog, explain fully and carefully why you can't, or perhaps make contact with another group that can. If you worked in a shelter and lost your heart to a dog you couldn't personally save, wouldn't you want any help you could get or at least empathy?

* Reach an agreement regarding fees/costs ahead of time. Even if you take a dog that will otherwise be put down, there may be State-mandated fees associated with any adoption, which the rescue group should pay. And when the person at the desk doesn't know about the fee arrangement, be patient and polite and take it up with the manager - don't stand at the desk and argue. (If saving that dog is so important, pay whatever that staff person thinks you should pay, and discuss future transactions with the manager later.)

* Unless the shelter agreed to hold a dog for you and you showed up in the time agreed upon to take it, never question the shelter's decision to put an animal down. There may be things that you aren't aware of, or they simply may have had so many animals that they had to put down a wonderful dog. In that case, you should commiserate with them rather than criticize. If you are truly puzzled, ask - non-confrontationally - what their policy is in deciding which animals get put down (ones there the longest? ones dealing most poorly with being kenneled? ones scoring low on their temperament screening? certain breeds?).

* If you are called and told that there is a dog of your breed/that your group might be interested in, respond as if someone is doing you a big favor - because they are!! If you are unable to come see the dog, thank them and let them know you won't be able to get there. If you can't get there right away, give them a definite date/time by which you will be there (or to contact a rescuer closer to the shelter and ask them to go evaluate) and meet that deadline. Holding a dog for you to

come meet it, in many cases, means that the shelter worker will have to condemn some other nice dog.

* Understand that shelter staff are very rarely breeders, exhibitors or even involved with one particular breed. If you are called about a dog of a breed that you rescue but discover, when you get there, that it's a mix or some other breed, do not fault the staff .. who were simply trying to save a dog.

* If the shelter, on your say-so, held a dog back from being adopted for an extended time, take it! By asking them to hold it for you, you have in essence adopted it. If it's a mix of your breed and a good dog - you will probably find a home. If it's a different breed from yours - take it and find a rescue contact for that breed. If you can't take it, apologize sincerely for not being sure before you asked them to hold the dog, thank them for their courtesy, and try to do something (buy a t-shirt, make a donation) to express your regret in more than words.

* You can give shelter staff information to help them identify your breed in the future, but make sure the pictures aren't all show-ring champions. Please remember that shelter workers who are willing to make those calls and to hold a dog for rescue are to be treasured, even if they miss sometimes on their breed identification. Plus, most purebreds who wind up in shelters don't look like last year's winner at Westminster.

* Do not resent but welcome requests that you prove your "legitimacy." If you're honest, you have to admit that there are some very strange, irresponsible people calling themselves "rescue." If the shelter wants you to fill out a reasonable form, provide copy of your business paperwork, provide vet references, etc., do that with a smile - and pride. Keep in mind that a shelter that is taking this approach is being responsible about the dogs in its care and is much less likely to be "burned" and stop working with any rescue at all. If you feel a requirement is unreasonable, discuss it with the director and explain your reasons.

* Be very serious about spay/neuter and make sure the shelter knows that you are. If the shelter isn't able to s/n on their own, make sure they know that the dogs they turn over to you WILL be altered, and send them a record showing that it was done. If they do s/n on their own, offer to pay a reasonable fee for the procedure when it's performed on dogs that you are taking - that's more income for them, a probably inexpensive procedure for you, and proof positive that you are serious about it.

Remember that if someone came to you with a stray of your breed (or type), you would have to pay for all medical expenses, so offer to pay the shelter for the vet work they do on the dogs that become yours.

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